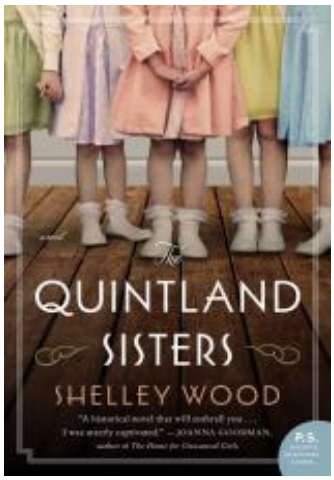
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The Quintland Sisters

by Shelley Wood



About the Book

For fans of SOLD ON A MONDAY or THE HOME FOR UNWANTED GIRLS, Shelley Wood's novel tells the story of the Dionne Quintuplets, the world's first identical quintuplets to survive birth, told from the perspective of a midwife in training who helps bring them into the world.

Reluctant midwife Emma Trimpany is just 17 when she assists at the harrowing birth of the Dionne quintuplets: five tiny miracles born to French farmers in hardscrabble Northern Ontario in 1934. Emma cares for them through their perilous first days. And when the government decides to remove the babies from their francophone parents, making them wards of the British king, Emma signs on as their nurse.

Over 6,000 daily visitors come to ogle the identical ?Quints? playing in their custom-built playground; at the height of the Great Depression, the tourism and advertising dollars pour in. While the rest of the world delights in their sameness, Emma sees each girl as unique: Yvonne, Annette, Cécile, Marie and Émilie. With her quirky eye for detail, Emma records every strange twist of events in her private journals.

As the fight over custody and revenues turns increasingly explosive, Emma is torn between the fishbowl sanctuary of Quintland and the wider world, now teetering on the brink of war. Steeped in research, THE QUINTLAND SISTERS is a novel of love, heartache, resilience and enduring sisterhood --- a fictional, coming-of-age story bound up in one of the strangest true tales of the past century.

Discussion Guide

1. Were you already familiar with the story of the Dionne Quintuplets? If so, how did you first learn about the sisters? If not, what surprised you about their story?

2. Did your opinion of Dr. Dafoe, the Canadian government, or the Dionne parents change over the course of the novel? Who was in the right? Who was in the wrong?

3. Normal motherhood is absent in Quintland. Real or substitute mothers in the book can?t or don?t "mother" according to conventional norms and would-be mothers are eager to get their hands on the magical ?quintstones.? Emma herself insists she has no intention of becoming a mother. What are the essential components of motherhood and how were these present or absent in the lives of the quintuplets?

4. Emma insists she?d be happy to stay at the Dafoe Nursery for as long as she possibly can, but what are her motives for staying? Are they purely altruistic, or are they selfish?

5. Emma tries, with pencils and paintbrushes, to capture the true individuality of each Dionne girl in her art. But Emma?s art also helps to perpetuate a fairytale, make-believe world. Discuss how Emma?s progress as an artist serves as a metaphor for the deepening tensions at the heart of Quintland.

6. Quintland, we learn at the outset, consists of archival "fonds" --- as if these official documents, in some way, represent a formal record of events. How do these documents both support and undermine the central "facts" of the Dionne story? What do we gain from seeing this world from Emma?s vantage point? What do we lose?

7. Emma prides herself on noticing quirky details, yet her eyes are so focused on her young charges that she fails to fully see what?s going on around her. At the same time, the people in power in Quintland work hard to make sure the public sees only the official version of events and nothing more. What echoes does Emma?s predicament share with modern day celebrity and those who work in the margins of fame?

8. Imagine the Dionne sisters being born today, under similar circumstances, but in the era of social media and a 24-hour news cycle? Would they have fared better or worse?

Author Bio

Shelley Wood is a writer, journalist and editor. Her work has appeared in the *New Quarterly*, *Room*, the *Antigonish Review*, *Causeway Lit* and the *Globe and Mail* (UK). Born and raised in Vancouver, she has lived in Montreal, Cape Town, and the Middle East, and now has a home, a man and a dog in British Columbia, Canada.

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