

GABRIEL'S MOON BY WILLIAM BOYD

About the Author:

William Andrew Murray Boyd CBE FRSL is an English novelist, short story writer, screen writer and film director. He is best known for his novels, which include *A Good Man in Africa*, *Any Human Heart* and *Restless*, many of which have received critical acclaim and literary awards.

He was born in 1952 in Accra on the Gold Coast New Guinea. His parents were Scottish. His father Alexander was a doctor specialising in tropical medicine, and his mother was a teacher. He has two younger sisters. They moved from the Gold Coast to Western Nigeria in the early 60's. William went to prep school at the age of 9 and then went to Gordonstoun School in Scotland. He went to the University of Nice then the University of Glasgow where he gained an MA Hons in English and Philosophy. He also went to Jesus College Oxford but did not graduate.

His career started in 1980 when he was 26. He was employed as a lecturer of English at St Hilda's. It was while he was there that his first novel, *A Good Man in Africa* was published. He was also a television critic for the *New Statesman*. Boyd was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire for services to literature in 2005.

He met his wife at university and now lives between a house in Chelsea London and a farmhouse and vineyard in Bergerac in the Dordogne.

He has written 16 novels of which four are written from a female viewpoint e.g. *Restless*. He has written several short story collections; screen plays and non-fiction. He has received many awards for his writing.

In 1998 Boyd published '*Nat Tate, an American artist 1928-1960*' which presents the paintings and tragic biography of a supposed New York abstract expressionist painter named Nat Tate who actually never existed and was along with the paintings a creation by Boyd. It was a hoax set up with his publishers. Some of the works he painted were sold for charity.

Boyd revealed that *Gabriel's Moon* is the first of a trilogy, indicating his intention to further explore the characters involvement in the espionage landscape. His latest book in this series is entitled *The Predicament* and will be published in September 2025.

There is a series on BBC Sounds with 15minute short stories which is "savagely funny about the art world".

About the book

The story starts when Gabriel escapes from a house fire at the age of 6 but finds his mother dead. The insurance company identified Gabriel's night light '*Gabriel's Moon*' as the cause of the fire. Gabriel is haunted by the memories of this tragedy.

During the grip of the Cold War Gabriel spends his days as a travel writer. He's offered the chance to interview a political figure which leads him to be unwittingly drawn into the shadows of espionage.

As Gabriel's reluctant initiation takes hold, he is drawn deeper into duplicity and deception. Falling under the spell of Faith Green, an enigmatic and ruthless MI6 handler, he becomes 'her spy', unable to resist her demands. But amid the peril, power and passion consuming Gabriel's new covert life, it will be revelations closer to home that change the rest of his story....

Questions and Discussions

Interesting Characters:

The fem fatale character of Faith and how she manipulated Gabriel. Faith Green was the 'puppet master',

The character of Calwell was interesting – once a spy always a spy.

Gabriel was naive and gullible – he didn't think with his head where women were involved!

Gabriel always described the woman and what they were wearing. It made it real as you can picture what they looked like. As a travel writer he also describes things.

The insurance assessor. He was still angry after all the years since the claim was made. Why was he sidelined and not listened to at the time?

There was a parallel between the 'untrained' psychologist who Gabriel dismissed while he was a spy with no experience.

There seemed to be a parallel with 'the mouse' saga and the spy story line. Trying to kill it then when it was captured helping to release it.

Gabriels's brother: Did he commit suicide or was he targeted?

The plot involves real events? Did you learn anything new?

The assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the first Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the early 1960s.

The political turmoil of the newly independent Congo from Belgium.

The global tension of The Cold War.

The alleged international involvement e.g. Britain, Belgium and the US in Lumumba's death. Conspiracy theories.

What was the significance of the fire?

Trauma. Gabriel's early life and not being able to sleep, guilt about what happened, his life was unsettled and unstable.

He didn't have a close relationship with his brother who was away at school when the fire occurred, at 6 Gabriel was orphaned because of the fire and he was unable to piece together what had happened and why his mother died.

Was his father's death more sinister? Is there more to that part of the story? Is there a connection between the intelligence service and what happened to his parents? We could write the sequel!!

Did you highlight any passages you particularly liked?

When he was with Victoria "He liked Victoria because he knew she liked him and because she ignored Sefton's mocking deprecations. One day when he was visiting the house, he had overheard her talking about him on the phone to a friend."

Gabriels's brother, Sefton, speaking to his sons Cyril and Nigel "Mind where you kick the ball chaps"

Moles and termites' comparison to spies and double agents.

Where the word 'Refulgent' is used. His brother turns out to be a spy and must use the word. "Splendid view," he said. 'Chelsea's grandest and most expensive houses and the refulgent Thames as a bonus.'

In Cadiz - "barely illuminating the ...here he was alone in a big city. This was why he travelled. "...the old adage was right; he who travelled the furthest travelled alone". This reflects the themes of a lone travel writer on a journey even as he gets entangled in espionage. Travelling solo means you speak to other people and maybe have a different experience.

He's very florid in his descriptions "a full plum pudding"

Would you recommend? Why?

Yes, was the consensus.

I wasn't hooked in until the 'spy' aspect came in.

William Boyd is very florid in his descriptions which were enjoyable to read.

Lots of conspiracies! Even the publishers who employed him were in on it!

Humorous. The posh boy and his piece of rough with a brother, a locksmith, who was there when his skills were needed!

There are two stories running side by side. The espionage and Gabriel trying to find out what happened when he was a boy and his mother died. Will this be explored in the second book?

Comical how in the 1960's they talked openly to others about their spy roles.

The political background was very accurate.

Final Thoughts

- I read the first chapter and was drawn in. It was appealing and addictive with an underlying humour which I liked. The book captivated me, and I enjoyed it. The ending with Faith tapping him on the shoulder makes me want to know what happens next. I will read the sequel!
- I got into the book straight away. A real page turner.
- A rip-roaring spy yarn. Felt it was setting the scene for a sequel.
- A light-hearted read with funny moments.
- I had to remember it was the 1980's and you could keep important documents in the shed! It felt like it could be a film. Amusing and enjoyable - a bit Austin Powers! Really funny moment when Lorraine finds someone else and lets him down.
- I'll give it 9.5 and that's from someone who doesn't like spy stories! It was funny and clever. Loved the references to food, drink, smoking etc. Really, really, enjoyable!
- Brilliant one liner e.g. "And Gabriel shot him through the pocket of his coat"
- Having read 'Restless' I expected this to be similar, but it is very different. Gabriel is engaging; quite simple and gullible. His head was easily turned!
- I enjoyed it very much. Lots of loose ends which was a bit unsatisfactory. Good descriptions of day-to-day things. I will read the sequel.
- A bit disappointed by this book. I felt it was very dated and uninspiring. Very 'James Bond' in style of writing. Unsatisfactory ending but maybe the sequel will tie up the loose ends.

Final Scores: 7, 8, 9.5, 7, 8, 6, 8 Overall score 7