

ABSTRACT

Author: Belinda Bartley
Title: Desperate Characters: A Short Story Collection
Thesis Advisor: Timothy Parrish
Department: Department of English
Year: 2021

This collection consists of two short stories focused on the rum-running business across the Quebec-Maine border during multiple prohibitions in the late 19th to early 20th-century, all centered around a single family in the area with a history of bootlegging and a penchant for evading the law. These stories are presented through the eyes of the women in the family: first is Annie, the older sister of a wanted criminal whose unstable presence in both Quebec and Jackman, Maine, served as a source of fear for many of his neighbors. After being arrested and held as bait for her brother George, Annie must come to terms with how her brother's actions and attitude regarding his trade have affected his growing family and how her own culpability in helping him seduce possible customers by the railroad track has tainted her life as well. The second story jumps ahead to 1919; the Great War has ended but another one is brewing in Jackman, this time concerning George's youngest children who have followed in the family footsteps of bootlegging. Hesse (Annie's nephew and George's daughter) must mediate between her fracturing brothers, Henry and Nelson, while processing her traumatic youth, questioning her guilt, and planning a possible future away from her family. Both women must face their past abuse and present accountability as they struggle to unbind themselves from the men in their lives.