

# A bomb shelter, kids, and liquor

*Falling Angels*  
Barbara Gowdy  
Somerville House

Any novel that carries the reader through an aborted trip to Disneyland — instead spending two weeks locked inside a suburban bomb shelter with three kids and a family-size stash of liquor — is at least brave. *Falling Angels* proves Barbara Gowdy is both brave and gifted.

Book-ended by a funeral and a suicide, and with the suffocating lack of context one experiences in their own family in between, *Falling Angels* is an inside view of the Fields, circa 1959 to 1969. I counted six deaths in this book, and haven't laughed so hard in a long time. The suspension of disbelief was great enough that I didn't question the premise of such incredibly bad things happening to such incredibly dysfunctional people. However, I wasn't wrapped up enough to miss how ridiculous the whole thing was — and neither were the characters.

The story is about three sisters

— Norma, Lou and Sandy — and how they manage to be mangled by (but ultimately survive) everything life has funnelled through their family. A delusional, though well-meaning, alcoholic mother who leaves the house but once a year, and an easily diagnosed manic-depressive father whose moods define the household are the supposed heads of the family.

A series of disasters, the "hits" in this novel, just keep on coming. And while it could be argued that the novel's greatest fault is the number and easy distance at which the hits can be spotted — though the girls themselves remain completely ignorant — it serves instead to further plunge the reader into the story.

If this book has any faults it would be the occasional sacrifice of story for deeper subtext. Each daughter is an avenue through which different negative sexual experiences can be traced to an end, and as such the girls can seem more like well worn sexual stereotypes than people. The men are also cutouts; satellites to the

girls' development. Clueless as to the real nature of women, all are either older sexual deviants, thoughtless, or dumb. Gowdy does best when just sticking to the story, and more than enough happens to justify such a focus.

The strengths of this novel lie in being able to find the same event tragic and comedic. The lives these girls lead may be hilarious distortions of reality, but enough reality remains to feel a lump at some of their misfortunes. Ultimately the novel ends with another falling angel and as a result, a new start for the angels remaining — the sisters.

While I would classify the novel as a light read, I by no means want to dismiss its value. *Falling Angels* is an excellent book. Much like the author's dedication "To my parents, for not being the parents in this book", it provides a handy escape from reality and yet makes you appreciate it, once back.

SHELLEY ROBINSON



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## ROSEMARY GILL AWARD

In June of 1995 the President approved the establishment of the Rosemary Gill Award in memory of Dr. Rosemary Gill, Director of University Health Services, who exemplified a high level of commitment of service to students, both in terms of her responsibilities as a physician on campus and as a member of the larger University community.

The award is to be presented annually to a member of the faculty or staff of the University who has provided outstanding service, other than teaching, to students. The selection of recipients is to be made by a committee consisting of the president, the Vice-President - Student Services, the Chair of the Student Relations and Residence Committee of the Board of Governors, and a student appointed by the Student Union.

The first Rosemary Gill Awards were presented in February, 1996, and nominations are now being sought for awards to be presented in 1997. Written nominations that include the rationale for the nomination and the names of the persons who could be contacted for further information should be submitted to:

The Office of the Vice-President  
Student Services  
1234 LeMarchant Street  
Dalhousie University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3H 3P7

The deadline for nominations is Friday, January 24, 1997.

PLACES 2 GO — YOUR GUIDE TO LEISURE IN HALIFAX

## The Halifax Commons

BY ANDREW SIMPSON

The other night while I was walking downtown I stumbled upon a great place to hang out — the Halifax Commons. Now when I say stumbled, I mean I literally fell down. The moist, mushy turf of the Commons broke my fall and prevented me from breaking anything else.

A little stunned by my clumsy footwork, I lay face down in a patch of muddy grass trying to figure out if I could move. Not feeling any pain I was reasonably sure that I was unhurt, but strangely I still didn't move. For some reason I didn't want to move. There was something keeping me there, something pleasant, maybe even pleasurable.

I had been planning to visit one of those monster bars downtown, although I don't quite remember the name. I think it might have been the one they call "the palace" or perhaps the one they call "the dome" that isn't a dome at all or maybe JJ's. Well you get the picture, it was some kind of bar like that.

But lying on the grass I was confused. "Why on earth do you enjoy this?" I asked myself. "If anyone sees you they'll think you're messed."

But the truth of the matter is that I no longer wanted to go downtown. I no longer felt any desire to be crammed like cattle into one of those giant alcoholic troughs. I no longer wanted to be pushed up against other people in a sweaty, smoke-filled room while I dodged drunken varsity athletes (who happen to be bigger than me).

I decided that I shouldn't worry about other people thinking I looked silly — I like what I like and that's that. Lying face down in a muddy field in near freezing temperatures probably seems a bit weird to you, but who the Hell are you to

judge me? As long as I don't hurt anybody else, I should be able to do what I want when I want. But alas, I can sense your disapproval, I can feel your haughty ridicule as you look down your precious nose at this page.

I know you're secretly un-sheathing your crude little knife, preparing a pathetic assault on my name, persecuting me for my non-conformity. But I know that the source of your rage is not me at all, it's your own loneliness and insecure self-loathing. So take your little jabs, how can I stop you? Slash and rip me as you please. Stick that knife as far into my back as it'll go, not forgetting to twist as you yank out. And when your anger and false-courage recede, we both know you'll run away into the darkness like the snivelling little wretch that you are. You'll scamper off to hide under some grimy rock where you'll sit and fester until someone again stumbles. And once again you'll pounce at the sign of weakness and ride the wave of their humiliation and misery as it carries your lecherous soul farther than it ever could have travelled on its own.

Soon water began soaking through my clothes and I began to realize that lying face down on the Commons is a pleasure that needs to be enjoyed in moderation. My toes were going numb and the mud was getting in my eyes. But as I readied to rise, I noticed a couple of people watching me.

"Try it," I exclaimed and they both jumped with fright. Once I had convinced them that they weren't about to be mugged, they agreed to give it a chance. And now, on any night of the week you can find large groups of people who would rather lie face down in the mud than go to one of those big bars in downtown.

Arts Ed. Note: We're not sure if Andrew ever fully recovered from his fall.



**Hell on Earth**  
Mobb Deep  
Loud/RCA

In the spring of 1995, two twenty-year-olds from the Queensbridge projects in New York released one of most intriguing, poignant, and darkest albums in recent memory. Theirs was quickly the sound to bite, as anyone who has heard any rap from Toronto can attest. But just as quickly, Mobb Deep built a strong following among traditional hip hop fans, despite the fact that they largely ignored many of the fundamentals of hip hop.

On *Hell On Earth*, Mobb Deep

don't have many surprises and essentially pick up where they left off. The quintessential Mobb Deep song could be argued to be almost any song on this album. Technically, each is not all that different from the next. On each track their rap style is close to spoken, always dry and cold, and every metaphor or insult is delivered in a matter-of-fact tone with complete ease. The end result has them appearing more like cold-hearted, poetically-inclined storytellers rather than hip-hop MCs. Also, the production remains simple and dark, each song again focused around a single, sinister sample with programmed beats that pack an extra punch.

But all of it still sounds good. Havoc and Prodigy rhyme about little other than street life and the misfortune of those that step to the Mobb, but they are gifted poets who rarely slip up and still continue to impress. Their production techniques remain ahead of the packs of thieves by matching some of the crispest, cleanest programmed beats out yet to the illest samples. Plus, the background vocal work ensures each

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