



Gumbeaux

Kimberly Vargas

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Where do you go when you disappear?

For young heiress Mary Fait, the answer is New Orleans. After the death of her parents, she is placed in the care of her alcoholic uncle. For years, she assists her uncle in growing the family empire, all the while plotting his demise and / or her escape. A college scholarship gives her the opportunity to break free of her life to start a new one - under a new name.

Follow Mary and her often hilarious misadventures in the early 1990's while attending college in a small town in Louisiana. The story reads as a series of diary entries which chronicle the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the main character during this time in her life. The novel's title refers to a cajun restaurant in which the main character works as a waitress. The colorful descriptions of the town of Bayou Bend, the college, its inhabitants and the surrounding areas paint a vivid and amusing tale of life in the South.

Gumbeaux Details

Date : Published September 19th 2011 (first published September 18th 2011)

ISBN :

Author : Kimberly Vargas

Format : Kindle Edition 174 pages

Genre : Fiction, Romance

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From Reader Review Gumbeaux for online ebook

Mike Owens says

An intriguing debut novel written in epistolary form (dairy entries) by the first person protagonist, Mary Fait. Mary, having lost her parents some years before, is next in the inheritance queue, after her Uncle Claude, for the prestigious Fait Gallery in D.C. In spite of her financial resources, she is desperately unhappy, mostly because of her boorish uncle who is both a drunkard and a lecher. She fantasizes killing him, but lacks the fortitude to carry out the act. So, she runs away to Bayou Bend, Louisiana, and enrolls at Audubon College under the assumed name of Veronica Fey. She also takes on a job as waitress at a local watering hole, Gumbeaux, hence the title. There she encounters a number of memorable characters and the magical setting of the bayou, city of New Orleans in particular. The author does a very good job of presenting this setting, and it becomes a major element of the work.

Except for Uncle Claude, most of the characters are those she meets in Bayou Bend and Audubon College. These include the charming (and older) Professor Landry, Bad Boy Braden, and an assortment of minor folk. The Landry and Braden characters are almost predictable stock for such a setting. Landry appeals to her pure scholastic hopes, while Braden opens up her wild side. The primary "tension" in this work is caught up in the question: which one will she pick? We'll leave that to the reader to find out.

There is no real "crisis action" in this work, rather it's presented as a series of adventures that unfold in Bayou Bend. I'm not quite sure how to place this novel, YA? The love scenes are quite muted, nothing graphic. In one of her encounters with Bad Boy Braden, she says "he threw me on the bed and we went at it for an hour." Not exactly steamy stuff.

I gave the book 4 stars because of the use of setting, and the smoothness of the narrative. It's an easy read, and as they say, easy reading comes from hard writing.

Melissa says

Really enjoyed the Louisiana theme and descriptions. Worth reading for that alone. Easy read.

Angel says

The beginning of this book was as bright and beautiful as New Orleans itself, then it sort of fell apart, like the end of a night on Bourbon Street. Some of the latter journal entries were not very well thought out and could have been more meaningful. For example, some had way too much detail for a journal entry and could have been cleaner. Overall, very good book and I'm glad I read it.

Christine Cunningham says

This is a coming of age story for heiress Mary Veronica Fait. The dazzle that drew me in was the diary format and time period beginning in the 1980's. Mary plays the submissive role of hostess and quiet partner in her family's business. She's hardly content and longs to be free from her oppressive and abusive surroundings. She hopes she will be allowed to go away to college, but her uncle squashes that idea.

Cunningly Mary sends a letter to an art college located in Louisiana under a fictitious name; she is granted a scholarship and begins her adventure.

I liked this book in the beginning, but by the end I was rather disappointed in the character. She starts off strong and blazing her own trail and then lets others bog her down much like her uncle. It was fun reading the diary entries. It felt like I was a secret intruder peering over the shoulder of someone with a completely different life.

I would recommend this book as a good weekend read. It's well-written and a bit meaty.

Nancy says

<3 I loved this story! <3

I was a Goodreads first reads winner. "Gumbeaux" has a little of everything and is just a really great story with characters you connect with and don't want the story to ever end. It wasn't predictable and I just had to keep reading to see what would happen to Mary, her uncle, Dr Landry, and especially Braden. I also had to see what his next t-shirt would say. There are many other characters in this story that give so much extra to the story too.

The ending wasn't disappointing but I hope the author will write more with these unforgettable characters.

Jeffrey Taylor says

Let's first deal with the chick lit label. I only saw one male reader in the review list although there were a few TBR's with male names. The novel seems to bridge the divide between chick and general lit, there's more here than the loves and lusts of Mary Fait. For one thing there is a very sensitive presentation of local color in suburban New Orleans. For another the main character has the determination to leave her existing life to run to a remote place in which she can craft her own version of her life. Life as art is an interesting theme.

I enjoyed the story line and the writing style. I like Vargas' use of devises like the crow as a harbinger of events. My only criticism concerns the abrupt return to her former life in D.C. after the death of her Uncle Claude and the break up of her relationship with her former professor Dr. Landry. This was a major milestone decision in both their lives and we see the sudden sturm and drang. It was so sudden it just seemed contrived. I understand the monologue about Mary's inability to form complete attachments as a result of the death of her parents and the mental stress of life with her Uncle. But that event was so sudden and such a complete return to her former life that it just didn't seem to work for me. The final denouement with Mary's return and reuniting with Braden seemed better. I liked the use of missing diary entries to give the feeling of lapsed time.

The work is sufficiently complex that a reader can approach it from different directions. I look forward to future efforts with ever more complex craft.

Nancy says

I won this book on Goodreads First reads giveaways.

A fairly simple novel about a girl needing to find herself. The setting is New Orleans, where all things magical and mysterious converge.

I have never been to New Orleans but what I like about the book is the author was able to convey southern living through her words. I was easily able to visualize Veronica's "second home".

As for the protagonist Veronica, I tried to empathize with her because of her cruel uncle but I just couldn't quite get that feeling going. At one point Dr. Landy calls her out and says (in my own words) that some unfortunate individual could have used the scholarship Veronica was on, as she, a multi-millionaire, was more than able to afford her own tuition. I totally agreed with him.

Ms. Vargas created characters that were well thought out and extremely life-like, eliciting different emotions in me while I was reading the book. That's good writing for you!

Alas, I did find some grammatical errors and to my knowledge this was not an ARC.

I only gave the book 3 stars because although I did enjoy it I just found it kind of 'bland'. Veronica (nee Mary) doesn't really go through any monumental adventures (although her relationship with Branden does contain most of her highlights), just ordinary young adult high-jinks and mistakes.

Pamela Sloss says

I absolutely loved this book. In her debut novel, Vargas makes me feel like I'm sitting in a diner in the bayou. The characters are very real and exude N'awlins life. Written in diary form, this book is a quick read and very entertaining. I can't wait for the author's next book.

Beverly Lucas says

An ode to Louisiana and a nice coming-of-age tale, "Gumbeaux" is a great story. Mary/Veronica, the main character of the tale, escapes her uncle Claude and high-pressure, privileged life in D.C. by attending college in Louisiana. She's quickly confronted with how privileged her life has been and is found the worse for wear several times due to her inexperience or ignorance. What is most compelling about her story is the total sensory and sensuality of the novel: colors, textures, tastes, and sounds are all part of our artist's journey as she learns about art, cooking, fishing, mixing drinks, shooting, love, and a host of other activities. The charm of the south is readily portrayed and if we ignore the consequence of the "yankee comes to the south and learns about the real world" trope, we're still left with a well-crafted story. The use of the diary to tell the story in places juxtaposed with 'real time' narration is interesting and compelling. The different stories revealed, between intimacy and the mundane, violence and gentleness, are paced appropriately and keep the readers engaged.

I don't think the author fleshed out the other characters enough. I wanted to know more about Claude, Dr. Landry, and Braden; what happens to Betty and how does Clarence settle into his new life? Does Braden appreciate the offer at the end? These didn't ruin the story for me, but I think it would have been even better if more character development had been provided.

Readers should be advised there are moments of violence and sexuality, but the author doesn't rely on these for the grotesque or for titillation. Mary/Veronica is being pushed, and she's reluctant to heed helpful advice at times so these 'real' consequences are part and parcel of her education. I think these moments are among the best in the book, but they can be difficult to read at times.

Onaiza Khan says

Gumbeaux is a piece of art. It has emotions for colors like fear, anger, love, belongingness, responsibility and any other emotion that exists. Every emotion is expressed in the most exciting yet soothing hues and shades.

All I can say is that it's a journey worth following.

Audrey Lambert says

Fantastic!!! I received this book as a giveaway from the author Kimberly Vargas and I was completely immersed in the story from the first few pages. I found myself wondering what the characters were going to do next...even when I wasn't reading the book. Very quick read because it was so good. It was an uplifting story of how love prevails, growth is a necessity and we all have a path to follow. Makes me want to visit New Orleans again.

Kailey Sitzman says

The epistolary novel is one of my favorite forms a book may be written in. Gumbeaux did not disappoint this format by any means and the plot benefited from the one sided POV this diary format offers. Another rarity for a novel, is the main character in this bildungsroman is female. Traditionally male characters play the protagonist in this genre. It was a refreshing change. If you are a fan of art, there are many great references you will understand and enjoy. I would definitely recommend this novel to others as a simple yet fun read.

Victoria Scott says

Three Reasons You Should Stay Far, Far Away From Gumbeaux

1. The Romance First, there's Braden. Braden brings "adventure" to Veronica's oh so bland life, including being way too obsessed with sex. He brings out the worst in Veronica, making her even more snobby towards all her friends. But alas, the relationship continues. Then there's Dr Landry, her art professor at the college she goes to. They don't date while he's her teacher, but he does promise he'll wait for her. And he does, even though she dates Braden for most of her time in college. Cool romance guys. Obviously true love...

2. **The Writing** This book jumps all over the place, making it so confusing! It's written in diary form, which I guess is unreliable in real life. Artistic licence gives you the right to assume she writes in it every day though. Not Veronica. Oh no, she might forget to write for months at a time, and never bothers to explain what we missed out on. Plus, there's none of that "show not tell" that we all need. It's written very "I saw my uncle. I was shocked." Sometimes, that works for effect. But when the entire book is written like that, it loses the excitement. Sometimes, really good writing can save a shoddy plot. In this case though, the plot and the writing went hand in hand...

3. **The Morals** Oh wait, what morals? I thought I knew what this book was going to be about; a girl trying to escape her haunting past to find happiness. But it didn't go anywhere! There were a few scenes with her uncle that showed how much Veronica had grown. By the end though, she ended up basically exactly where she started, with an awful romance, and no foreseeable future. She didn't find anything - she stayed exactly the same, as the spoiled brat she really is. When people suffer, I like to see them learn from their role models mistakes. Not this one, though. She made mistake after mistake, and DIDN'T GROW AT THE END OF IT. There was genuinely no purpose to the book, unless you like seeing what life in New Orleans is like.

Michele says

Let's see, a very respectable 4 stars. This was not the light book I was hoping to read but it was very enjoyable. It had me laughing, made me mad, and made me sad during different parts of the book.

I wasn't thrilled with the diary entry format the book was written in but after the first few entries, I didn't even notice it anymore and actually started to appreciate it towards the end. The main character in the book, Mary Veronica, was very likable and this book shows her growing up (mostly mentally) from high school to post college. A lot of what she goes through I think most people will be able to relate.

Mary has an alcoholic guardian uncle. She is the only heir to a famous artist and she wants out. She goes from DC to Louisiana to college in the back bays country to get away. Determined to make it on her own, she loses her scholarship and decides not to ask or take anything from her uncle. She ends up working in a restaurant name Gumbeaux. This story is about first love, crushes, and growing up. She makes many mistakes along the way and explores her wild side. This book made me long for my youth again and let me live vicariously through Mary's journal entries. It was an extremely fun book, one I'd definitely recommend.

Debra says

Written almost as diary entry. Different, engaging. Will read more by this author.
