



Margaret Dumas

The Balance Thing
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Q: Most authors hate to be asked if their characters are based on themselves, and yet readers are always curious. What characteristics do you share with Becks Mansfield?

A: By having Becks be recently laid-off from a high-powered job at the beginning of the book, I put her in a similar situation to one I'd experienced, but her reaction to it was very different than mine.

Becks is fundamentally a workaholic. Her work is what defines and drives her, and that really could not have been said about me in my former professional life. Now that I'm writing, I have a few more workaholic tendencies—but I'm still easily distracted by shiny objects. Oh, and she's thinner than I am!

Q: Your previous books have been crime novels. What inspired you to change genres?

A: I think crime novels are a great form for new writers. They give you a clear structure to cling to—there's a crime, an investigation, and a resolution. You know when you're finished, because the crime is solved. So I'm glad I started in mysteries, and I plan to continue writing them.

But I also discovered that I really enjoyed writing the scenes where "nothing" really happened—where my characters went out to lunch and just talked to each other. The fact that other people liked those scenes too made me think I could do a whole book of them. I'm not saying nothing happens in *The Balance Thing*, but at least nobody had to die!

Q: Do you think that having a career one loves *and* a lasting, healthy relationship is a fantasy?

A: Fantasy, no. Damn difficult to find and hang on to, yes. Even finding one of those things is difficult. But if you're going to go for something, why not go for it all?

Q: What writers have inspired you? Who do you read for pleasure?

A: Oooh, I love and hate this question, because I've been such a voracious reader all my life. I'll spare you my Jane Austen ramblings and say that three of my favorite contemporary writers right now are Anne Tyler, Elinor Lipman, and Adriana Trigiani. I'm also slightly addicted to mysteries, and I read everyone from Elizabeth George to Sarah Strohmeier.

Q: What do you think it is about the form of the novel that makes it so lasting, and gives so many different kinds of people so much pleasure?

A: Well, now I have to go to Jane Austen, because whenever I think of "the novel" I think of her. Just take a look at *Sense and Sensibility* and you'll know what I mean.

One of the things, for me, that give richness to a novel is the importance of the "secondary" characters. *The Balance Thing* is about Becks, yes, but I hope readers also care about Vida, Connie, Max, and Josh.

Some books are a race from Point A to Point B, but I tend to prefer a more a meandering route that takes me down the side paths of the different characters involved. I just hope readers of *The Balance Thing* will enjoy the trip.