



Stormy Weather

By Paulette Jiles
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Introduction

Oil is king of East Texas during the darkest years of the Great Depression. The Stoddard girls—responsible Mayme, whip-smart tomboy Jeanine, and bookish Bea—know no life but an itinerant one, trailing their father from town to town as he searches for work on the pipelines and derricks. But in a year of devastating drought and dust storms, the family's fortunes sink further than they ever anticipated when a questionable "accident" leaves the girls and their mother, Elizabeth, alone to confront the cruelest hardships of these hardest of times.

Returning to their previously abandoned family farm, the resilient Stoddard women must now place their last hopes for salvation in a wildcat oil well that eats up what little they have left . . . and on the back of late patriarch Jack's one true legacy, a dangerous racehorse named Smoky Joe.

Questions for Discussion

1. *Stormy Weather*, like Jiles's previous novel, *Enemy Women*, makes use of historical facts. Did you know anything about the setting (the Dust Bowl, the Texas oil industry of the 1930s, quarter horse match races) before you started reading the novel? How well do you think the author captures the time period?
2. Jiles was a poet before she was a novelist. Do you see any evidence of this in her prose style? Was there a moment in the novel when you found yourself caught off-guard by a certain sentence structure, or came upon a word choice or phrase that you found yourself thinking about later?
3. Although they are sisters, Mayme, Jeanine, and Bea have very different personalities. What contributed to each girl's character? Does Bea's dreaminess have anything to do with her being the youngest? What elements of Mayme's character might be attributed to her position as the eldest?
4. Which of the four women was your favorite? Which one do you think you are most like, and why?
5. It's easy to dismiss Jack Stoddard as an irresponsible, unlikable man. Does anything redeem him? Can you sympathize with Jeanine's attachment to him? Did your perception of him change over the course of the novel?
6. Jeanine has a complex relationship with another "character" in the book, the racehorse Smoky Joe. She needs to sell him in order to pay the back taxes, but she has a strong affection for him, perhaps because he was the one thing left by her father. Do you think Ross Everett realizes this when he offers her part ownership of the horse?
7. The scenes between Jeanine and Ross are sexy, although physically almost nothing happens between them. How does Jiles create this romantic tension with such spare details?
8. What did you think of Milton Brown? How did he compare to Ross Everett? Did Jeanine take Milton seriously as a suitor? What do you think she found appealing about him?
9. Why is Jeanine initially reluctant to accept Ross's marriage proposal? Does her ultimate acceptance represent growth on her part?

About the Author

Paulette Jiles is a poet and memoirist. She is the author of *Cousins*, a memoir, and the bestselling novel *Enemy Women*. She lives in San Antonio, Texas.