



A Dream of Wolves

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About the Book

Hubbard County, North Carolina. The heart of the Southern Blue Ridge mountains is an isolated place of rugged beauty. Its people are close-knit, wary of outsiders, labeled as backwards hillbillies. Dr. Stuart Jordan, a transplanted Yankee, has spent nearly thirty years trying to understand and to help these people. At 57, Doc, as his friends call him, is a man who lives a quiet life in the small mountain town of Slade. Since the tragic death of his son fourteen years earlier, he has thrown himself into his work: by day he runs an OB/GYN practice, delivering babies and tending to women, while he moonlights as the town's medical examiner, as he puts it, "working the other end of the line." He has dedicated himself to caring for his mentally ill wife, Annabel, a former artist. Driven by drugs, alcohol, and her own raging demons, Annabel has become a drifter, a street person who floats in and out of his life, wreaking havoc. For months, sometimes even years, he won't hear from her. Just when he allows himself to consider a future, out of the blue his estranged wife will show up at his doorstep, or he'll get a call from a hospital asking him to come and get her. There in the farmhouse on Shadow Mountain, he'll nurse her back to health only to see her leave him once more. Though he knows the only answer is divorce, Doc can never quite bring himself to abandon the woman he once loved, and so he remains locked in this unhappy cycle.

One night Doc is called out to the scene of a brutal murder. An Indian woman, Rosa Littlefoot, has gunned down her abusive lover, Lee Roy Pugh, a white man related to a violent hill clan. When Doc arrives, the woman is holding her baby, refusing to give it up. Cecil, the county sheriff, asks Doc to intervene, hoping to get the baby safely away from her. He succeeds but gets more than he bargains for. Before she gives her baby up, Rosa extracts a promise from Doc: to see to it that her child is looked after while she's in jail. Thus, is Doc slowly drawn into a tangled web of lives and conflicts: those of Rosa and her baby, the backwoods Pugh clan, and Bobbie Tisdale, the local D.A., a beautiful woman who has recently become Doc's lover. There is also the secret Rosa shares with no one. And finally, of course, there is Annabel.

Questions for Discussion

1. Like many physicians, Stuart "Doc" Jordan, the narrator of the novel, works long hours. Is there any reason in his particular circumstance why he puts in such long hours?
2. Doc Jordan is, as he himself admits and as his friend, Cecil Clegg says, a Yankee, an outsider in this insular world of mountain people. What makes him such an ideal narrator? Why not a narrator who is from Hubbard County?
3. The Prologue begins with the following quote: "What I know of death is how hard we work to deserve it and how little we appreciate it when it finally comes." Given what happens later in the novel, what is the significance of this statement?
4. The women in Doc's life, his estranged wife Annabel and his new lover Bobbie, have very different personalities. What attracts Doc to each woman? Does he love each one?
5. Babies as well as the process of childbearing is very important to the novel. Discuss the various ways babies and woman giving birth are significant to the story.
6. The Appalachian Mountains and its people have been portrayed in various stereotypical ways, from Lil Abner to Deliverance. Doc himself admitted that when he first came to the region he also harbored similar stereotypes. Yet he says, "Slade, like most of the new South, was rapidly changing, sloughing off its small-town, bible-thumping, good-ole-boy skin." Discuss the ways the area is changing, breaking away from those stereotypes, and the effects those changes are having on its people and their traditions.
7. Doc Jordan is a man who is confronted by several moral, emotional, and legal choices? What are those choices and what are the repercussions of each?
8. There are several contradictions in Doc's life. For example, his day job, as he calls it, is nurturing life while his night job, that of part-time ME, is "working the other end of the line." Discuss this and other contradictions in his life.
9. Though Annabel says she wants Stu to be happy she continually returns and throws his life into chaos. Why does she keep coming back and why does he keep taking her in?
10. Several other women are important to Doc. Who are they and how are they significant to him? How do they affect him?
11. After Doc's meeting with Leonard Blackfox, when he learns about the events of the night of the murder, there's one thing that is still unclear to Doc. What is it and how does he handle it?
12. Dreams are an important device in the novel, starting right with the title. Discuss how dreams are used here.
13. At the end of the novel, Annabel leaves. However, even now Doc imagines her calling or returning some day. Do you think she will return?