

Shortlisted
The
2020
Booker
Prize

THE NEW
WILDERNESS

A NOVEL

Author of *Man V. Nature*

DIANE COOK

"The New Wilderness is a virtuosic debut, brutal and beautiful in equal measure." —EMILY ST. JOHN MANDEL,
author of *Station Eleven* and *The Glass Hotel*

Shortlisted for
The 2020 Booker Prize

About the Author:

Diane Cook



Diane Cook is the author of the novel, *The New Wilderness*, and the story collection, *Man V. Nature*, which was a finalist for the Guardian First Book Award, the Believer Book Award, and the Los Angeles Times Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction. Her writing has appeared in Harper's, Tin House, Granta, and other publications, and her stories have been included in the anthologies Best American Short Stories and The O. Henry Prize Stories.

She is a former producer for the radio program *This American Life*, and was the recipient of a 2016 fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. She lives in Brooklyn, New York, with her husband, daughter and son. After studying and writing fiction in college, she pivoted to radio, attending the Salt Institute for Documentary Studies in Portland, Maine as a member of their first Radio cohort in 2000. She began her radio career as an intern, then producer at *This American Life*. After years as a nonfiction writer and producer, she felt hemmed in by all that truth-telling, and decided to return to fiction.

She attended Columbia University for her MFA and published her first book, *Man V. Nature*, a few years later. She has taught writing and literature at Columbia University and at the University of Michigan's New England Literature Program, in which students and teachers live and study together in a rustic camp, foregoing all technology and traditional classroom methods. It's awesome. Students from any college or university are welcome to apply. The push-pull of civilization and wilderness has always been at the heart of her work.

How did you start writing THE NEW WILDERNESS?

I thought of the idea for this book when I was still writing my story collection in 2012. I thought it would be a short short—as in a story that was only 1000 words. A story that just played with one idea. I took a day to write down all the ideas and thoughts I had, and all the characters, and I realized—oh, no, this isn't a short-short. This is a novel.

What made you choose to set the book in the Pacific Northwest?

I spent a lot of time in Eastern Oregon when writing this book. It is the high desert, the edge of the Great Basin, with sage seas and rocky eruptions of mountains, plates that rise and slide over other plates. It's a landscape where you can see how the earth came to be. It is also pretty empty. And that was key to my book. I hadn't always intended to have it take place here. But it was a lucky break I spent a couple of months there when I was first really beginning to seriously write the novel and the landscape was not something I could ignore. It was perfect. I wish I could write about this landscape forever.

Q & A with Diane Cook

The book really centers on the relationships between mothers and daughters. Is that something you knew you wanted to write about?

When I started this book, I knew it would be about mothers and daughters. My mother died in 2008. A lot of the stories in my collection are me working through ideas on death and grief. With *The New Wilderness*, I was still exploring that relationship—what happens to your past when the people who shared it are gone? I approached the story as the daughter I was. Then two years ago I became pregnant and had a daughter. Suddenly, I was on the other end of this relationship, but interestingly with even more questions for my mother. I began the novel as a daughter thinking about mothers and daughters, and ended it as a mother to a daughter, thinking about mothers and daughters

The Manual

an excerpt

Leave no trace.

All microtrash should be cleaned and bagged meticulously. Garbage will be weighed at Post check-ins. Any garbage found will result in a fine.

Always refer to the map.

Entering a restricted area will result in a fine.

Dying in the Wilderness State will result in a fine.

You may stay in one place for a maximum of five days.

You may not camp in the same place twice.

You may not break off from the Community.

Domestication of animals is strictly prohibited.

If there is a natural fire, you will not be rerouted.

Discussion Question:

What is the purpose of the manual?

Are the rules fair?

Discussion Questions

How do the children who grow up in the Wilderness State differ from the adults who moved there voluntarily?

List all the mother/daughter relationships in the novel. How do they differ? How are they similar?

What is The Group's relationship to death?

Is it possible to survive in the Wilderness State?
Can humans truly coexist with nature?

What are some of the more hopeful moments and storylines throughout the novel?

Diane Cook wrote this novel before the current crisis – what parts of the novel are similar to the situation we're currently facing?

There are multiple layers to this story – mother/daughter relationships, human's relationship to nature, a harrowing look at our possible future. Which storyline did you find most compelling?

How do you think you would fare in the Wilderness State, and why?

Printable Postcards from The Wilderness State



*The drive for survival is strong.
Even the most brute creature
can be clever if it means another
morning under the cool light of
the sun in the Wilderness State,
which was the last Wilderness.*

*Of course, now it's gone. But let's
not talk about that yet.*

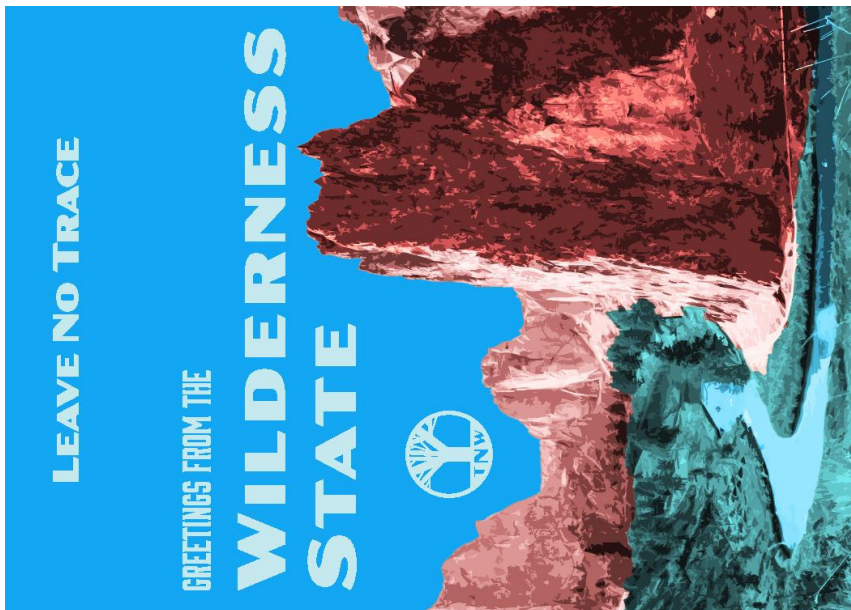


The New Wilderness

A Novel

By Diane Cook

Printable Postcards from The Wilderness State



"Here's a good rule: If
Diane Cook wrote it,
read it."

—THE BOSTON GLOBE



The New Wilderness

A Novel

By Diane Cook
