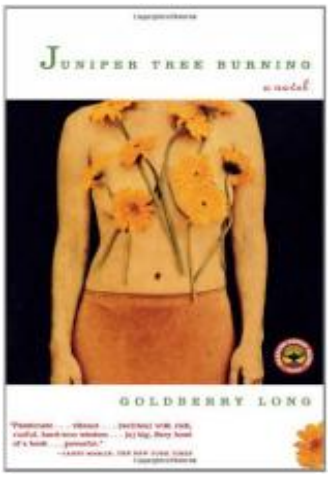
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Juniper Tree Burning

by Goldberry Long



About the Book

Juniper Tree Burning hates her name. It represents all she despises: her hippie mother, Faith; her restless father, Ray; her helpless baby brother, Sunny Boy Blue; and the raw poverty of her New Mexican childhood. She escapes them all to become Jennie, a fierce, intelligent woman with a rage so powerful even her seemingly perfect new husband cannot get close. Then one night the police call -- Sunny has leaped off a Seattle ferry. Jennie takes her only friend and flees New Mexico, retracing her brother's final steps, and the path traveled by generations of her family. It is only by facing her history that Jennie is able to come to terms with her rage, her grief, her guilt at Sunny's death, and her greatest challenge -- accepting love.

Full of myth and metaphor, **Juniper Tree Burning** is a fearless coming-of-age tale; it is a love story, a family saga, and a passionate and dynamic novel about the "flower children's children."

Discussion Guide

1. "They give their daughter the name she tells them she was born for: Juniper Tree Burning. But this is not my name, and so this is not my story" (p.101). What is the significance of names and the process of naming in **Juniper Tree Burning**? What do the characters' names tell us about their personalities? Throughout the novel Jennie struggles to overcome the implications of her given name-what importance does the book's title take on in light of this fact?

2. Discuss the ways in which the narrative voice alternates between first and third person, between Juniper and Jennie? What effect does this have on the story? What do we learn about Jennie from this?

3. Jennie is constantly creating and retelling stories, often in the form of fairytales, " Once upon a time, long ago and far away, at practically the edge of the world, there was a place called Seattle..." (p.116). Discuss the different places in the novel where Goldberry Long has used the fairytale form. Explain why Jennie's character uses fairytales to express her

feelings and the events in her life.

4. "What I need, Jennie tells Faith in her head, is holiday decorations, and a normal mother" (p.68). Juniper is on a quest for normalcy. What sorts of things does she do or dream of doing in order to establish a "normal" life? How does Jennie define normal? Who does she think is normal, and what is her reaction to or relationship with them?

5. Part of Jennie's desire to be normal is related to belonging. What sort of inside/outside dichotomies has Goldberry Long constructed in the novel? What does it mean for Jennie to be white and the daughter of hippies in New Mexico? How does Jennie's appearance relate to this theme? Why does she refer to herself as "the ugly chick"?

6. Goldberry Long has captured the legacy of the 1960s counterculture. Discuss the socio-political context of **Juniper Tree Burning**. What effect does this context have on the novel? How does it shape the characters and their beliefs?

7. Religion plays an important role in **Juniper Tree Burning**. Describe Jennie's relationship with God. What does she believe in? What is she looking for? How does her relationship with God compare to Faith's? Her other family members? Her classmates? What role does science play in Jennie's spiritual life?

8. **Juniper Tree Burning** is a family saga that crosses time and place. Discuss Jennie's relationship with her immediate and extended family, as well as Clarence, Essie, and Chris, who take on familial roles. What does family mean to Jennie?

9. The theme of inheritance surfaces throughout the novel. What forms does it take? What characteristics do the members of Juniper's family share? Who has passed which qualities down to whom? Which patterns resurface and repeat themselves? Can these patterns be altered? Is it possible for Jennie to raise a peaceful family?

10. On many levels **Juniper Tree Burning** is a novel of escape; besides the principal plot line of Jennie tracing Sunny's path to Seattle, it is filled with Jennie's many escape stories about her family. Give examples. How do the characters try and escape? What are they trying to escape from? Do any of them succeed? Why or why not? How does this theme relate to the pattern of kidnappings that we see throughout the novel?

11. This is a book about family, about love, and about rage. How are these three things related in **Juniper Tree Burning** ? Describe Jennie's rage. How does it become the underlying force in the novel?

12. Both Sarah and Chris forgive Jennie. What makes this possible? Does Jennie forgive anyone? Why or why not? Is there power in forgiveness, in withholding forgiveness, or in being forgiven?

13. Discuss the setting of **Juniper Tree Burning**. What is the relation between its setting and its themes? Goldberry Long evokes several different places and times throughout the novel? Discuss the importance of these places. Why does she write them in? What do they mean to Jennie? How do they relate to some of the novel's other themes?

14. Discuss the symbolic meaning of fire. Where do we see fire imagery? Who is it associated with and why?

15. **Juniper Tree Burning** is a coming-of-age story; it is a tale about survival. Compare and contrast the strengths and weaknesses of Jennie and Sunny. How have these qualities defined their relationship with each other, with their family, and with the outside world? Why does Jennie survive?

Author Bio

Goldberry Long is a graduate of the Iowa Writers Workshop. She has received a Wallace Stegner Fellowship, a James Michener Fellowship, and a Hackney Award for the First Novel. A native New Mexican, she lives in northern California. **Juniper Tree Burning** is her first novel.

Critical Praise

This lush first novel is part family drama, part fairy tale (Brothers Grimm, not Disney)...Entertaining but unflinching...it's an unsentimental song of grief and forgiveness. Bottom Line: Blaze of glory.

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