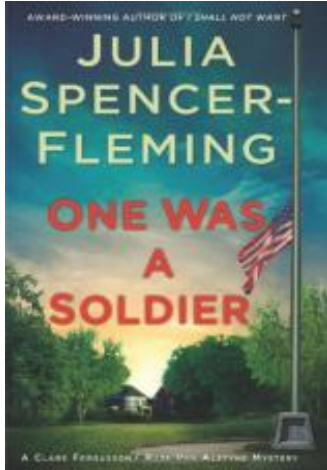

One Was a Soldier: A Clare Fergusson/Russ Van Alstyne Mystery

by Julia Spencer-Fleming



About the Book

On a warm September evening in the Millers Kill community center, five veterans sit down in rickety chairs to try to make sense of their experiences in Iraq. What they will find is murder, conspiracy, and the unbreakable ties that bind them to one another and their small Adirondack town.

The Rev. Clare Fergusson wants to forget the things she saw as a combat helicopter pilot and concentrate on her relationship with Chief of Police Russ Van Alstyne. MP Eric McCrea needs to control the explosive anger threatening his job as a police officer. Will Ellis, high school track star, faces the reality of life as a double amputee. Orthopedist Trip Stillman is denying the extent of his traumatic brain injury. And bookkeeper Tally McNabb wrestles with guilt over the in-country affair that may derail her marriage.

But coming home is harder than it looks. One vet will struggle with drugs and alcohol. One will lose his family and friends. One will die.

Since their first meeting, Russ and Clare's bond has been tried, torn, and forged by adversity. But when he rules the veteran's death a suicide, she violently rejects his verdict, drawing the surviving vets into an unorthodox investigation that threatens jobs, relationships, and her own future with Russ.

As the days cool and the nights grow longer, they will uncover a trail of deceit that runs from their tiny town to the upper ranks of the U.S. Army, and from the waters of the Millers Kill to the unforgiving streets of Baghdad.

Discussion Guide

1. Sarah Dowling reassures her participants that their attendance in her group will not go on their official records.

Discuss ways in which ambivalent or negative attitudes toward mental health struggles affected each person's healing process. Does this reflect your experience of these attitudes and issues in your own community?

2. Claire's independence and helping attitude both help and get in the way of her personal and professional lives. What were some situations when her own blind spots got in the way of her investigation or own best interests? What were some ways in which these traits helped other or herself?

3. Claire is a woman in two traditionally male-dominated fields. Is this ever an advantage in her investigations?

4. The therapy sessions, where the narrator is Sarah Dowling, gives a chance for the reader to see the characters from a bystander's perspective. How did these sessions serve as a "reality check" for the reader, compared to seeing the action through the eyes of characters who were not very self-aware?

5. Church members often expect their leaders to live a transparent, moral life of example for others. And yet, the incidence of depression and addiction in the field can run very high. What factors might drive these two, parallel realities?

6. As the title implies, this book deals with those who have served in the military returning to their civilian lives: What is your experience of returning military? How do you feel the book addresses the topic?

7. The book opens with a new character, Sarah Dowling, getting ready to start a veteran's group. What do you think of her role? Of the group?

8. Who is your favorite character in the book? Why? If your favorite is either Clare or Russ, who else would you pick?

9. This book's focus is more about the personal lives of its characters and less centered in "church." How do you feel about this?

10. What do you think of the ending? What do you think will be the reaction of Russ, the congregation, and the rest of Miller's Kill?

11. Is Will's reaction to his injuries typical? Why or why not?

12. Do you feel that Dr. Stillman was right to continue practicing medicine? Would his condition be obvious to others?

13. Is Clare's use of drugs and alcohol logical? Would a woman of faith need these crutches?

Author Bio

Julia Spencer-Fleming is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *ONE WAS A SOLDIER*, and an Agatha, Anthony, Dilys, Barry, Macavity and Gumshoe Award winner. She studied acting and history at Ithaca College and received her J.D. at the University of Maine School of Law. Her books have been shortlisted for the Edgar, Nero Wolfe and *Romantic Times* RC awards. Julia lives in a 190-year-old farmhouse in southern Maine.

Critical Praise

Julia Spencer-Fleming is a rarity in this business, a risk taker and a writer of deep feeling. Few others could deliver a high-concept thriller that so perfectly captures the subtle sufferings of soldiers home from combat. A story of greed, betrayal, and wounded love, ONE WAS A SOLDIER left me entertained, satisfied, and a shade wiser about the cost of war.

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