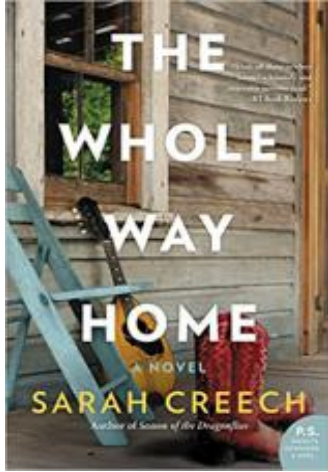


# The Whole Way Home

by Sarah Creech

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## About the Book

A radiant talent on the brink of making it big in Nashville must confront her small-town past and an old love she's never forgotten in this engaging novel --- a soulful ballad filled with romance, heartbreak, secrets and scandal from the author of SEASON OF THE DRAGONFLIES.

Playing to packed houses while her hit song rushes up the charts, country singer and fiddler Jo Lover is poised to become a one-name Nashville star like her idols, Loretta, Reba and Dolly. To ensure her success, Jo has carefully crafted her image: a pretty, sassy, down-to-earth girl from small-town Virginia who pours her heart into her songs.

But the stage persona she's built is threatened when her independent label merges with big-time Capitol Records, bringing Nashville heartthrob JD Gunn --- her first love --- back into her life. Long ago Jo played with JD's band. But they parted ways, and took their own crooked roads to stardom. Now Jo's excited --- and terrified --- to see him again.

When the label reunites them for a show, the old sparks fly, the duet they sing goes viral, and fans begin clamoring for more --- igniting the media's interest in the compelling singer. Why is a small-town girl like Jo so quiet about her past? When did she and JD first meet? What split them apart? All too soon, the painful secret she's been hiding is uncovered, a shocking revelation that threatens to destroy her reputation and her dreams. To salvage her life and her career, Jo must finally face the past --- and her feelings for JD --- to become the true Nashville diva she was meant to be.

## Discussion Guide

1. "[Jo] made music just for them, to make them feel like their experience as women was represented in country music, to give them a living heart in a song." Do you experience country music --- or any music --- this way? Which singers make you feel the way Jo aims to make her audience feel?

2. What purpose does Floyd Masters serve in this novel? Who's he talking to?
3. J. D. lives in a modern, \$12 million estate with all the bells and whistles --- and an entourage of his bandmates as roomies. Jo, by contrast, lives alone in an Arts and Crafts bungalow near downtown Nashville that she restored to its historic look. What do their houses say about them and where they are in their lives? Why did they choose those homes?
4. Rob, J. D.'s bandmate, observes, "As the paychecks had grown larger, the quality of their music had shrunk. He knew it. They knew it. How come they never talked about it in a serious way? Did they think J. D. was satisfied? That the money was enough?" What do you think? How does this contrast with Jo's decisions to stick to her own songwriting, and a less spectacular career?
5. Marie, Jo's faithful assistant, "couldn't understand why Jo would betray Nick and risk losing all his love and devotion. What could she possibly be missing that J. D. could give her?" Is Marie right? What do you make of Jo's relationship with Nick? Was she right to break off their engagement?
6. Did Jo's mother make the right decision to raise Isabell as her own, rather than let people know that she was Jo's daughter? What would you have done if you'd been her? Or Jo?
7. "Country music was for people who hurt. Singing country songs allowed [Jo] to tell a story, and she could escape and be somebody else for a little while through a song". Country music was her healing.? Do you agree? Do you think Jo could have become as talented and famous as she did if she hadn't suffered the way she had?
8. What do you make of Denver and Alan's decision to walk away from a potentially lucrative recording deal? Would you have done the same? What do you think will happen to the Flyby Boys as a result?
9. Was Jo right to name Travis Goode as her rapist and make the whole story public at a press conference? What effect do you think that had on her hometown? Would you have chosen differently?

## Author Bio

Born and raised in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Sarah Creech now teaches English and Creative Writing at Queens University of Charlotte. She lives in Charlotte, NC with her two children and her husband, the poet Morrie Creech.

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