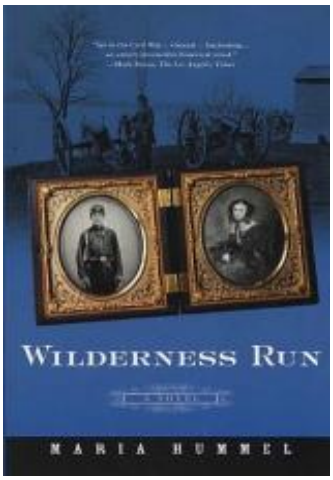
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Wilderness Run

by Maria Hummel



About the Book

Winter 1859: While exploring the frozen expanse of Lake Champlain, Isabel "Bel" Lindsey and her cousin Laurence hear a hoarse voice call out to them, the voice of a runaway slave.

The teenage children of wealthy Vermont lumber barons, Bel and Laurence decide to hide and aid the runaway. The choice catapults them from their sheltered upbringing into the central issue of their time: slavery and the future of the Union. Wilderness Run recounts their coming of age as it follows America's own loss of innocence after entering the Civil War.

Two years pass and Laurence is a soldier fighting in some of the war's bloodiest battles, while Bel, in the confines of her father's mansion, begins to fall for her French-Canadian tutor, Louis Pacquette-only to see him enlist for the Union. As Laurence and Louis become friends and serve in the same brigade, Bel starts to unravel a painful family secret. The history of family and nation come together when Bel goes to serve as a nurse in Washington, D.C., and after the terrible fires of the Battle of the Wilderness, reunites with the two men who love her.

Featuring vivid characters and visceral war scenes balanced by intimate portraits of domestic life, *Wilderness Run* is a powerful debut by a gifted young writer.

Discussion Guide

1. In the beginning of the novel, Bel and Laurence each choose to rescue the runaway slave for different reasons. What are these reasons and how do they play out in the rest of the book?

2. Bel's mother Faustina reads the cousins a story about two lovers who communicate for years via a white swan. Over the course of the book, what does the swan mean to Faustina? to Bel? to Laurence?

3. The novel contains many bloody battle scenes. How does Laurence's attitude toward battle and mass killing change from his first battle to his last?

4. Laurence has to make a terrible choice in the river at Bull Run. If you were in the same circumstance, what would you do? How would you face your comrades afterward? Does Gilbert ever forgive Laurence for Pike's death?

5. Descriptions of winter appear often in the novel. What role does the season play in the story? How does the experience of winter differ for Bel and Laurence?

6. How does music influence the lives of the soldiers?

7. Laurence carries Walt Whitman's **Leaves of Grass** into war. How does his relationship to Whitman's poetry change over time?

8. Like many Union soldiers, Laurence's comrades first went to battle to save the Union, not necessarily to end slavery. How and why did these attitudes change over time?

9. In the early war scenes, Addison is a strong if unofficial leader in his company. What happens when he is promoted and given official responsibility for his friends' lives?

10. When Bel's mother falls down the stairs, Bel thinks her father blames her for the accident. Does he? Why or why not?

11. During wartime, desertion is a crime punishable by death. If you were in Laurence's position and had to choose between obeying martial law and saving the lives of your friends, what would you do?

12. How does the novel's language change in the section that describes the Battle of the Wilderness? Does this affect how you perceive that final battle?

13. What kind of woman do you think Bel will become at the end of the novel? How does this differ with your first vision of her on the frozen lake?

Author Bio

A native Vermonter, Maria Hummel has won several awards for her poetry and fiction, including a Bread Loaf Fellowship, Randall Jarrell Fellowship, and Academy of American Poets Prize. She has published work in *The Georgia Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Manoa*, and *Los Angeles Magazine*, among others, and a selection of her poetry is collected in **City of the Moon**(Harperprints, 1999). She currently works as a writer and editor at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

Critical Praise

"A driving narrative and vivid characterization."

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