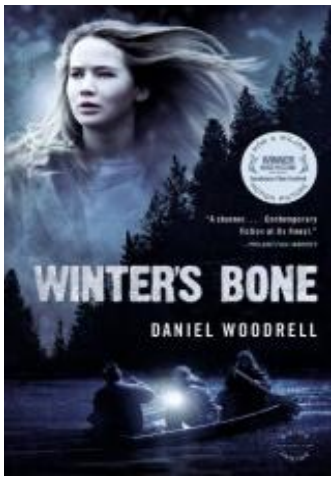
Winter's Bone

by Daniel Woodrell



About the Book

The sheriff's deputy at the front door brings hard news to Ree Dolly. Her father has skipped bail on charges that he ran a crystal meth lab, and the Dollys will lose their house if he doesn't show up for his next court date. Ree's father has disappeared before. The Dolly clan has worked the shadowy side of the law for generations, and arrests (and attempts to avoid them) are part of life in Rathlin Valley.

With two young brothers depending on her and a mother who's entered a kind of second childhood, sixteen-year-old Ree knows she has to bring her father back, dead or alive. She has grown up in the harsh poverty of the Ozarks and learns quickly that asking questions of the rough Dolly clan can be a fatal mistake. But along the way to a shocking revelation, Ree discovers unforeseen depths in herself and in a family network that protects its own at any cost.

Discussion Guide

1. Ree Dolly is only sixteen. How, in the first pages of Winter's Bone, does she prove herself a mature caretaker and teacher of her little brothers? Given her use of strong language, how does she reveal her tenderness toward her dependents?

2. Ree's mother is medicated for her mental illness, and neighbors donate painkillers to Ree after she takes a beating. The Dolly clan makes a living by producing illegal methamphetamines, and Ree smokes marijuana when it's offered to her. How do mind-altering devices both destroy and make bearable the fabric of life in Rathlin Valley? Do you think moonshine wreaked as much havoc on rural American populations as crystal meth has?

3. How does the fearsome Uncle Teardrop reveal the potential for loyalty and humanity in some of the most hardened members of the Dolly family? Even Merab, the fierce Mrs. Thump, proves herself willing to help Ree save her house and land. What do you think is at the root of this clan's rigid, sometimes brutal moral code? Poverty? Deliberate isolation

and separation from mainstream values?

4. Can you imagine better lives, in an earlier time, for people with the Dollys' background? Perhaps before the advent of chemically manufactured drugs and after the first immigration to America? Ree's mother was once a happy beauty who loved to dance, for instance, and Mamaw Bromont --- her mother --- seems to have been a steady matriarch.

5. Ree's married friend, Gail, becomes an intimate of Ree's. How does their passing physical relationship speak to each girl's lack of unconditional love? How is Megan also a purely benign, if misguided, support for Ree?

6. Nature and the elements contribute greatly to the atmosphere of Winter's Bone, for better and for worse. How does Daniel Woodrell convey both the harshness and the beauty of the natural world? In what ways are Ree's walk in the pine woods with her ailing mother and her trip to Bucket Spring to wash her wounds enhanced by Woodrell's description of the landscape? Did you feel Ree's arduous journey to find her father more sharply because of the icy cold?

7. Critics have compared Ree to such classical literary figures as Antigone, Psyche, and even King Lear, and have seen reflections of the Old Testament in the Dolly family's code. How, for you, has Woodrell given his story a mythical stature that reaches beyond its particular Ozarkian hollow?

8. The tension raised by Ree's quest for her father is at times intense for the reader.How does Woodrell temper this anxiety with both humor and tenderness? How does his use of authentic dialect bring his larger-than-life story and characters back to earth?

9. Do you think Ree would have been better off pursuing her dream of joining the military than staying with her dependent family? If not, why?

Author Bio

Daniel Woodrell was the author of such novels including THE MAID'S VERSION, WINTER'S BONE and THE DEATH OF SWEET MISTER, as well as the collection THE OUTLAW ALBUM. He was the recipient of the PEN West Award, and five of his novels were selected as *New York Times* Notable Books of the Year. Three of his novels have been adapted for film, including the Oscar-nominated *Winter?s Bone*. He lived in the Ozarks near the Arkansas line with his wife, Katie Estill, and died in 2025.

Critical Praise

"A piercing, intense tale told from way inside, WINTER'S BONE is stark evidence that Daniel Woodrell is a writer of exceptional originality and importance."

?*Thomas McGuane*

"In prose both taut and lyrical, WINTER'S BONE vividly evokes the spirit of one little woman warrior."

?*Edna O'Brien*

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Publication Date: June 1, 2010
Genres: Mystery
Paperback: 224 pages
Publisher: Back Bay Books
ISBN-10: 031613161X
ISBN-13: 9780316131612