Blackwater

by Kerstin Ekman



About the Book

Midsummer Eve, 1974, in the far north of Sweden, near the Norwegian border. Annie Raft arrives with her six-year-old daughter, Mia, in the remote village of Blackwater to join her lover, Dan, on a nearby commune. But Dan does not meet them. In the eerie light of the midsummer night, a frightened Annie wanders into the forest, where the myriad paths cross like veins in a body, to find the commune. A strange dark young man rushes by, without seeing her. By the rushing waters of the river, Annie comes upon a tent, and what she sees inside will haunt her for years to come -- until the morning Annie spies her daughter in the arms of the man from the forest, and a crime unsolved for nearly twenty years begins to roll toward a dark and devastating conclusion.

Psychologically complex and deeply sensual, **Blackwater** is a unique and unique and unforgettable thriller, in which the hearts and minds of the characters are as striking as the exotic northern landscape that envelops them.

Discussion Guide

1. **Blackwater** moves back and forth in time between past and present, and recreates events. What does this narrative structure reveal about the nature of memory?

2. Critics have noted that this novel diverges from the crime or mystery genre. Would you agree? In what respects might it diverge? What does the element of murder add? Can you imagine this novel without the central mystery?

3. The novel touches upon environmental issues of clear cutting, uranium mining, and the international underground trade in peregrine hunting. How do these issues deepen our underground trade in peregrine hunting. How do these issues deepen our understanding of place? What sort of character is place in this novel? How is human nature revealed to be similar to the natural world?

4. At one point, Annie says, "Why do we keep looking for meaning and connections? It's the way our minds work, seeking pattern and order. Yet we scatter our lives, helplessly and absently." This statement hints at an alienation between our thoughts and our lived lives. What other themes of alienation run through the book?

5. When Johan is trapped at the bottom of the well, he finds his only companion is an eel, which later becomes his pet. How does the relationship with this animal humanize Johan in a way that human relationships cannot? Can you think of other examples where animals play such a role?

6. When Annie decided to move to the rustic commune, she had lost her teaching job, and desired a simpler life. Aside from the murder scene she encounters, what sort of complications does she face as a result of her decision? Is her life truly simpler?

7. **Blackwater** takes place near the border between Sweden and Norway. Many figurative borderlines come into play as the novel progresses. Which are the most important?

8. The setting of the novel is unfamiliar to most English-language readers. How does the exotic locale influence our experience of reading? Do we ever find ourselves at home in this strange land?

9. How does Dan's failure to meet Annie and Mia when they arrive in **Blackwater** influence the course of events? Are there any other instances of such crucial absence in the book?

10. How is the relationship between Annie and Mia affected by the memory of the murders? What other sorts of intimacy are affected? Can we draw any universal knowledge about the nature of evil and its effects from witnessing the relationships between characters as they unfold?

Author Bio

Kerstin Ekman is the author of seventeen novels, which have been widely published in Scandinavia and Europe. **Blackwater** (Picador USA) won the Swedish Crime Academy?s award for best crime novel, the August Prize, and the Nordic Council?s Literary Prize. She lives in northern Sweden.

Critical Praise

" Mesmerizing . . . *Like Smilla's Sense of Snow*, it is beautifully written, absorbing and accessible. It makes you hold your breath. "-***Newsday***"Wonderfully . . .powerfully enigmatic . . . extremely "intelligent . . . *Blackwater* works so brilliantly both as a mystery"and an evocation an unfamiliar word. "-**Richard Berstein *The New York Times***"A rich adventure, the kind of long, lush, thoughtful page-turner many of us crave but rarely get our hands on. "-**Beverly Lowry, *The New York Times Book Review***"Thrilling . . . a superbly written and atmospherically engaging crime novel. "-**Sven Birkerts *The Washington Post Book Review***"Striking . . . Graham Greene meets Dean Koontz. "-***Entertainment Weekly***"Never uninvolving . . . keeps us guessing . . . Ekman tosses out conventional plot mechanics and stuns us with unexpected tragedy and twist after twist. "-**Peter Handel, *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle***

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