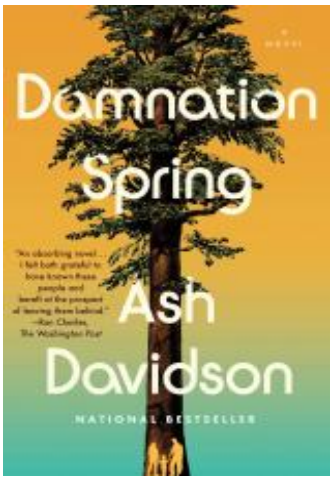
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Damnation Spring

by Ash Davidson



About the Book

An epic, immersive debut, DAMNATION SPRING is the deeply human story of a Pacific Northwest logging town wrenched in two by a mystery that threatens to derail its way of life.

For generations, Rich Gundersen?s family has chopped a livelihood out of the redwood forest along California?s rugged coast. Now Rich and his wife, Colleen, are raising their own young son near Damnation Grove, a swath of ancient redwoods on which Rich?s employer, Sanderson Timber Co., plans to make a killing. In 1977, with most of the forest cleared or protected, a grove like Damnation --- and beyond it 24-7 Ridge --- is a logger?s dream.

It?s dangerous work. Rich has already lived decades longer than his father, killed on the job. Rich wants better for his son, Chub, so when the opportunity arises to buy 24-7 Ridge --- costing them all the savings they?ve squirreled away for their growing family --- he grabs it, unbeknownst to Colleen. Because the reality is their family isn?t growing; Colleen has lost several pregnancies. And she isn?t alone. As a midwife, Colleen has seen it with her own eyes.

For decades, the herbicides the logging company uses were considered harmless. But Colleen is no longer so sure. What if these miscarriages aren?t isolated strokes of bad luck? As mudslides take out clear-cut hillsides and salmon vanish from creeks, her search for answers threatens to unravel not just Rich?s plans for the 24-7, but their marriage too, dividing a town that lives and dies on timber along the way.

Told from the perspectives of Rich, Colleen and Chub, in prose as clear as a spring-fed creek, this intimate, compassionate portrait of a community clinging to a vanishing way of life amid the perils of environmental degradation makes DAMNATION SPRING an essential novel for our time.

Discussion Guide

1. Lark says of Rich, ?Not a lot of guys are born to do something.? What is Lark referring to? In your opinion, what role does a sense of ?destiny? play in Rich?s decision to take a risk on 24-7 Ridge?

2. Consider the role Daniel played in Colleen?s young adulthood. Why does she feel drawn to him when he first returns to Klamath? To Colleen, what does Daniel represent in her life?

3. In the beginning of the novel, Colleen is reeling after her latest miscarriage and feels resentful of her sister, Enid, who now has six children --- including her youngest, the miraculously docile Alsea. How does Colleen?s notion of Enid as the luckier of the two become more complicated as the novel progresses? By the end of the novel, how has the sisters? relationship to one another changed?

4. On page 50, Daniel?s words replay in Colleen?s head: ?*People think it?s just about trees, or it?s just about fish. By the time they realize it?s about them, it?s too late.?* How does the interconnectedness of people and the environment play out in the novel? Do you think Daniel?s prediction --- that the risks of environmental degradation will be evident only once it?s too late --- comes true for the community of Klamath? Why or why not?

5. Throughout the novel, water --- flood waters, mudslides, contaminated creeks --- poses as much a danger to all Klamath residents as the occupational hazards of forestry do to the loggers. How do you understand the role of water in this story?

6. Rich observes about Merle?s husky, ?A dog wasn?t a man. It didn?t choose which sonofabitch owned him.? Consider the subsequent revelations about Eugene?s actions in light of Rich?s observation. In your opinion, is Eugene?s financial dependence on Sanderson a justification for his behavior, or not?

7. Consider Colleen?s reluctance to tell Rich about the tap water collection jars, and Rich?s insistence on keeping the news about his purchase of 24-7 Ridge a secret from Colleen. Why do you think these characters repeatedly hesitate to confide in one another? In your opinion, what are some events and developments that finally lead to more openness between them, and why?

8. On page 295, Pete says to Rich ?[A] woman?ll lift a car if her kid?s under it.? Mothers --- and in particular Helen and Colleen --- are among the most vocal and active in the effort to uncover the truth about the health implications of Sanderson?s herbicide sprays. Why is this? What role does motherly love and heartbreak play in driving the investigation forward? How might the novel have been different if the experiences of the women in the community were less central?

9. During his speech at the hearing, Rich says, ?You scratch a logger, you better believe you?ll find an ?enviromentalist? underneath.? What does Rich mean by this? What do the loggers, the Yurok fishermen and the environmentalists have in common? How do their perspectives differ?

10. At the dentist?s office in Coos Bay, Rich is finally relieved of the toothache he?s had since the beginning of the novel. In addition, he at last finds closure to his relationship to Astrid. How do you understand his relief in this chapter? What --- in addition to a rotting tooth --- do you think has been plaguing him all this time?

11. By the final chapter, how would you characterize Colleen?s relationship to 24-7 Ridge? How has it changed over the

course of the novel? What do you imagine Colleen will do with the land now?

Author Bio

Ash Davidson was born in Arcata, California, and attended the Iowa Writers? Workshop. Her work has been supported by the Arizona Commission on the Arts and MacDowell. She lives in Flagstaff, Arizona.

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