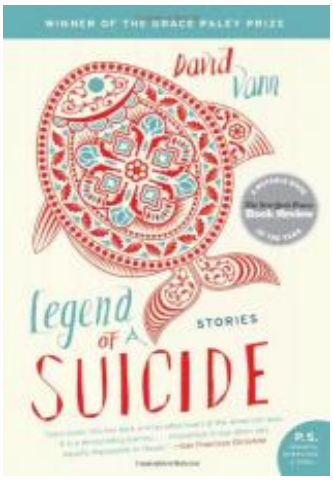
Legend of a Suicide: Stories

by David Vann



About the Book

In Legend of a Suicide, his heartbreaking semi-autobiographical debut story-collection, David Vann relates the story of a young man trying to come to terms with the guilt and pain of his father?s suicide. The wild outback of the author?s native Alaska acts as the ideal backdrop for this collage of six stories --- a novella and five shorts --- and mirrors the author?s own psychological wilderness.

Discussion Guide

1. ?Ichthyology? means ?the study of fish.? What do we learn from fish in this story? How do we read them? Why not just tell the story of the father directly?

2. What does the boy understand in ?Rhoda?? What does the father understand? What does Rhoda understand?

3. The structure of ?A Legend of Good Men? is a series of portraits, borrowing from Chaucer?s **Legend of Good Women** and the tradition of writing about saints? lives (and this is the meaning of the word ?Legend? in the title of the book also: a series of portraits). Why do we need to hear about all these men? What?s the point?

4. The enormous change in the middle of the novella ?Sukkwan Island? came as a complete surprise to the author. He didn?t know what was going to happen until he was partway through writing that sentence. What?s the significance of the event?

5. What role does wilderness play in ?Sukkwan Island??

6. What is Roy searching for in ?Ketchikan?? What does he find?

7. ?The Higher Blue? repeats the dramatic structure of ?Ichthyology? but in a fabulist riff which provides an epilogue to the book. The story is set in Fairbanks, where the author?s father actually killed himself. Why does the boy hide away in the cabinet?

8. Is this book closer to being a story collection or a novel? Do the stories have to be read together and in this order to gain their full meaning?

9. Why does the style vary from story to story?

10. Is it possible to understand why someone has committed suicide?

Author Bio

David Vann?s internationally bestselling books have been published in 23 languages, won 14 prizes and appeared on 83 Best Books of the Year lists in a dozen countries. A former Guggenheim fellow, he is currently a Professor at the University of Warwick in England and Honorary Professor at the University of Franche-Comté in France.

Critical Praise

"As the title suggests, the stories in **Legend of a Suicide** approach a private mythos, revisiting, reinvestigating and reinventing one family?s broken past. They also transport us to wild, uncharted places on the Alaskan coast and in the American soul. Throughout, David Vann is a generous, surehanded guide in some very dangerous territory."

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