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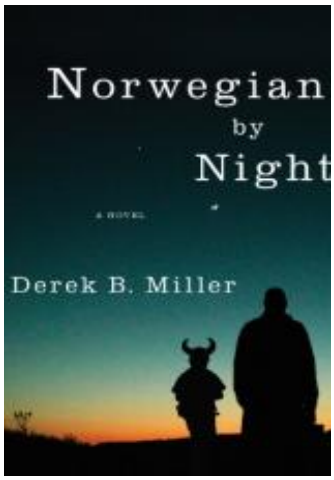
Norwegian by Night

by Derek B. Miller



About the Book

A luminous novel, a police thriller, and the funniest book about war crimes and dementia you are likely to read.

Sheldon Horowitz --- widowed, impatient, impertinent --- has grudgingly agreed to leave New York and move in with his granddaughter, Rhea, and her new husband, Lars, in Norway: a country of blue and ice with one thousand Jews, not one of them a former Marine sniper in the Korean War turned watch repairman, who failed his only son by sending him to Vietnam to die. Not until now, anyway.

Home alone one morning, Sheldon witnesses a dispute between the woman who lives upstairs and an aggressive stranger. When events turn dire, Sheldon seizes and shields the neighbor?s young son from the violence, and they flee the scene. But old age and circumstances are altering Sheldon?s experience of time and memory. He is haunted by dreams of his son Saul?s life and by guilt over his death. As Sheldon and the boy look for a haven in an alien world, reality and fantasy, past and present, weave together, forcing them ever forward to a wrenching moment of truth.

NORWEGIAN BY NIGHT introduces an ensemble of unforgettable characters --- Sheldon and the boy, Rhea and Lars, a Balkan war criminal named Enver, and Sigrid and Petter, the brilliantly dry-witted investigating officers --- as they chase one another, and their own demons, through the wilderness at the end of the world.

Discussion Guide

1. At the end of Chapter 17, Sheldon tells young Rhea that ?being conceived in indifference but raised in love is better than the inverse.? Discuss the family ties that are woven throughout NORWEGIAN BY NIGHT. How do they compare to the bonds experienced in your own family?

2. The novel is shaped by generations of warfare, from Hitler?s invasions to America?s campaigns in Korea and

Vietnam to the Balkan wars of the 1990s. Ultimately, what do these storylines tell us about the nature of war? What determines whether its victims will seek peace or vengeance?

3. Do Sheldon and Rhea experience Judaism in the same way? How does Sheldon?s Jewish identity affect his sense of legacy as he copes with the aging process?

4. Discuss Norway as if it were a character in the novel. How does the landscape --- both beautiful and treacherous --- reflect the storytelling? Is Norway a naïve utopia that will eventually succumb to the Envers of the world, or is it a shrewd stronghold that lives up to its Viking history?

5. What is the essential root of Enver?s power? Is his quest for his son driven entirely by his ego? What keeps Burim from breaking free, despite Adrijana?s pleas?

6. How did you interpret Sheldon?s conversations with Bill? How do his memories of Bill and Mario surpass the bonds he has with his family? Are you ever aided by ?ghosts? who deliver encouragement and good advice during trying circumstances?

7. Discuss the issue of gun control as it plays out in the novel, from Enver?s attempts to acquire weapons to the hunters who give aid to Sheldon and the boy. How does Sheldon?s former life as a sniper shape the way he sees the world? In the closing scenes, what does Lars demonstrate about the key to self-defense?

8. At the end of Chapter 16, as Saul searches for meaning in the aftermath of his tour of duty, what accounts for the differences between the way he and Sheldon see the role of an American soldier? Why does Saul reenlist?

9. How does Lars?s view of the world compare with Rhea?s? What makes them an unlikely yet compatible couple?

10. What gives Sheldon the ingenuity and stamina to outwit the police and Enver? In his attempts to protect the boy, what unfinished business from his own life is he pursuing?

11. What do Sigrid and Petter discover about their homeland while the case unfolds? What are their best assets as investigators?

12. Discuss the novel?s title and the way it captures the expatriate experience. What do the novel?s immigrants hope to gain from a life in Norway? How does the boy?s disguise --- a costume of stereotypes --- capture the expat experience?

13. How were you affected by reading some of the scenes from Sheldon?s seemingly lucid point of view, followed by evidence of his dementia? How does this help us experience the gray areas of memory and reality?

14. Without words, Sheldon?s photographs speak volumes. What do you think they say? In the end, what does it take for him to make peace with his past?

15. As you watched the boy throughout the novel, what did you discover about the way humanity?s struggles look through the eyes of a child?

Author Bio

Derek B. Miller is the author of NORWEGIAN BY NIGHT, THE GIRL IN GREEN, AMERICAN BY DAY, RADIO LIFE, QUIET TIME (an Audible Original novel), HOW TO FIND YOUR WAY IN THE DARK and THE CURSE OF PIETRO HOUDINI. His work has been shortlisted for many awards, with NORWEGIAN BY NIGHT winning the CWA John Creasey Dagger Award for best first crime novel, among others. HOW TO FIND YOUR WAY IN THE DARK was a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award and a *New York Times* best mystery of 2021. A Boston native, Miller lives in Spain with his family.

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