

BOOK CLUB KIT



Dear Reader,

One of the hardest parts of growing up for me was realizing that some answers will always be out of reach. *In the Woods They Wait* grew out of this desire to make sense of my relationship with my brother—and my reaction to losing him.

When I was twelve, my little brother Robby fell out of a chair in his first-grade classroom and misfiring neurons hijacked his body. He was diagnosed with epilepsy. There was nothing that could save him, or my family, from the cruel, unfair reality that he could die at any moment.

I turned to horror as a way to cope. What fictional fear could compare to my real anxieties? I desperately wanted something that could scare me badly enough to make my troubles feel small, even if just for a moment.

While Robby endured a series of brain surgeries, I disappeared into the pages of Stephen King novels, or creature features like *Jaws* and *Jurassic Park* where the danger lurking around the corner was something tangible. Being devoured by a shark in a frothing whirlpool of blood and guts seemed preferable to losing someone to the invisible grip of disease. At least when you close the book, the shark is gone.

We lost Robby in 2018 in the middle of a seizure like any other. SUDEP—sudden unexpected death in epilepsy. The catch-all diagnosis for “we don’t know why it happened, it just did.”

Why do some children suffer and die? It’s a question I’ve been asking myself since I was born into a grieving family—my sister drowned a year before I came into the world. Grief has always been part of my identity. I know myself in relation to my lost siblings. Their losses changed who I am as a daughter, a sister, a human. But what surprised me in the wake of Robby’s death was a different emotion: guilt.

In the Woods They Wait is the story of a sister struggling with grief, regret, and a dark secret. Fifteen years before the main events of the novel, Audrey Figg played a cruel prank on her younger brother that resulted in his disappearance in Devil’s Den State Park. Now, she works there as a park ranger. Her brother never left, so neither did she.

In some ways it’s a penance for the damage she caused, but it’s also a way for her to exert some control over her life. Nature is unpredictable, but our responses to it shouldn’t be. She’s an expert in search and rescue, patterns of probability, and treatment of serious injuries in the wild.

I wanted to emphasize two main ideas in this novel: the ways in which the world lurches out from beneath your feet when you lose someone you love, and how nature isn’t cruel but powerful and indifferent to us. There are many forces at work against Audrey, all of them unknowable, and ultimately, she has to come to an acceptance of that fact. Sometimes, horrible things just happen.

The world is a dark place, but I believe there is beauty in the way people rise to meet that darkness. I hope you find that beauty in these pages.

Thank you for reading,

Carrie Lee South

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WARNING! THESE QUESTIONS CONTAIN SPOILERS

1. How did the dual timelines shape your understanding of who Audrey is? How did it shape your understanding of what happened to Benny?
2. The novel opens with birders coming to Devil's Den because of the Grail Bird sighting. What do you think the significance is of Audrey's family coming to the park for this reason?
3. How does this novel portray different types of grief through Audrey and her parents? Why do you think they each expressed themselves the way they did?
4. Audrey and Corbin have grown up together and know each other better than anyone else. Would you say their relationship is based on growth or stagnation?
5. As you were reading, what did you think of the scratching and wet clicking noises Audrey heard in the woods? How did they make you feel? Did you think they would be significant?
6. Scott tries to keep Audrey in the dark as long as he can. Why does he want to hide the truth from her? Do you think she would have accepted it before she saw evidence herself?
7. Cairns are human made rock formations that can mean to stand in as a trail marker, but often lead people down an incorrect path. What is the significance of cairns in this novel?
8. How do you feel about Audrey and Porter's decision to stay at Devil's Den after everything they went through? Why do you think they stayed?
9. What do you think was the scariest part of this novel? The missing children, the animals, the woods themselves, or was there another element that made your hair stand on edge?
10. Which scenes most resonated with you? Which ones did you find yourself thinking about upon finishing the novel? Were you satisfied with the ending?

Notice: To preserve scenic beauty and ecology, fences and warning signs have not been installed in some park locations. Caution and increased supervision of your children and others in your care are required when visiting these areas.

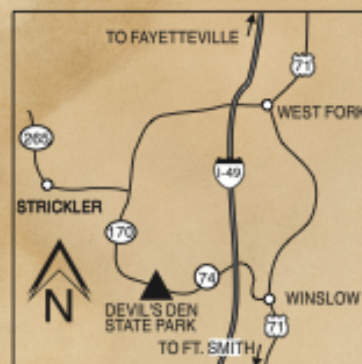


LEGEND

- A** RESTROOMS
- B** SHOWER HOUSE
- C** CCC PUMP HOUSE
- PA** PAVILION/RESTROOMS
- CC** CAMPER CABINS
- PAVED ROAD
- - - GRAVEL ROAD
- FOOT TRAIL
- PUBLIC TELEPHONE
- WATCHABLE WILDLIFE AREA
- BALL FIELD (AREA-E)
- PICNIC AREA
- WILDLIFE AREA

MAP NOT TO SCALE

Some areas have been enlarged for easy reading.



DEVIL'S DEN STATE PARK

COURTESY OF ARKANSAS.COM TOURISM & STATE PARKS OFFICES

THANK YOU FOR READING IN THE WOODS THEY WAIT

NEED MORE? CHECK OUT OUR PLAYLIST,
CURATED BY CARRIE LEE SOUTH!

