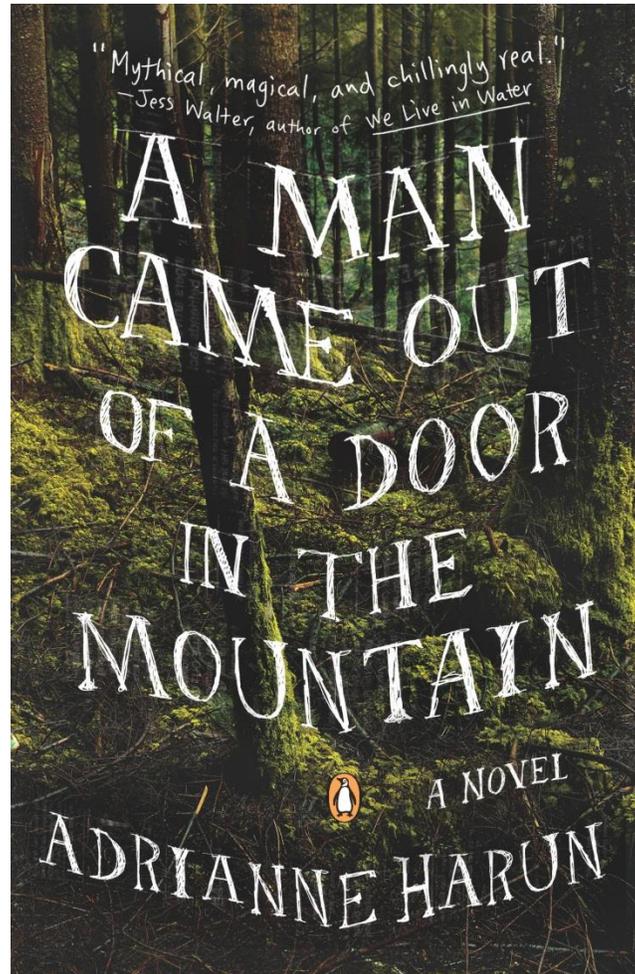


Reading Group Guide



Introduction

Adrienne Harun's first novel, **A MAN CAME OUT OF A DOOR IN THE MOUNTAIN**, weaves together folklore and elements of magical realism to create a compelling and unsettling portrait of life for five young friends in an isolated mountain town in British Columbia, where young girls, mostly Native, begin to vanish from the sides of a notorious highway. Leo Kreutzer and four friends are barely touched by these disappearances—until a series of mysterious and troublesome outsiders arrive on the mountain. Then it seems as if the devil himself has appeared among them. This is a seductive and chilling debut novel about what happens to Leo and his friends when evil—both human and otherwise—walks right through their town.

Selected Praise

“In **mesmerizing** prose, debut novelist Harun spins a chilling tale shot through with both aching realism and age-old folktales, melding them together to capture a landscape lush with possibility and imagination and terrifying in its vast emptiness.”—*Booklist, starred review*

“*A Man Came out of a Door in the Mountain* is a **rich, haunting, original novel** that captures evil in many forms--mythic, magic and chillingly real. **Adrienne Harun's writing can hold you breathless.**”—**Jess Walter**, author of *We Live in Water*

“Dark, mysterious . . . [and] by turns Gothic and **grittily realistic, astute, and poetic** in its evocation of evil everywhere.”

—**Andrea Barrett**, author of *Ship Fever* and *Servants of the Map*

“Harun’s mastery clearly lies in establishing atmosphere and mood. Much as it does to the novel’s characters, **the gothic ambiance wraps around the reader and won’t let go.** Laced with local color, this debut will please fans of the macabre.”—*Library Journal*

“I have long been a fan of Adrienne Harun’s work, and *A Man Came out of a Door in the Mountain* has raised my admiration to new heights. **Writing with astonishing vividness, Harun weaves her own myths and magic as she plots her amazing tale.**”

—**Margot Livesey**, author of *The Flight of Gemma Hardy*

“Harun creates a masterfully bleak and spooky mood, and succinctly captures the desperation of the young people’s lives. . . . **[a] promising debut.**” —*Publishers Weekly*

Discussion Questions:

1. This story is primarily told by Leo, but many voices contribute to the tale. Whose story is this?
2. How does music work in this novel?
3. How do fairy tales shape the story? Is this book a fairy tale?
4. What role do the devil's interludes in the story play?
5. Leo is studying physics through an online course. Why physics?
6. Uncle Lud tells Leo stories and tales that are meant to instruct. Leo's professor for his online course, Leila Chen, writes Leo long emails that are parallel to Uncle Lud's stories. Why is Leo a student with two different teachers employing two different teaching methods?
7. In this book, art has more influence than science. Why?
8. The five friends in this story are of mixed races and are united by their having to straddle worlds. Similarly, Leo's mother is Catholic, but his father "believes in science." (pg. 90) Uncle Lud believes in listening. Could this story have developed without the theme of navigating between or among worlds?
9. Leila Chen's emails are ruminations on visible energy and the invisible, and on our place in the world. Does she represent how science might view what others call spirits or the devil?
10. This book is full of loss. Is it also full of hope?
11. How does this novel define family?
12. What do you think will happen to the remaining four friends?



About the Author

Adrienne Harun's prize-winning short fiction, essays, and book reviews have been published in numerous magazines and journals, including *Story*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Narrative Magazine*, *Ontario Review*, *The Sun*, *Willow Springs*, and *Colorado Review*. Her short story collection, *The King of Limbo* (Houghton Mifflin) was a Sewanee Writing Series selection and a Washington State Book Award finalist. Stories from an upcoming collection have been noted as "Distinguished Stories" in both *Best American Mystery Stories* (2003) and *Best American Short Stories* (2009). Adrienne is also a member of the core faculty of the Rainier Writing Workshops, an MFA program at Pacific Lutheran University, as well as a faculty member at the Sewanee School of Letters at the University of the South. She lives with her husband in Port Townsend, Washington. Her website is adrainneharun.com

A Conversation with Adrienne Harun, author of *A Man Came Out of A Door in the Mountain*

Q: *A Man Came Out of A Door in the Mountain* is a book about evil, specifically the devil. How did you get the idea for this novel?

A: Over the last four decades, a great many girls and women have gone missing and/or been found murdered along Highway 16 in northern British Columbia. Until very recently, those disappearances and killing have gone unsolved and largely uninvestigated as well, it seems. I knew I wanted to write about the murders and disappearances of First Nation women along the Highway of Tears, but I'm a lousy journalist – truly can't stick to the facts for the life of me – and the idea of co-opting a real family's tragedy for fiction seemed abhorrent to me. I really struggled to find a way into the story.

Driving along Highway 16 – that gorgeous, isolated road– I was thinking as always about the girls and about how, in situations like this one, the first push is for protection. “Women Beware,” the yellow billboards on Highway 16 warn, “Killer on the Loose. Do Not Hitchhike.” The victims (and prevention) are the visible face of a two-sided coin. On the other lies a thousand questions, including the nagging, never-ending, *Who Could Do This?* Where does such evil come from? One could simply point to mental disturbance and shrug, but there's more, isn't there? Where does evil come from? The question wouldn't leave. Over and over: *where does evil come from?* Frustrated, I turned stupid. Maybe, I thought, it just comes out of a door in the mountain whenever it pleases.

Later, at home, while doing one of those rout, mind-cleansing chores – washing dishes, pulling weeds –I remembered a story my Irish grandmother had told me about a man who came out of the hills near Donegal. He always appeared on a payday around dusk, and he set the men to gambling and fighting until violence bore fruit and someone was badly harmed – or worse. As the man left, he would place his palm on the wall, leaving an enduring mark that could not be vanquished by soap and water or even a dozen fresh coats of paint. He was the devil, of course, doing his job. With that memory, that long-forgotten story, I began to find my way into my own story.

Shortly after, I was at a dinner party with wonderfully thoughtful people, and a heated debate began about whether the presence of evil is necessary for good to exist. The next day, I sat down to write and the first words that arrived were, “A man came out of a door in the mountain.” I saw him then, that dusty fellow, heading calmly and purposefully down his own trails toward the highway and town. The devil arrived via Uncle Lud's story, and I began to follow him, notebook in hand, to see what would happen next.

Q. The Highway of Tears and the mysterious disappearances of women along this road are tragically real. Why did you choose to write about them?

A. Murders and disappearances are common currency in fiction. They're embedded with seemingly unanswerable questions and vibrate with suspense. Maybe a writer's eye is always drawn to such stories in the news. The Highway of Tears tragedy, however, hit me for other reasons: the victims

were all female, almost all First Nation girls and women, and the investigation, like that that preceded the infamous Pickton murders in Vancouver, had been lackluster, seemingly because of the race and social status of the victims. In other words, the victims didn't seem to matter *enough* and assumptions about why they might have been chosen as victims seemed to override the dramatic action solving a crime should demand.

I know this has been said again and again in terms of violence in the States, particularly the divide between urban and, say, suburban youth violence, but if a great number of suburban white girls (children!) and women went missing and/or were found murdered along even the most isolated and difficult terrain, the families probably wouldn't have had to wait for Amnesty International and an organized outcry for a real effort, E-PANA, to finally plow resources into the investigation.

As I said, I'm not a terrific journalist, but I first read about the Highway of Tears years ago and followed the stories, and my initial outrage and grief only deepened, a constant ache. I wanted to write something if just to shine a little more light there. The novel I ended up with doesn't address the murders full on. It's an entirely fictional story, peopled by entirely fictional characters, that touches only tangentially on the real Highway of Tears, but I hope it's intriguing enough that readers might want to seek out more information and learn, too, more about Canada's First Nations and their treatment by the Canadian government, in general.

Q: Clearly place is critical to this novel. How important is place to your writing in general?

A: Place holds history and emotion, two vital aspects that create and define character. I've lived in the same small town all my adult life. I walk a lot, and there are days when I feel as if I meet my younger self, her trials and triumphs, a dozen times. Many of the props in *Port Townsend* – the businesses, the shops, the homes – have been greatly altered over the years. The type of people who live here, too, has changed oh so much. But the *place* – that intersection of memory and physical being – well, that will never change for me, because in a sense I've constructed it as my own. This place and the place of my early childhood comprise a great deal of my consciousness. So that probably seeps into how I meet characters on the page, understanding them, too, through *their* places, kind of like learning an individual geography of the soul.

Q: In *A Man Came Out of A Door in the Mountain*, you make use of music, particularly that of Leonard Cohen. What about his music affected you?

A: Leonard Cohen tells the truth. Full stop. Like Leo's physics teacher, Leila Chen, I admire him immensely. One feels so honored to be told the truth.

Q: Uncle Lud tells Leo folk tales about the devil as a way to guide him. Why does Uncle Lud use folk tales to instruct rather than a more direct approach? Why are the folk tales Uncle Lud tells not from his own heritage?

A: Stories affect us more viscerally than either advice or instruction can. We enter into a story. We can't help ourselves, and as we do, the world as we know it is reconfigured. Our vision widens, and with luck our perceptions grow more acute and true. The fairy tale or folktale form is an ancient one we all recognize, and I think the structure alone has a familiar resonance that calls to us. To be clear, the stories Uncle Lud tells aren't exactly folktales or derived from any real Native legends. They are his own entirely, tales he's half-heard or intuited or conjured. But I hope they share a consciousness

with traditional tales in that, like them, Uncle Lud's stories make visible an unspoken world and lay bare unseen but crucial connections. The stories *are* part of him, of his true heritage, then, and of Leo's and mine and yours, too.

Q: You use Uncle Lud's stories in the novel as a way to advance your own, and your novel reads like a folk tale in some ways. What about this form intrigues you?

A: We survive by the stories we tell. We thrive or fail by the stories we believe. The folktale, the fairy tale, the anecdote, the joke – oh, man, how I love that moment when someone pauses and says, “Well...let me tell you a story,” and we settle in to learn more, not just about a situation, but about the character with whom we're spending a little time. And *listen*. Notice how the stories that hit us hardest become layered and surprising, with no one clear line drawn between a beginning and an end, and lots of places where we too can enter and imagine ourselves in the world of the story.

This novel's trajectory unfolds in a complicated dance. All kinds of stories appear and intertwine. There's the main narrative of Leo and his friends and there are Uncle Lud's tales. Another kind of interlude enters the story at some point, as well: as the action deepens, the devil's own tales (which become a little boastful, I'm afraid) invade the tales Lud's been passing on and begin to act as kind of a shadow narrative for the larger story. I like this. It feels true to me. The devil's not going away, and in the end, he will claim his own story, if not yours, too.

Q: In the same way you put your characters between worlds, your novel sits between genres. Your novel is described as part literary novel, part thriller, part fairy tale. Why did you mix genres? How would you classify your novel?

A: As a writer who adores playing with language, I'm often happier messing around with sentences and wallowing around in a character's thoughts than worrying about pacing and suspense. As a reader, I want it all: language, rhythms, charging events, multilayered imperfect characters, and plots I can't see coming a mile away. This story meant a great deal to me, and I wanted readers to engage on as many levels as possible and to feel the rush and worry that erupts for Leo and turn pages faster and faster. I also hoped for magic, a sense of otherworldliness that might cause the reader to feel a contrary desire, one that might compel the reader to slow down and enjoy language and image and the mysterious nature of the human character. I do like the description of the novel as a fairy tale thriller. It's wonderfully subversive and also seems the state of the world as I know and read about each day in the news: a place of wonder... and horror.

Q: This novel is in some ways about different kinds of communities—family, school, town, ethnic, a group of friends. The community of friends seems most important initially. In the end, though, family seems most important. Do you agree?

A: I'm not sure I do entirely agree. The friends *are* a kind of family. Sheesh, we're all a kind of family – or should be. Okay, maybe I do agree then, but only if the upshot is that the definition of family is widened so that our responsibility and concern touch more than those folks who look just like us and live just like us.

Q: You teach in two different MFA programs. How do you succeed in getting your own writing done? How does teaching influence your writing?

A: I am ridiculously lucky in that my responsibilities are almost wholly to my students. I don't have a department head to answer to daily or committees on which I must serve. And I have terrific students. I'm engaged by their work and their reading and our discussions, which always require me to be at the top of my game or try to be. Because of my students, too, I read work that I might not otherwise – novels or stories that might fascinate a student or enrich his or her work – and so I never fail to learn more about story-writing.

Q: You write short stories and published the critically acclaimed collection, THE KING OF LIMBO. Why did you decide to write a novel? Were there any challenges in going to the longer form?

A: I'm always writing or trying to write stories, and of course, like many writers I spent tortured years on a first novel that never did quite work. In retrospect, I can see that there was no good reason to write that earlier novel except...well...to *write a novel*, whereas it seems to me that stories begin in urgency or real curiosity and often with a character, too, who intrigues me madly. *This* novel clearly arrived with all those qualities, but if a story is a hard, charging spark, a novel seems a slow burn, and I'm still learning how to tell a longer story without too much meandering, without getting lost in each appealing spark. I will say that finding a voice for the story felt crucial to me. That became the guide, the leyline, that I hope keeps the novel on track.

Q: What's next?

A: I've finished another collection of stories, and I'm deep into a longer work (yup, a novel) about a young woman who explores abandoned places and becomes ensnared in the story of two soldiers from the Great War.