

Lone Women by Victor LaValle

Book club Monday 10/30/23 at 6 PM at Comstock Township Library

Discussion questions

- 1) Did you finish the book? What was your overall opinion of it?
- 2) Did you have any guesses about what might be inside Adelaide's trunk?
- 3) We meet Adelaide in a suspicious and compromising scene. Did you suspect that Adelaide might be the villain of this story?
- 4) Why do the children of this story – Adelaide, Sam, Delmus and Joab Mudge – keep their parents'/family secrets? What does it do to children to keep their parents' secrets? How do the characters decide to reveal the truth?
- 5) Adelaide misses the company of other Black people, particularly Black women (p. 67). When she meets Bertie, she feels profound relief (p. 104). Did it take a complete loss of community for Adelaide to understand how important that connection was? Although her family was isolated from other families, did she take her "old life" for granted?
- 6) How did the reactions of Glenville and Eleanor Henry, and of Jack and Jerrine Reed, towards their monstrous children shape their lives?
- 7) What do you think life was like for Elizabeth? What was reading her narration like? Why did she apparently forgive and then help Adelaide?
- 8) When the Reeds and their cohorts prepare the opera house stage for Bertie, Fiona, and Grace's executions, Mr. Reed announces, " 'For the sake of our town...We are all Stranglers now,' "(251). Later, Adelaide thinks, "The twenty people in the audience had arrived in Montana and simply tried to survive. They should have protested when they saw three women being hung, but Adelaide didn't think they deserved quite the same treatment as the people

who were gathered on that stage. They would be spared,” (259). Why would the audience stand by and allow the murders to be committed?

9) *Lone Women* takes inspiration *The Dunwich Horror*, a story by notoriously racist and xenophobic author H.P. Lovecraft. Some of LaValle’s other books have been inspired by Lovecraft. Do you find value in retelling old stories with a modern lens – particularly stories with problematic and hurtful elements?

10) What did you think of the ending? In his acknowledgements, the author credits his wife for the outcome. Was it important for this story to have a positive ending?

Reviews and other resources

Benz, Chanelle. (2023). Victor LaValle's latest mixes horror with a history of the west. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/26/books/review/victor-lavalle-lone-women.html>

Schaub, Michael. (2023). Victor LaValle's novel 'Lone Women' is infused with dread and horror – and more. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2023/05/12/1175718334/the-changeling-author-victor-lavalle-new-novel-lone-women-book-review>

Scholz, Phoenix. (2023). Lone women by Victor LaValle. *Strange Horizons*. <http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/lone-women-by-victor-lavalle/#:~:text=Victor%20LaValle%20has%20done%20it,and%20also%20so%20much%20more>

Previous interviews focusing on another LaValle book *The Ballad of Black Tom*, a retelling of the H.P. Lovecraft story *The Horror at Red Hook*

24 minute author interview on *NPR*

Briger, Sam and LaValle, Victor. (2016). 'The Ballad of Black Tom' offers a tribute and critique of Lovecraft. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2016/02/29/468558238/the-ballad-of-black-tom-offers-a-tribute-and-critique-of-lovecraft>

M., Daryl. (2023). Interview with an author: Victor Lavalle. <https://www.lapl.org/collections-resources/blogs/lapl/interview-author-victor-lavalle>

Michel, Lincoln. (2016). Victor Lavalle's new novel is H.P. Lovecraft, without the horrific racism. *Vice*. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/exqw7w/victor-lavalles-new-novel-is-h-p-lovecraft-without-the-horrific-racism>

Schnelbach, Leah. (2017). Wrestling with tentacles: Cassandra Khaw and victor LaValle take on H.P. Lovecraft. *Tor.com*. <https://www.tor.com/2017/10/05/wrestling-with-tentacles-cassandra-khaw-and-victor-lavalle-take-on-h-p-lovecraft/>

Michel, Lincoln. (2016). Victor Lavalle's new novel is H.P. Lovecraft, without the horrific racism. *Vice*.
<https://www.vice.com/en/article/exqw7w/victor-lavalles-new-novel-is-h-p-lovecraft-without-the-horrific-racism>