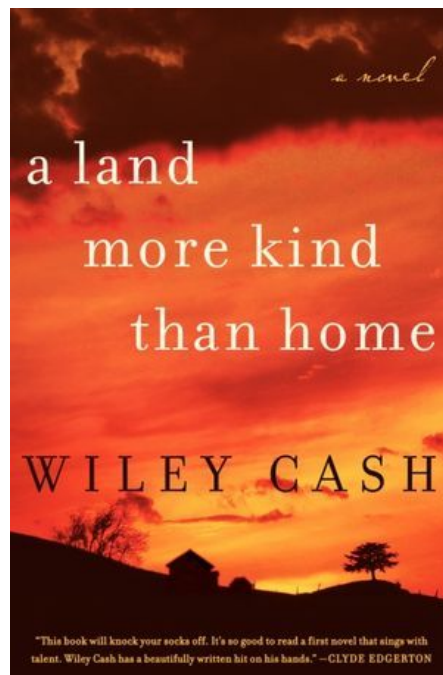




A Land More Kind Than Home

Wiley Cash

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A Land More Kind Than Home Wiley Cash

A stunning debut reminiscent of the beloved novels of John Hart and Tom Franklin, *A Land More Kind Than Home* is a mesmerizing literary thriller about the bond between two brothers and the evil they face in a small western North Carolina town.

For a curious boy like Jess Hall, growing up in Marshall means trouble when your mother catches you spying on grown-ups. Adventurous and precocious, Jess is enormously protective of his older brother, Christopher, a mute whom everyone calls Stump. Though their mother has warned them not to snoop, Stump can't help sneaking a look at something he's not supposed to - an act that will have catastrophic repercussions, shattering both his world and Jess's. It's a wrenching event that thrusts Jess into an adulthood for which he's not prepared. While there is much about the world that still confuses him, he now knows that a new understanding can bring not only a growing danger and evil - but also the possibility of freedom and deliverance as well.

Told by three resonant and evocative characters - Jess; Adelaide Lyle, the town midwife and moral conscience; and Clem Barefield, a sheriff with his own painful past - *A Land More Kind Than Home* is a haunting tale of courage in the face of cruelty and the power of love to overcome the darkness that lives in us all. These are masterful portrayals, written with assurance and truth, and they show us the extraordinary promise of this remarkable first novel.

A Land More Kind Than Home Details

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Author : Wiley Cash

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From Reader Review A Land More Kind Than Home for online ebook

Diane S ? says

My goodness but this book was fantastic! His use of local color and dialect, his descriptions, his use of the weather to ratchet up the tension, and all this from a first time author. The town midwife, Adelaide, who sees it as her job to protect the children, the sheriff, who has plenty of tragedy in his own life, and the two young boys, Jess, who is in third grade, and his older but mute brother, Christopher. When evil comes to their small Appalachian town in the form of itinerant preacher, Chambliss, events are set in motion that will leave few unscathed. Two boys would pay for their natural curiosity in a way that is out of all proportion to their misdeed. I knew this story drew me in when I found myself wanting to grab one of the characters and tell them not to do it. I felt the tension in the pit of my stomach, like the way one feels before the big drop on a roller coaster. Yet it ends in a note of hope and a looking forward to that I would not have thought possible. Absolutely gripping!

Annet says

Beautifully written book, debut of this writer, a real recommendation from my part. Yes, the book is a slow read, not really pacy story, but that did not bother me at all, all the more does the beauty of the story, the atmosphere and the writing come through. I loved the change of narrator and story line per chapter. And you really feel the tension and atmosphere drifting from the pages.

A Land More Kind than Home tells the story of the bond between two young brothers and the evil they face in a small North Carolina town. The novel is narrated by three characters, nine year old Jess, the youngest of the two boys and the lone witness to the tragedy that befalls his autistic brother Stump under an adult's hand; Adelaide Lyle, the church matriarch and moral conscience whose suspicion of a preacher drives her from the congregation; and Clem Barefield, a local sheriff with his own tragic past, who struggles to untangle the roots of the tragedy in a community that has been intimidated into silence..."They said he could perform miracles, heal the sick - like my brother Stump. After it happened, they said that sometimes miracles go wrong. They say it was God's will, and that's all there is to it. But I know what I saw... and it wasn't a miracle...

I hope this author publishes a new book soon!

Will Byrnes says

The title of the book is taken from Thomas Wolfe's *You Can't Go Home Again*, referring to death as how we "find a land more kind than home, more large than earth," so you have to expect some unpleasantness before we come to the end.

Evil arrives in garish togs. Carson Chambliss is a reverend of suspect provenance. He comes to town, takes over an unused church, papers over the windows and mesmerizes his congregation with some very old-time religion. He seems particularly taken with snakes, handling them, using them as a test of faith, and finding some other uses besides. He is a big believer in faith healing. A considerable scar has marred his hand and who know how far up the damage goes? No shades of gray here, CC is a baddie. He brings not only his somewhat charred history and odd passions, but real danger to some of the inhabitants of Madison, North

Carolina, a sleepy tobacco-growing town.

The story is told through the eyes of three narrators, Sheriff Clem Barefield, Adelaide Lysle and young Jess Hall. Jess is an ordinary kid, curious, energetic, but with a bit more on his shoulders than other ten or eleven year olds. His older brother Christopher, who everyone calls Stump, was born mute, autistic most likely, and Jess looks out for him. Stump and Jess do a bit of spying and see something they shouldn't, setting in motion a wildfire of deceit, violence and revenge that affects much of the town.

Sheriff Barefield, charged with trying to keep the peace in town, has some personal history that still haunts him and affects how he goes about his business.

Addie Lysle heroically acts as a guardian angel, trying to keep Chambliss from harming the town's children. She tells of her battles with evil, but how much protection can one woman provide?

Is this a tale of good versus evil? CC is definitely evil, no question. And Adelaide Lysle stands strongly for good, but there are diverse forces lined up against CC and most of them have chinks in their moral armor. Jess withholds critical information. Jess' father, Ben, has issues with anger and another kind of withholding. The sheriff allows his anger at old events get the better of him. The only real innocent here is Stump, but he is not really involved in the battle. Maybe this is more a case of human versus evil.

Can you ever go home again? I guess it depends on why you left and what remains there that might still retain a hold. Is location destiny? We are told of one man who burned his own home because he thought the devil lived there. No going home again for him. Maybe a home being on particularly high ground made its residents susceptible to tragedy living in a lowland, or in-town house would have avoided. Might it be that a childhood home rich in religion can make one feel that church is a home?

This is an impressive first novel. Cash has crafted engaging characters, a story that will keep you burning through the pages, and enough content to make the journey worth your time. Hopefully your home is a kind enough place in which to read this and you do not have to go looking for something kinder.

PS

Here is a piece by the author that is worth reading.

Brenda - Traveling Sister says

4.5 stars rounded up

A Land More Kind Than Home is a daring, haunting, and heartfelt story of courage and the bond between two brothers that left me lost and mesmerized in the all my heart and soul lush coulee. I settled in my grassy spot to read and soon I was checking the grass for the evil that I could feel slithering in, leaving me a little uncomfortable in my Coulee. The love and bond between Jess Hall and his brother soon had me moving into a safer grassy spot with my guard up for the evil hiding behind the face of what should be good and safe.

Wiley Cash creates the strongest narrators here for me with these complicated and troubled characters, allowing me to become completely engrossed in their stories. I loved the intensity, grit, and suspense to this one and Cash does a great job of showing me what his character's words wanted me to see. It left me with no

questions as to who to trust with this one, just the intense suspense to see how it all comes together in the end. I highly recommend!

For all my reviews featuring Wiley Cash please check out our Travelling Sister Blog
<https://twogirlslostinacouleereading....>

Florence (Lefty) MacIntosh says

A sinister thriller with all the elements you look for in southern gothic. Good versus evil, a tragic morality tale spiced with carnal sin and deceit, its focus the terrible cost to a community when blind faith and religious fervor is taken to the cult level. You've got the perfect villain in Carson Chambliss, a crooked snake lovin pastor, nastier than the rattlers he uses to test the devotion of his flock. Caught in his cross-hairs is poor 'Stump' Hall, a young mute boy who's only line of defense is a 10 yr. old - his kid brother Jess and a 70 yr. old named Adelaide Lyle. She's perfection as the *"came off the mountain"* town mid-wife, gutsy *"I drove back from that meeting with Chambliss as scared as I'd ever been in my entire life"*, simple but sharp enough to see right through Chambliss and hell-bent on protecting the children from him. Good thing because Stump's mother is nothing but a holy fool and his father while a good man, oblivious to the danger threatening his family. Throw in a mean drunk for a granddaddy and a town sheriff with his own demons to contend with... **Seriously, what more could you ask for!**

Wiley Cash's debut and it read's like it was written by a pro. A southern boy raised in an evangelical church, he's got the dialect, setting and characters down pat. *"You could tell that autumn was bearing down on us because the leaves on the trees atop the ridge were just starting to get notions of color."* His tension building is slow & relentless, pulled me into that backwoods little North Carolina town & held on right through to its inevitably tragic conclusion. **4 ½ stars**

Cons: Switching perspectives between 3 narrators (old Adelaide, sheriff Barefield & young Jess) Jess's was the weakest, the pacing suffered for it. In fairness 10 yr. olds can only hold my attention for so long. The telling by Adelaide & Sheriff Barefield more than made up for it. And no getting around it - the ending is overblown but hey, it felt appropriate and oddly satisfying.

Mark 16:17-18. "And these signs will follow those who believe: In my name they will cast out demons, they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will place their hands on the sick, and they will get well."

Perry says

Snakes on Montane

Right after reading this in June 2012, I wrote a long review, which I apparently deleted by accident.

I waver between 4 and 5 stars. I'd say 4.4. *A Land More Kind Than Home* was a powerful novel illustrating the constant conflict in the deep South (in so-called "fundamentalists") between the nature of humans as

Sinners and the hellfire, brimstone and eternal damnation of the soul for violating the strictures of the Word. A sex-related sin infringing on a marriage triggers nearly all the rest of the Seven Deadly. When the sin's primary procurer is a man who preaches the Word..., well it usually causes a tornado that harms or destroys many lives within a small community, not only the children whose parent was involved or child who was the victim, but the spouse, the parent, immediate family members, and the entire church community, many of whom come to see the church as their lives' moral center, which if rotten throws all into chaos.

Jimmy Swaggart

If I had not witnessed this happen several times in my life in the deep South (always from just outside the church [at the church of a best friend, an uncle, a first cousin]), maybe I wouldn't have been as impacted by this novel.

Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker

Wiley Cash is an excellent writer. This is a profoundly Southern story told from the point of view of a pre-teen boy looking back on his childhood and the evil side of religion, a Fall and the awful damage done.

Ted Haggard

Jennifer says

People out in these parts can take hold of religion like it's a drug, and they don't want to give it up once they've got hold of it. It's like it feeds them, and when they're on it they're likely to do anything these little backwoods churches tell them to do. Then they'll turn right around and kill each other over that faith, throw out their kids, cheat on husbands and wives, break up families just as quick. I don't know exactly how long Carson Chambliss had been living in Madison County the first time I ever ran up against him. And I'm not saying this fanaticism started with him, because I know it didn't. That kind of belief has been up here a long time before I arrived on this earth, and it's my guess it'll still be around for a long time after I'm gone. But I've seen his work firsthand, and I still can't put my finger on what it is and why it affect folks like it does."

Mr. Cash, please tell me you are already working on another book.

I was first introduced to Wiley Cash last fall when my GR friend Angela M chose *This Dark Road to Mercy* as the monthly pick for a group read. I loved the characters and story development in that book, and this one is amazing too.

In "Home" Cash sets a dark tale in lightly populated rural North Carolina mountain village. The story is told through the eyes of three narrators -- the town midwife, the sheriff, and a 9 year old boy.

The essence of the book is about the danger of religious fanaticism. This setting is North Carolina, but the parallels to other situations -- across the country and across the world -- are not hard to see. The book succeeds due to the depth of the characters, terrific pacing, and Cash's storytelling prowess.

5 stars.

Shelby *trains flying monkeys* says

You know that feeling of a chill going up your spine when you are reading a really good book? That's what this story was to me.

Now don't get me wrong..this book is dark fiction. Not all fairy tales and happy endings.

This story is told from three points of view but it's not confusing when the view points switch. The one that tore my heart out was 8 year old Jess. The other two viewpoints are from the sheriff who has suffered his share of loss and an elderly woman who has seen bad in men before.

You've got a church that keeps yellowed paper over the windows so that people can't see in from the outside. Snake handling, poison drinking and hard healing is what's going on inside that place. This bad guy was truly scary. It's easy to see that someone like him would have followers. His story is just pure evil. Can I just punch him for the hell of it?

Then I noticed at the end of the book that this is author Wiley Cash's first book?! What the heck! This writing flows like smooth sweet chocolate. You see everything he is writing and feel all the emotions of his characters.

Rebbie says

Wiley Cash is a master storyteller, and this book is indeed evidence of that.

It would be all too easy to give away spoilers by accident, so I'll just say that this book is deep, complex and thought-provoking. It's about something that most books don't talk about, which is how easy it is to manipulate someone, even to the point where they override their own parental instincts and put their loved ones in imminent danger.

It's written from the pov of a 13 year-old boy, a devout Christian woman in her 50s and an older male sheriff. Wiley Cash did a phenomenal job developing all 3 characters and making them sound realistic, sometimes frightfully so.

I can't wait to read more of Wiley Cash, as he's quickly becoming one of my all-time favorite writers.

Tooter says

So sad and touching but wonderfully written.

karen says

You show me a woman who calls herself a Christian up in these parts, and I'll show you a woman who knows how to heal. It ain't un-Christian to make do when you're poor, I can promise you that. You just show me a Christian woman up here, and I'll show you a woman who knows what to pick and where to find it. If you don't know how to heal yourself, then you don't know how to live when times are hard.

ahhhh, another "salt of the earth," "take care of your own business" kind of book.

and another great one, at that.

this definitely reminds me of that tom franklin brand of crime fiction, but this one is somehow even more grim than Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter.

in the best way, of course.

here we have a story of a preacher come to a small town in north carolina with a past full of sins and a hankering to form his own little cult of snake-handlers and affliction-healers; covering up the church windows with newspaper and ostensibly leading his congregation on the path to glory, speaking in tongues and laying on of hands.

except, sometimes, behind those newspaper-covered windows, people will die.

including a teenaged boy; mute and somewhere on the autism spectrum, who has seen something he just shouldn't have seen, and will be healed so hard he will end up dead.

the story is told through the narration of three characters; the brother of the deceased boy, the sheriff of madison county, and the elderly adelaide lyle, who knows what the preacher is, but is powerless against him. she has managed one small victory in taking the children out of the church and schooling them herself every week, but that is a small victory, and cold comfort when christopher/"stump" dies in that very church.

the most powerful element of this story is the transformation of the family after stump dies, particularly stump and jess' father's transformation. this is deep, heartbreaking stuff here.

it is a story of powerlessness, and the way that we rarely have the opportunity to do the right thing - because of lack of knowledge, or courage, or proof. it is about small-town clannishness, and old grudges, and the difficulties of seeing the big picture in the midst of a crisis.

eventually, it is about healing. but the healing comes at a great price, and leaves a permanent hurt.

definitely worth reading. and if penguin UK weren't so stingy, i would be reading his new one through netgalley right now.

dammit.

Jennifer Masterson says

Jess Hall broke my heart into ten million tiny little pieces!

"A Land More Kind Than Home" is a beautifully written novel by Wiley Cash. It is unbelievably good, especially for a debut. This story had me hooked right away and never let go. I have a feeling little Jess will stay with me for a long time.

Set in a small Southern town it's a dark story about the power and corruption that religion can cause. Carson Chambliss is an evil preacher who comes to this town and boy is he a disgusting, vile piece of scum. I don't want to give too much away. What I will say is Cash uses three different narrators to tell the story which centers around a death. The three narrators bring to light secrets from the past in this small town in North Carolina. The story was told so vividly that I felt like I was actually there! I couldn't read the last 100 pages fast enough!

Highly recommend!

Lawyer says

A Land More Kind Than Home: The Debut Novel of Wiley Cash

Wiley Cash

Wiley Cash takes his title from the final lines of *You Can't Go Home Again* by Thomas Wolfe. The epigraph Cash chose sets the tone of the work that follows.

Something has spoken to me in the night...and told me I shall die. I know not where. Saying:

"[Death is] to lose the earth yo know, for greater knowing; to lose the life you have, for greater life; to leave the friends you loved, for greater loving; to find a land more kind than home, more large than earth."

Cash skilfully spins his tale through three distinct points of view: Adelaide Lyle, an elderly lady who provides the history and background of the story, serving as moral conscience of the story; nine year old Jess Hall, the portrait of innocence lost; and Clem Barefield, sheriff of Madison County, North Carolina for twenty-five years. First taking office in 1961, Barefield sets the events in the story in 1986.

Madison County is as far west in North Carolina as you can get, butting against the border of Tennessee. Marshall is the County seat. A patchwork of deep wooded valleys and steep mountains, tobacco farmers in the western region of the state produce burley tobacco on farms hewed out of land more reminiscent of a network of roller coasters than agriculture.

Marshall, NC, County Seat of Madison County

Folks in the Appalachians are God fearing. Passing through, if the Spirit moves you, you won't have a problem finding a church. But I'd recommend steering clear of churches in old grocery stores and gas stations, especially if the name of the church ends in the words "in Signs Following." Folks put their faith on exhibition by handling serpents, drinking strychnine, and handling fire to see if it'll burn'em.

Inside a Church of Christ With Signs Following

Adelaide Lyle

Now, you take the church in this book. It didn't start out that way. Once upon a time it was the French Broad Church of Christ in a real church with pews and a steeple, headed up by Pastor Matthews. But the cancer got him back in 75. Then along comes this fellow from out of nowhere, name of Carson Chambliss.

It didn't take long for about half the congregation to up and leave when Chambliss took over pastoring. Without half the congregation, the bank took the church and sold it to the Presbyterians. That was fine with Chambliss who moved the church down to the old grocery store and papered the windows so nobody passing by could see what was going on inside that building.

Chambliss put up a sign by the road at the edge of the parking lot and changed the name to River Road Church of Christ in Signs Following. Now, you remember what I told you about those churches ending their name in Signs Following. Underneath the name of the church he painted Mark 16: 17-18. That's those verses that say you got faith you can pick up serpents, drink poison, and the Holy Ghost will keep you safe.

"I'd seen people I'd known just about my whole life pick up snakes and drink poison, hold fire up to their faces just to see if it would burn them. Holy people, too...that hadn't ever acted like that a day in their lives. But Chambliss convinced them it was safe to challenge the will of God."

Jess Hall

I'm nine and my brother is eleven. His name is Christopher but everybody calls him Stump. He's never said a word. He's bigger than me but I'm the leader. We live with Mama and Daddy. Daddy grows tobacco. When he hangs it in the barn and it dries out it smells so good.

Stump and I get in trouble with Mama when we snoop. There's things we shouldn't know about. One day Stump and me were outside and heard the noises Mama and Daddy make sometimes when we're told to go outside and play. Stump climbed up on the rain barrel but it wasn't Daddy in there making those noises. I saw Mama's preacher leave the house and he looked at me and Stump. I didn't tell Daddy about the noises.

On Sunday Mama went down to the church like she always does. Daddy doesn't go. Instead of leaving us at Sunday School with Miss Adelaide, Mama took Stump with her. I wanted to go, but she wouldn't let me. Only Stump. She took him to night church, too. I don't know what happened. But Stump died. Daddy got so mad at the men from church that brought Stump home he hit them and hit them.

Clem Barefield

Twenty five years next month. That's how long I've been Sheriff here in Madison County. My grandfather was Sheriff over in Henderson County. And my father farmed apples there. Hendersonville, Flat Rock, they're little more than an hour away, but living here is as close to living in a different world as you can get, no matter how old you get.

People here are different. They're superstitious. Know the old mountain ways. Religion is so thick in the hills and hollers up here you can stir it with a stick. But I haven't had a reason to set foot inside a church in more years than I can count, especially after my son Jeff died. It's not natural for a man to outlive his son. Jeff and

Ben Hall were friends, good friends. Ben settled down, married, became a good farmer, a good provider.

There's calls you get that don't amount to nothin'. Then there's those you get you can't forget. My wife Sheila handed me the phone and it was Robby, my Deputy, telling me Ben Hall's boy Stump was laying dead up at Adelaide Lyle's house. Killed in that damned church over on River Road.

Sheila told me not to let things get out of hand. There's some times though you can't keep from gettin' out of hand. Specially when that damned crazy preacher Chambliss is at the bottom of things. How the Hell does a boy get killed in a church? Why in the Hell do you kill a child who is incapable of speaking a word?

The Reviewer

Wiley Cash can write. He can tell a story. Cash began *A Land Before Time* while a graduate student in Louisiana. His mentor, as he worked on his dissertation, was Ernest Gaines. What an opportunity!

Ernest Gaines--I love me some Ernest Gaines' Books

Everyone seems to love this book. Cash is one of the new darlings of the publishing world. His interview with Vanity Fair is entitled "Author Wiley Cash on Being the "Justin Timberlake of American Literature."
<http://www.vanityfair.com/online/dail...>

The dust jacket gleams with blurbs to the point you'd think this book came wrapped in stars. Clyde Edgerton said it would knock your socks off. Gail Godwin said it was like stepping into a Greek tragedy. Ernest Gaines' blurb is a little bit more interesting. Although it begins with a glow it dims to a weak glimmer. "I think this could be the beginning of a long fruitful career."

In an interview with Brad Wetherell in Fiction Writers Review Cash said he got the basic idea of his plot from a newspaper clipping about a young autistic boy being smothered during a healing ceremony in a storefront church in Chicago. Cash wanted to move it South to North Carolina.
<http://fictionwritersreview.com/inter...>

I wish I could love this book as many reviewers and readers seem to. However, as well as Cash can cause the reader to keep turning the pages, he leaves some mighty big gaps in his story.

How was Chambliss chosen as the new minister at the ill-fated church? How did Chambliss manage to convert a Church of Christ into an unquestioning foot stompin', snake handlin' strychnine drinkin' fire handlin' bunch with such ease?

Sure, this is a work of fiction. But even writers of fiction might do a little research about an area in which so much documentation exists, such as the Holiness Church movement. Bottom line, there are few converts to serpent handling. These churches, found up through Appalachia, consist of small congregations which include descendants of the original founding members. They don't grow into practicing churches overnight. Cash should read *Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia* by Dennis Covington.

Cash is being touted as the next Tom Franklin. Sorry. Franklin never left so many gaps in a story. I think Ernest Gaines is right. This book could be the beginning of a fruitful career. Or it could turn into a series of incredulous stories. The choice is Cash's.

I wouldn't discourage anyone from reading this book. I rate it a 4 for the prose, a 3 for the plot with an overall 3.5. Hallelujah!

UPDATE: Chosen as a group read by members of *On the Southern Literary Trail* for August, 2013.

<http://www.goodreads.com/group/show/6...>

Trudi says

This book has everything I love -- a Southern setting, secrets, family tragedy, religious zealotry run amok, and strong narrative voices. If I had read it, it would have been an easy four stars. But because I *listened* to it, and the audio version is one of the best I've ever heard, it's getting five stars.

This is a debut novel -- is it flawless? No. But you know what? I didn't care. I don't think you will either. I got so swept up and carried away by the story I was being told I was living it. I was *right there* in that small town watching it all go down with a flutter of anxiety in my stomach, and a lump of sadness in my throat.

What really made me love this story as an audiobook is that we have three narrators read by three different readers-- 1) Jess Hall, a precocious nine year old who has a penchant for spying and will eventually see something he wishes he hadn't that will change his life and the life of his town forever 2) Adelaide Lyle, a feisty old woman who has born witness to much of the town's history and dark secrets and 3) Clem Barefield, seasoned Sheriff with a painful past who must confront the evil that has taken hold of his town like a cancer.

Getting the story from these three very distinct voices and points of view is fantastic. It makes what is essentially a simple and straight forward story feel richer, more layered and emotional. I loved the reader for the Sheriff. What a fantastic performance. That voice married to the author's prose is a match made in heaven. In the best ways it reminded me of Tommy Lee Jones's performance in *No Country for Old Men*.

A Land More Kind Than Home is set deep in the heart of snake-handling country where you better hope that when the preacher arrives in town, he ain't the devil in disguise.

Read this book -- and if you do the audio thing -- *listen*. You won't be able to stop, I promise.

And since I have a thing for book trailers, this one does a great job of capturing the edgy, southern Gothic mood of this novel that's so portent with revelation, betrayals, and tragedy.

This review can also be found at [Busty Book Bimbo](#).

Dana says

How could I not have known Wiley Cash existed until a few months ago? *A Land More Kind Than Home* takes place in Madison County where my dad was born! My dad died in an automobile accident when I was young, so most of my memories of Madison County go back to before I turned 12 years old, but I was immediately transported back to those country roads and the tobacco farm he grew up on, the minute I started reading this book.

I savored every page of Cash's lyrical storytelling. He did an excellent job capturing the local color of the Appalachian people. It brought back so many memories for me. My sister and I would spend a week with my grandparents in the summer on their farm in Madison County. All people in that area aren't like the characters in this book (my dad and grandparents certainly were not), but so, so many are! We were always

told not to wander too far off into the woods or beyond their house because there were some "really mean and crazy people" in that area, so we were always a little scared. I loved hearing them tell stories about the people in that area and wondered how much was true. The stories and characters in this book resembled those tales so much! After my grandmother died, my grandfather remarried and moved and left the tobacco farm to my sister and I. They had leased it to a farmer and we continued to do so until we sold it back in the early 90s. I was filled with nostalgia reading about the farms and land in this book.

My mother told me that my dad had talked, many times, about the religious fanaticism in that area and said the lines I read to her from the book sounded so familiar to stories he had told her. He had known people who handled snakes and did the sorts of things Cash writes about, all in the name of God...which is the foundation of this book.

Cash writes:

"I'd seen people I'd known just about my whole life pick up snakes and drink poison... Holy people too. God-fearing folks that hadn't ever acted like that a day in their lives. But Chambliss convinced them it was safe to challenge the will of God. He made them think it was all right to take that dare if they believed."

"People out in these parts can take hold of religion like it's a drug, and they don't want to give it up once they've got hold of it. It's like it feeds them...they'll turn right around and kill each other over that faith, throw out their kids, cheat on husband and wives, break up families just as quick."

This is an unforgettable southern ballad of good and evil. I can't stop thinking about these people. I will be talking about this book to everyone I know. Thanks to GR friend Jennifer for introducing me to Wiley Cash! I am moving on to *This Dark Road to Mercy* - my first audiobook!

Margitte says

"and I can tell you God makes us how he needs us to be."

? Wiley Cash, *A Land More Kind Than Home*

What was there to do for Clem Barefield, the sheriff for twenty-five years of Marshville, in Madison County, with pastor Carson Chambliss, who ran his church like he was Jesus Christ himself, had a following that would believe in his message to their deaths, and a church with windows covered in newspapers, and his idea of religion that was like a drug to these souls. *"People out in these parts can take hold of religion like it's a drug, and they don't want to give it up once they're on it they're likely to do anything these little backwoods churches tell them to do."* - like drinking poison, handling snakes and fire.

Clem Barefield: *"Well, I got a dead boy who never said a word in his life, a mama who don't want to say one now, a preacher who's more interested in saving my soul than telling me the truth, and an old woman who's too scared of him to say hardly anything at all. I know it sounds like I got a lot, but when you take a hard look at it it don't amount to much more than jack shit, if it even amounts to that."*

Adelaide Lyle, the fiery old matriarch of the church, the midwife who brought most of the members into the world, the spiritual conscience of the town, had the history of the church and town to share, when a little boy dies during a church service. She was country; she was tough; she was sweet, and nurturing.

Nine-year-old Jess Hall, second son of Ben and Julie Hall, was the keeper of his older brother Stump, the mute friend and soulmate, in a time when silence was more important to his dad, and the church the voice of

reason for his mother. Jess and Stump explored the mysteries of the world, but discovered one mystery too many that left young Jess with a guilty secret.

Sheriff Clem Barefield, the outsider, the rational voice of the law, had to defy the laws of God and the self-anointed presenter on earth, Carson Chambliss, to get to the facts. For in religion and stories, there is always a deeper truth disguised behind the lies. The problem was how to determine what was lies and what was truth. And what to do when his own road of life crossed intimately with some members of the community.

MY COMMENTS

A literary thriller; southern-*noir*; southern gothic; grit litt. In the rhythmic dialect of the Souths (because the dialects differ from region to region, resulting in more than one south) a tale of hope of deliverance and salvation, and the power of forgiveness enfolds in the mountains of North Carolina.

I was so immediately invested in this story, making it my own, since it reminded me of one of the most profound books I have ever read in this genre:

The Night of the Hunter by Davis Grubb.
<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

Both books not only knocked my socks off, it also ripped my heart out.

THE ELEMENTS IN THE BOOK

There are three protagonists who represent a true portrayal of the community. They provide a well rounded, multi-perspective-angle to this story:

- 1) the emotional element through Jess, the young innocent boy;
- 2) the spiritual balance through Adelaide Lyle;
- 3) and the voice of reason through sheriff Clem Barefield.

Through their eyes, introducing the history, customs and complexity of all the characters, a tale of love and sorrow is told with a fine balance between the lighter and darker components in the book. More dark than light.

A Land More Kind Than Home is an atmospheric lyrical and literary thriller which deserves all the accolades it received as a bestseller.

MY REACTIONS:

I made war with Julie; I wanted to confront the author- man! how I wanted to drive Wiley Cash off the dang bridge! I was shocked and sad; emotionally spent; but in the end I was so grateful for the author's brilliant storytelling and mastery with words.

What an unbelievable journey this book has been. How can I ever forget it! Like *The Night of the Hunter* this book lands up on my All-Time Favorite shelf.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!!!

PS. A 1967 documentary called *The Holy Ghost People* about the religious handling of snakes and drinking poison in some American churches, can be viewed here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIUDY...>

Paula Kalin says

I just can't read a book about a preacher that is a snake charmer. Way too much for me. So I'm not giving this book a rating. Tried to get back to it twice, but couldn't make it through.

Update:

This author is very well liked by Goodreads friends. I do have his The Last Ballad to read that I got on a Kindle deal. I do want to give this author another chance.

I am a definite fan of Southern lit (Franklin, Hart, Joy, and Smith).

🌸Julie says

This was an absolutely gripping novel that drew me in instantly with its simple yet addictive writing style. I loved the southern setting, the unforgettable characters, the intricate details, and vivid imagery that made me feel like I was right there. It was a mesmerizing story, quietly told in three distinct voices, but was **not** for the faint of heart. There were times it was difficult to read and I found myself holding my breath at its intensity, but also there were some beautiful passages on hope and healing. My heart completely broke for the character Jess, and all that he endured at such a young age. As secrets in this small town were revealed and the story evolved it became haunting, and I could not turn the pages fast enough. I appreciated this story even more after reading the author's notes at the back of the book on what inspired him to write this story and how he derived its title. I had never heard of this author until seeing a goodreads friend post it recently with a high rating, but I am so glad I read it and I look forward to reading more from this author.

Angela M says

I am surprised how quickly I was drawn into this book . I didn't want to read it at first because I thought it might be a bit too dark for me and I wasn't sure if I really wanted to read a story about religious fanaticism . I'm glad I did read it in spite of the fact that this book was gut wrenching and tragic and dark and it made me just about hold my breath waiting for the inevitable to happen.

I know it may sound odd to say that this is a "readable" book but it really is . From the first word there is no going back , only forward - it is so gripping. There are multiple story tellers . Jess Hall's focus is on the present lending us a 9 year old's view of this world in a small town in North Carolina defined by tobacco farming and religion. I was heartbroken for what he endures and was moved to tears as he tells about his relationship with his mute brother Stump and how he has to deal with things that he just can't understand. Through Adelaide Lyle , who has delivered many of the children and their parents and Clem Barefield , the sheriff, who carries his own personal loss and sorrow , we come to know about the pasts of Ben and Julia Hall, Jess and Stump's parents and Carson Chambliss, the minister who is the personification of evil .

It's eerie and dark and sad , yet beautifully written. While there is a feeling of hope and redemption in the end - I couldn't help but ask - at what cost ? I can't imagine that I will forget about this book any time soon . I was left with the thought that Wiley Cash was born to write.

Zoeytron says

What the mute boy sees is unspeakable; what goes on behind the covered windows in that church is unforgivable.

How many times have we been told that life isn't fair? *'I've learned to just go ahead and take fairness out of the equation. If you do, things stand the chance of making a whole lot more sense.'* Wise words from Sheriff Clem Barefield, Madison County, North Carolina.

Addie Lyle, 81 years old and is as sharp as a tack. She sees right through the viperous Carson Chambliss, preacher of the local church. His stock in trade includes the handling of poisonous snakes and faith healing, lording it over anyone who is not a "true believer".

The relationship between young brothers Jess and Stump seemed spot on. My heart went out to the both of them. I thoroughly enjoyed this story and the characters. A very fine debut novel.
