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Lie Down in Darkness Details

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From Reader Review Lie Down in Darkness for online ebook

Clint says

This was my first time reading Styron and I fell in love. The story of the Loftis family consumes you... I had a hard time putting this novel down. I enjoyed delving into the minds of the different characters, trying to identify with and understand their troubles and experiences. I look forward to reading more of Styron's novels. I would definitely recommend this book to a specific crowd - although I can't quite put my finger on it - but it isn't meant for everyone.

Albert says

Sometimes three stars means a novel was a good experience. Sometimes it means there was great and not great mixed together. I have previously read Styron's The Confessions of Nat Turner and Sophie's Choice. Neither was an easy read, but they were remarkable and memorable, and in many ways, enjoyable. Reading Lie Down in Darkness was a painful experience. The writing itself was quite beautiful. The structure of the novel was unique and worked to support the story. It is very hard to imagine this a first novel. The craft seems so advanced. To love a novel I need something more than story. But I still need a story that grabs me. I don't have to like the characters, but I need to feel something about them. The story of Loftis, Helen and Peyton is foretold in the first few pages of the novel. There was no story to be told. Only explanations. I didn't like the characters or strongly dislike them. I felt sorry for them, but mostly I didn't care. I looked at a piece of art, was amazed at the abilities of the artist but didn't enjoy the art.

Camie says

The story of possibly the most dysfunctional family ever, Milton Loftis a womanizing creepy guy who lusts after his own daughter Peyton... and Helen, the mother who loathes her because of it, and ends up doting over Maudie the other "crippled" daughter. William Styron won the Pulitzer Prize for his later book The Confessions Of Nat Turner, the story of a rebellious slave and was probably most famous for another book Sophie's Choice which became an award winning movie, and his writing here will make you feel literary, as it has the structure of an old classic. But beware, this particular book is depressing, a serious downer. In fact, Lie Down In Darkness is a perfect title for it, though Lie Down And Wallow In Darkness may have been even better. The characters here are well fleshed out, but there is certainly not anyone here you would care to know. Quite frankly, I was entirely grateful NOT to be able to connect with a single one of this severely damaged lot, lol !!

A catch up for On The Southern Literary Trail - 3 stars

Lobstergirl says

As *Lie Down in Darkness* opens we are near the end of the story chronologically: it's 1945, the younger Loftis daughter, Peyton, has committed suicide, and several of those close to her are awaiting the train that bears her casket south to Tidewater Virginia. From that point we travel back and forth in time to watch the disintegration of the Loftis family as told from several points of view: first Milton, the alcoholic father, then Helen, the inadequate and punishing mother, and finally Peyton, the carefree, spoiled, and ultimately probably mentally ill daughter.

Every character is horribly damaged goods, in every conceivable way - the damage both self-inflicted and inflicted by others. Some people like these dark, perfervid, passionate, morbid, Southern gothic stories. I'm not one of these people. What rescues this from being a book I would really dislike is some lovely writing - maybe one-third of the book could be described this way. Styron does physical description really well, and if more of the novel had been like this I would have enjoyed it more:

Halfway between the railroad station and Port Warwick proper - a distance altogether of two miles - the marshland, petering out in disconsolate, solitary clumps of cattails, yields gradually to higher ground. Here, bordering on the road, an unsightly growth of weeds takes over, brambles and briars of an uncertain dirty hue which, as if with terrible exertion, have struggled through the clay to flourish now in stunted gray profusion, bending and shaking in the wind. The area adjacent to this stretch of weeds is bleakly municipal in appearance: it can be seen from the road, and in fact the road eventually curves and runs through it. Here there are great mounds of garbage; a sweet, vegetable odor rises perpetually on the air and one can see - from the distance faintly iridescent - whole swarms of carnivorous flies blackening the garbage and maybe a couple of proprietary rats, propped erect like squirrels, and blinking sluggishly, with mild, infected eyes, at some horror-stricken Northern tourist.

It's impossible to endorse a daughter calling her father "Bunny" - but passages like this help ease the reader's discomfort:

There were wide barren fields now, a patch of river to the south, the Rappahannock; this was territory that they knew, where one lane, one house or barn, gliding soundlessly past the car's vaultlike silence, only announced another house or lane or barn a few yards farther on, each more familiar as they drew closer to home. This was the Northern Neck, a land of prim pastoral fences, virgin timber, grazing sheep and Anglo-Saxons: these, the last, spoke in slumbrous Elizabethan accents, rose at dawn, went to bed at dusk, and maintained, with Calvinist passion, their traditional intolerance of evil. Most were Presbyterians and Baptists, many were Episcopalians, and all prayed and hunted quail with equal fervor and died healthily of heart failure at an advanced age; destiny had given them a peaceful and unvanquished lang to live in, free of railroads and big-city ways and the meretricious lures of the flesh, and when they died they died, for the most part, in contentment, shriven of their moderate, parochial sins. They were bounded by two rivers and the sky, and were as chary of the hinterland as of the deepest heart of Africa. A sturdy and honest curiosity filled their minds, provided the objects of such were not exotic or from the North, and the smell of sea filled their days; exacting in all matters, moral but never harsh, they lived in harmony with nature and called themselves the last Americans.

Kristin says

This 1951 novel by William Styron won several literary awards. It is the tale of the dysfunctional Loftis family...their betrayals, infidelities, and disappointed love that ultimately results in the suicide of their daughter Peyton. The story is told as the family accompanies her body to the cemetery.

I really wanted to like this book...in fact I really wanted to LOVE this book. But I didn't. This book was recommended to me by my Uncle Steve. He LOVES it. So do lots of other people I know. I was surprised that I didn't. I usually love books of this genre. Dark Southern novels...quirky characters...psychological turmoil. It didn't happen for me with this book. I really wanted to feel something... anything for the characters...but I didn't. Maybe that was the point...all I felt was cold and remote like the relationships they had in the story. But in the end I want to "feel" something and I didn't.

The writing was excellent...the stream of conscious narrative in one part of the book...amazing. But all in all, it just didn't do it for me.

My rating: OK

Diane Barnes says

"She had wanted the future to be like a nice, long, congenial tea party, where everyone talked a little, danced a little and had polite manners. She had come to the party and it had been ghastly: everyone misbehaved and no one had a good time."

Well, welcome to the real world, where real life intrudes and the teacups go flying out the window.

I have spent the last 5 days inside the heads of crazy people, and it has left me a little addled myself. Styron's first novel is dark and brooding, a southern gothic tale about a Tidewater Virginia family bent on destroying itself. It was vaguely reminiscent of Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury" even including a sibling that was severely handicapped with a 3 year old mind. Love and hate are taken to extremes in this family, with tragic consequences. When the opening scenes are about the suicide of a 21 year old daughter, you know it's not going to end well. The Loftis family gets the award for dysfunctional family of the century.

But, man, can William Styron write. I may come back to this review later to add new thoughts, as I just finished and, like I said, am still a little addled. For now, I need to leave these people behind and attend a few of those above mentioned tea parties with the nice, congenial, polite participants.

Jim says

I read this first novel of William Styron about 30 years ago when I was in my 20's. I would have given it five stars back then. Now I give it four stars. The book is about an extremely dysfunctional Tidewater Virginia family with pretensions to "FFV" ("first families of Virginia"....the aristocracy of that state), and the tragic relationship between the alcoholic father, his very neurotic wife and their lovely, sensitive daughter, Peyton. When I first read it, I loved the highly dramatic and emotionally charged relationships between the main characters. Now I find all that somewhat overheated and adolescent in its excesses. Still, the book is very moving, the tragedy is searing and the final chapter, written in a James Joycean stream-of-consciousness style stays with you for a long time.

Betsy Lewis-moreno says

I think if I read this and a Richard Yates novel back to back I would throw myself off a tall building! Masterful prose and characters that draw you in and keep you reading although none are particularly sympathetic. Alcoholism, untreated mental illness - things go from bad to worse in the lives of each character and there's no hope for redemption. I read this after having read *Reading My Father* by Alexandra Styron. I had read *Sophie's Choice* years ago, but never this one, so wanted to know more about the book that launched Bill Styron's career. If his view of Virginia is anything close to the way he depicts it in the novel, there's no mystery about why he was not tempted to return very often. Not an easy read, but a memorable one.

Isaac Cooper says

Absolutely painful to read. Styron tries to go for your heart strings right at the start of the book, assuming you'll care about the divorced couple dealing with the suicide of their daughter, but nothing at all is done to make us care. The writing is heavy-handed, and feels incredibly – incredibly – forced. I'm being smacked over the head with misery and suffering, and I'm just not buying it: it doesn't feel real. *Lie Down in Darkness* does not feel real. It's fake, pseudo-tragic, and worst of all, overdone, too long.

I didn't get very far into the book at all, but it feels like I've gone through hundreds and hundreds of pages. Styron seems to have no interest in pacing the book, and will go back and forth in time, in and out of perspectives, all seemingly at random. His prose and descriptions are technically sound, yet fatally hollow, devoid of charm and life. I would recommend this only to readers who have trouble sleeping.

Zhi Xin Lee says

...yet so archetypical is this South with its cancerous religiosity, its exhausting need to put manners before morals, to negate all *ethos*-- Call it a *husk* of a culture.

The above quote summarises what I feel towards the South, and also why I, when I do not unwittingly borrow a book without knowing what it is about, try to avoid novels set in the South as much as possible. I was mistaken: it is not racism against African Americans that I prefer not to read about, excusing myself by saying "Once you've read one, you've read it all," knowing perfectly well that the same could be said about any other topic, trivially. No, I have pinpointed it down in the course of reading this novel: it is the South, with all its tight appearances its fakery its religion and all that sin and guilt and sin and guilt and the heat, the sun, there is always the sun, unrelenting, yellowed leaves and insistent bees, the worn-down tracks and stagnant puddles-- I *don't like* reading about the South.

And: the neuroticism! The obsessiveness! Whirling and whirling, oh I have been done wrong to, how I hate her, my daughter, a whore and a tramp, how I have saved my weak husband, how I *hate* all these men. This book fleshes finely how infectious this tight hold on madness is, spreading across the family, outside of the family to anyone who gives a damn about any of them. The helplessness of it, because our only tool is reason, and madness pays no heed to reason. Wings and drowning and time. Madness plays everything over and over, amplifies it until all you can focus on is one look, one act, whining about it again and again until I can't stand it, I keep reading and reading and spiral down the same corkscrew as the characters until I am half mad myself.

Three stars, despite the beautiful prose, the bubbling prose that goes on stream-of-consciously? Yes, purely because I can't take this neuroticism. I cannot fault it for its technique, nor its characterisation, nor its plot. This is fully me: I just can't take this bomb of a story with its run-on lines its endless time-stopped moments its drunken stupor-- tell me you can after reading 400 pages of descriptive prose, including 50 pages of ONE paragraph. You got me right. ONE PARAGRAPH.

-foams and dies-

I also forgot to mention how disturbing Milton's lust for his daughter is. I was very sure I was going to find that he raped her somewhere in there.

Dustin says

I actually read the e-book edition from Open Road Integrated Media. It includes some great supplemental material to shed some light on the life of Styron. Although this was a dark and depressing book, the writing was absolutely stunning. I really enjoyed the story and Styron's execution is brilliant, especially when you consider that he was 26 when it was published. Of course, I can't deny that I got a kick out of its Virginia setting and scenes at The University. It even ended up in New York for a bit, so the book really resonated with me. I flagged a bit at the end with the stream-of-consciousness and a closing scene I can only assume is fraught with symbolism. However, it did not tarnish my feeling for the book all too much, and I expect to read more Styron in the future.

Jackmccullough says

What an awful, awful family.

Lie Down in Darkness is William Styron's first novel. It provides an exhaustive (and exhausting) portrait of a

world-beating dysfunctional family. Milton Loftis, a middle-aged lawyer who has missed out on his youthful fantasies of parlaying his military background and law practice into a political career; Helen, his wife, who suffers from extreme, debilitating depression, and whose family money subsidizes Milton's inadequate legal practice; Peyton, their beautiful, smart, spoiled daughter; and Maudie, their physically and mentally handicapped younger daughter.

The novel starts and ends on the day Milton is driven to the train station to meet the coffin carrying Peyton, dead in her mid-twenties of an apparent suicide in New York City; Helen, who has always hated Peyton, doesn't come along, but he is accompanied by the family servant and his mistress. Throughout the ensuing 400 pages the author draws a believable but repellent portrait of the failures of this family and the way that Milt and Helen in particular make each other miserable.

Helen hates Peyton, who is Milton's favorite, and closes herself off to any positive relationship with either Milton or Peyton, devoting herself to the care of Maudie. Milton, partly in response to rejection by Helen, becomes an alcoholic and establishes a long-lasting affair with a woman, leading to her divorce and unrequited dependence on Milton. Peyton, meanwhile, exhibits an uncomfortably flirtatious relationship with her father, possibly implying some earlier sexual contact between them.

Although the novel is not primarily plot-driven, the author vividly portrays five pivotal days in the life of the Loftis family: a birthday party Milt throws for a teenaged Peyton at the country club, where he provides her with liquor while Peyton and her mother frankly express their hatred for each other; a trip Milton takes to Charlottesville to see Helen and the dying Maudie in the hospital in which he descends into drunkenness in an hours-long side trip to his old fraternity house and the UVA football game, which he rationalizes as an attempt to connect with Peyton to tell her of Maudie's condition; Peyton's wedding day, when Milton's theretofore successful resolve to lead a sober and responsible life falls apart; the last day of Peyton's life, fifty pages of stream of consciousness, reminiscent of the Benjy section of *The Sound and the Fury*, in which Peyton's first-person account veers between a reality-based narrative and her psychotic interior experiences; and the day of Peyton's burial, which opens and closes the novel.

Although the Peyton section is the only one told in the first person, Styron gives plenty of information to provide a good sense of the motivations, thoughts, and emotions of all the main characters. Milton, the alcoholic father, may be the most sympathetic because each time he starts to lose control of his drinking, seeing one drink slide into two, three, and then beyond counting, the reader keeps hoping he'll stop. The portrayal of Helen is unremittingly negative. Given Styron's later and well-known problems with depression one wonders whether his portrayal of Helen's depression comes from personal experience (he was writing this from ages 23-26), and why he couldn't muster a scintilla of sympathy for her.

In addition to these three main characters there are outside characters who are able to see this family for the disaster it is: Helen's ineffectual minister, on whom she develops an excessive dependence (it being easier to complain about her life than to do something about it); Peyton's Jewish husband; and the Black household servants, barely more than racist caricatures.

Although slightly over 400 pages, the paucity of true narrative action, the excess of description and inconsequential incidents, and the unremitting grimness of the life of this family made *Lie Down in Darkness* a burden to read pretty much from beginning to end. For this reason it is hard to recommend it, although readers who favor (hard to say "enjoy") novels based almost exclusively on the interior workings of their characters are likely to find this rewarding.

Finally there's an interesting side note. In the last couple of years the novel has been optioned for a movie

and is said to be "in development". There's been a quite public rivalry between two prominent young actresses for the Peyton role, and they could hardly be more different: Kristen Stewart, whose main acting skill appears to be her ability to maintain an unchanged facial expression regardless of the situation and emotions her characters are faced with; and Jennifer Lawrence, who has already shown herself to be a gifted and versatile actor. You can understand why either one of them would want the part, but it's hard to understand why a director with the chance to cast Lawrence would ever choose Stewart.

Mike says

William Styron's first novel (at 25) is my favorite, as much as I value what came later. Peyton Loftis is a haunting figure, lusted after by her father, hated by her mother, and thus, probably doomed from early on. But we get to see the fall. There's nothing melodramatic about any of it. Words like 'searing' and 'shattering' come to mind when I think of the overall impact of this book.

Anna says

What a dark and strange novel this is. Told in fierce omniscient narration, *Lie Down in Darkness* is the story of a Southern family struck through with envy, vengeance, sorrow, and bitterness. It is a family marked, even years before it occurs, by the suicide of one of the young Loftis daughters in the humid days after the United States dropped atomic bombs. The novel opens out as it brushes against the African-American spiritual followers of a man who calls himself Daddy Faith; Jewish artists and intellectuals in New York City; a wrenching World War; and, growling underneath the surface, the struggle between guilt and pride in the South.

William Styron's debut novel was published to great acclaim in 1951 and won the Prix de Rome by the American Academy in Rome. I am not the first to be startled that William Styron was a mere 26-years-old when he published this book. Despite his years, he doesn't hesitate to claim a strong storytelling voice, to take a stance. This is a hero-less novel of judgments, and the narrator is not an exception.

Zoom in on Port Warwick, Virginia. Here is Milton Loftis, an alcoholic lawyer in his early 50s who once had political ambitions. Here is his wife, Helen, who brought the money to the family. Here are their two daughters: Maudie, a mentally-impaired cripple who dies over a horrid weekend in Charlottesville when she's about twenty; and Peyton, beautiful and intelligent and doomed. Maudie is Helen's favorite; Milton rather forgets she's around. Peyton is the target of Helen's powerful loathing and Milton's discomfiting affection ... if it best can be called that. Helen and Milton have an awful marriage, marked by fear and bitterness; it's a relationship that reminds me of W. Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*. Milton finds solace, for a time, in his longtime mistress, Dolly Bonner. Biting at the heels of them all is a haunting sense of godlessness.

Most novels unfold in a variation between expansion and compression--that is, stretching some scenes out, and compressing others into a few lines in a way that brings texture and movement to the tale. Styron, however, settles almost entirely in the "expansion" mode; he is patient with his story and adept at honing in on the inward energy of self-destruction, the outward energy of gossip and posturing. While it seems to be an old-fashioned fictional technique to dwell on description, I found myself fond of Styron's sharp, lingering eye on the faces of his characters, whether--like Peyton, Milton, and Helen--they bear an influence that is felt

on every page, or--like Peyton's wedding guests, or her first beau, Dick Cartwright--they float in for a short time.

Narrative texture, then, comes to this novel in other ways -- the lyrical opening pages of a train traveling through Virginia, told in disarming second-person, for example, and the surprising section near the end that shifts into breathless first-person for fifty pages without a single paragraph break. Oftentimes we approach a scene already knowing how it will unfold. We move closely into the minds of a number of characters, watching some of these expansive scenes at the distance of, say, Carey, the frustrated Episcopal minister, or Lennie, the red-headed urbanite. Other scenes are owned only by the narrator in, for example, a fascinating account of the history of Potter's Field, the island off New York where un-claimed bones are lain, and then moved, and then lain again, as space permits. The variation of voice is what keeps a painful story palatable.

In a passage describing society's reaction to the affair between Milton Loftis and Dolly Bonner:

Hell, they'd say in the country club locker room, you know how Milt's getting his. Everybody knew, bearing testimony to the fact that suburban vice, like a peeling nose, is almost impossible to conceal. It went all over town, this talk, like a swarm of bees, settling down lazily on polite afternoon sun porches to rise once more and settle down again with a busy murmur among cautious ladylike foursomes on the golf course, buzzing pleasurable there amid ladylike whacks of the golf ball and cautious pullings-down of panties which bound too tightly. Everybody knew about their affair and everybody talked about it, and because of some haunting inborn squeamishness it would not have relieved Loftis to know that nobody particularly cared.

At times, I itched at the book's pretension: the ambitions of the artist to make this an "epic" are painfully apparent, and his relentless focus on the humiliations of his characters sometimes feels exploitative. When I closed the book finally, I was relieved to be free of the tension of characters that find so many ways to enact and absorb violence. I wish the book had been trimmed by about fifty pages or so. Simply put, Styron can overdo it. Perhaps this is the one place where the youthfulness of the author peeps through. Another flaw of the book? His rendering of African-American communities in Virginia rings of condescension and is marred by simple stereotypes (watermelon, fried chicken).

I came away from *Lie Down in Darkness* impressed with Styron's guts, both as a technician and an imagination. Indeed I was surprised by how far Styron was willing to go with the macabre; the overtures of incest took me aback and complicated the rendering of love that threads through the novel. Despite the book's weaknesses, Styron's gifts are enveloping. This was the first of his relatively few books that I have read. It won't be the last.

Peter says

This is EXACTLY the kind of book I would have written in my early 20s had I not been lazy, talentless and drunk.

Stacy says

This is one of the most unique writing styles I've encountered. I know that it probably isn't for everyone...I've seen people use the phrase 'continuous stream of consciousness' to describe it, the thing is that you jump from one person's stream to another sometimes within the same paragraph. I think it's genius.

The story is heartbreaking. But it's a common enough situation in 2012, just as it was in the 1940's when the story is based. The selfishness shown in these people, narcissism, sadistic actions, masochistic reactions...I'm sure we've all known a Peyton, or Loftis, or Helen. This is not a feel good story by any means, but damn...it's real.

Something that is different from now is the outlook on separation of the races...actually, in some areas of the south it may still seem this way sadly. As hard as some of the descriptions and words used are to read I guess you have to face even the ugliest parts of history. It is a depiction of the time when it was written. All that said, the black characters in this story are the only ones who really, truly, unselfishly mourn Peyton's death...

wally says

This is my 5th from Styron, the last four recent, within the last few months, or weeks, the first quite some time ago, mid-80s when I read his Sophie's Choice. This one, unless I'm mistaken, was his first.

This one has a **Recollection**, looks like a forward from someone who met Styron soon after he published this one. Looks like it was written by his wife? Rose? She met him, Bill, and Truman Capote, at the same time in Rome. Truman Capote told her, *Lie Down in Darkness* was a terrific book. Heh! She gets the book from a library, begins, decides, "oh dear, he's cute but he can't write. What am I going to do?" HA HA HA HA HA!

Oops, the librarian had given her another book by another with the same title. We're safe.

The title comes from Sir Thomas Brown, *Urne Burial*...and it relates to something I just read in Styron's *Darkness Visible*, the philosophical question...something to do with, is life worth living? If I find the exact phrasing (I can, will I look?)...I'll place it here. ...okay, I looked, and it is from Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*, "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy."...the quote from Brown and this from Camus seems related...zip it up and file it away.

There's another quote from *Finnegans Wake*:

Carry me along, taddy, like you done through the toy fair.

Begins:

Riding down to Port Warwick from Richmond, the train begins to pick up speed on the outskirts of the city, past the tobacco factories with the ever-present haze of acrid, sweetish dust and past the rows of uniformly brown clapboard houses which stretch down the hilly streets for miles, it seems, the hundreds of rooftops all reflecting the pale light of dawn...

Onward and upward.

update

Okay, so starting out we have present tense as well as second person. How often does one see that? Not often and it does not last...it does set the mood, however, sets up a character that at 7% has not arrived as yet,

a...man, I believe, coming in on train, with...possibly a body as a hearse and a limo have pulled up at the port...train station?...to wait, the old man, Milton Loftis going into the restaurant nearby to be sick, taking a stool, pulling out a letter from a daughter (Peyton, I think...a daughter who has committed suicide)...she addresses him as Bunny. Another daughter, Maudie, is also dead, Helen, the mother for 23 years is a mother no longer and she and Milton are separated.

This is an interesting read, having just read, as I said, *Darkness Visible*, a memoir of depression, and some of the very things Styron writes about in that one are displayed herein.

okay, back at it or smoke em if you got em

update

Finished, Sunday evening, 9:03 p.m. e.s.t.

Having read his *Darkness Visible* prior to this, having read his words in that work to do w/depression and his realization years after he wrote this one that in here he was dealing with depression, I think we are lazy and do harm when we use expression s like "dysfunctional family"...at least one description uses the phrase to talk about this story. If depression is a disease, then any analogy would work, telling the man with a broken leg to get up and run the hundred...that, or he is lazy.

The frustrating matter with this story is that so much is unsaid, is left to be read between the lines mayhap. Maudie wears a brace, Maudie, one of the Loftis's daughters, and she has other health problems, it is given, though it is never revealed just what they are, nor is the brace ever explained.

If that's not enough, the marriage of Milton and Helen Loftis is a mystery as neither one communicates the way they should with the other and so the reader is left wondering so often just what is going on. The reader is given to understand that Helen is....a nag, to put it simply....and more, definitely more....and yet, Milton is as unfaithful as our president, William Jefferson Clinton (and the list just keeps growing, nessay pa?) His daughter, Peyton, seems to know what is going on there, between her old man, Milton, and Dolly Bonner--there is a time when she tries to go into this room where there is a party happening, but the door is locked...her old man and Dolly are in there.

But the reader is not given to know what she makes of that.

This story has an interesting narrative line...as some of Styron's other stories have had....say line in *Set This House on Fire* in that the climax has happened, the event that usually ends with all dead in Act 5 has already happened and the story works its way backward and forward to that event, in this case, Peyton's suicide...death.

The parallels between Helen, the mother, and Peyton, the daughter, are....there. I need time to think about what has happened. Honestly, I feel wrung out and hung up to dry. Blow wind blow.

More about the story-line: Early on, I thought there was someone accompanying the body of Peyton, arriving via train back in Port Warwick, for the story begins with a second-person "you" and it is present tense. For whatever reason (I misread it) I thought a brother (there is no brother) was coming on the train with Peyton...perhaps the name itself, Peyton...I know no Peyton, save the quarterback all are concerned about...and what the one coach gets a pass by bullying? EEEE GAD!

Where is our humanity!

Anyway, the story-line goes back and forth in time, more back than forward, and each forward march is another increment at the station, picking up Peyton's casket, problems with the hearse...the engine keeps overheating...it all so troublesome...and...Dolly is there w/Milton, Helen did not go...but mixed in with this fairly short undertaking (sheesh, a cheap pun) of picking up the casket and putting it in the ground, the storyline reflects the past, what brought them to this point.

Then, with 80% of the story told, there's a shift to Peyton's point-of-view and again, here, the reader is left to puzzle out what is happening--who is this Tony guy?--and gradually, as one progresses, the reader discovers, unearths what has happened.

The final 5% or less (read this on the Kindle, verily, hallelujah) we visit with Daddy Faith, a black preacher man, and the various black folk who were present--at least Ella Swan was--there at the body retrieval--the various black folk attend this strange gathering at the....river, I'll say...water anyway. Somewhat surreal...

and of that...still trying to get my head around it all.

There are so many inflexible characters herein....

Jimme says

My goodness, how good can a book be? It felt like a million years until the author wrote another novel, "Sophie's Choice" of similarly incredible proportions, but quite different (or at least the story is a lot different, but maybe the characters here were similarly lost in their lives). How wonderful to discover that the author's superb writing enabled him to come with an essential book that is lyrical and has characters to both strongly dislike and adore, or both. What a family, and what an incredible description of its members! This book has so much internal and external obsession among its group of basically dysfunctional family members. And the characters are so inside-out. I was emotionally wrought by this book in a positive way (can an excruciating read be a good thing-YES!). There are insufferable strife and seemingly (unhealthy?) relationships among the characters that could not be outdone in words by any other author I can think of. Mr. Styron reminds us of the importance of trying our hardest to contemplate our relationships more selflessly in order to preserve the hope of others. I guess he is also telling us that people often can't or don't know they can do that, no matter what has gone before. This book is so picturesque, but what you see is everything and nothing. Great fortune brought this book to me, and neither the wind nor self-destruction can take it away. This book is too poetically painful to read again right away, but read it again I will.

Carol Storm says

Born into comfortable circumstances in a sleepy Virginia seaport, gifted with a fine mind, a lofty spirit, exceptional poise, a wry sense of humor and stunning good looks, Peyton Loftis should have had a life full of uncommon satisfactions. Instead she was tormented from early childhood by a sense of being unloved and

unworthy of love.

William Styron's debut novel, published in 1951, tells the story of a tragedy that resonates not only for its sadness but for its painful sense of the arbitrary nature of fate. Outwardly Peyton Loftis seems blessed in so many ways, yet inwardly she is cursed by self-loathing and her self-destructive tendencies become more and more pronounced over time. Is it the ugliness of the modern age that drives her to her fate? Her death comes on the day the Atomic bomb explodes over Hiroshima. Or is it the lingering taint of slave-owning and the blood of the innocents shed over centuries, marinating in the dark and bloody soil of Virginia?

The reader is carried along by a dark tide of events, as Peyton grows from a precocious and thoroughly captivating little girl, to an adored and celebrated college co-ed, to a lost and bewildered bohemian in the alien cities of the north. As bewitching as she is, the Virginia debutante who has been raised to see herself as an aristocrat proves to be a poor fit for the modern world. Like Lily Bart before her, Peyton is unable to escape the easy role of a prized possession, a cherished ornament rather than a fully functional human being.

It is highly significant that this southern heroine's attempts to adjust to modern, northern life end in disaster. Married to a ruggedly handsome and politically adventurous Jewish painter, Peyton soon finds that the demands of marriage (cooking, cleaning, buying toilet paper) are as jarringly unfamiliar as a world in which a hundred thousand innocents can be vaporized in a single white-hot flash. Jazz singers sing about sex, wailing the wang-wang blues. The subways are filled with smelly Puerto Ricans. Laughing Negroes saunter through the streets. (Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!) Peyton genuinely wants to be a part of this crude and vital new world, but she simply isn't coarse enough to endure. Or something.

Staggering through the sweltering streets in an urban and alien landscape, unable to envision a place for herself in the modern, multi-racial America which her own Virginia ancestors both fought for and betrayed, the stunningly beautiful but fatally flawed Peyton makes a shattering realization about her own inexorable fate.

LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS contains some laughably outdated ideas about the innate refinement of southern females, but in spite or perhaps because of these dated elements the tragedy of Peyton Loftis remains genuinely poignant. William Styron wrote this book before he turned thirty, and though his career dragged on for three more decades he never again reached the heights of his debut novel.

Debbie says

I'm going to begin this review with the thought that somewhere along the line, someone had told this guy that he had a gift for descriptive prose and he got the erroneous idea that he could write an entire book of it. Boy, did he! There were three pages of description of a character walking through a door then three more pages to describe how it felt to walk through the door with more descriptions of the memories that were triggered by walking through the door. I'm sure it's an exaggeration but it feels true. I will provide the disclaimer that I tend to be a plot-driven reader but I'm quite capable of appreciating vivid and important descriptive prose but this was just way too much. So I get to the end and read about the author whose name I did not recognize when I began and realize what a rock star this guy was. He won a Pulitzer Prize (not for this book) and I'd even read his stuff before. Sophie's Choice has one of my favorite opening lines ever. I couldn't believe this book was by the same author. Granted, it was his first novel and he was only 26 so I give him credit for

improving. I just don't understand all the critical acclaim he earned for this effort.

I give myself credit for making it through this book. I was determined to do it and I feel like I'd won a small victory. I'd describe how it feels but I just don't have the stomach for it. My recommendation is to go straight to Sophie's Choice. Be prepared, however, as he does not write happy books.
