



The Heart of a Distant Forest

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Retired professor Andrew Lachlan has returned to his family home on a lake in central Georgia to die. And yet he has never felt so alive, so ready to learn about the natural world around him. Having taught all his life, he is ready for solitude. But a young country boy, Willie Sullivan, disrupts Lachlan's search for order and rekindles memories he thought long dead. Lachlan also finds Callie McKenzie, a woman he loved years earlier, and they soon begin to see in each other reflections of the lives they once led. Lachlan's journal of his year by the lake leads him to a deeper understanding of himself and the world.

The Heart of a Distant Forest Details

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Scott Thompson says

This novel is set up like the journal of an old and dying man. The words are simple and few, but they have the power of many words. This is a beautiful book and a nice change from other books I've read lately. It's a sweet reflection on life and what really matters.

Charlene says

A lovely book about a difficult subject . . . the main character, Andrew, has returned to his childhood home, an old house out in the middle Georgia countryside, to die. He's lost his wife and his son, now that he is diagnosed with cancer, he wants no treatment, just peace to be part of the natural world for his final days. The book is told in journal form, with short entries for almost every day between May 1st when he arrives and the next spring when the entries stop. In between, Andrew reunites with a childhood sweetheart and befriends (adopts) a neighbor boy who has lost his parents. Neither of those relationships are easy but through them, Andrew works out a lot of the grief from the death of his wife and only child. Illness and pain don't play much part in this book since Andrew unrealistically stays pain-free and able to go for long walks in the woods until the end. Very nicely written with good observations about the natural world and the soul.

Bill says

This book, written in 1984, is truly amazing. A retired college professor dealing with a life threatening prognosis, his wife having predeceased him, returns to his middle Ga. cabin in the woods to return to nature. It is written as a journal and is beautifully expressed.

Ken says

This was a nice book for reading slowly. Being in a journal format, it was completely from the view of the main character, and we see his world - both physical and psychological through his journal. This provides a good view of his relationships to other people, nature, and himself - especially himself as he slowly succumbs to an unspecified illness. That would sound like a pretty dull and morbid sort of story, but it is not because even though he is coming to the close of life, he still retains the richness and control of awareness. He is still in the game. Nature is the setting - one that gives him a great amount of comfort and solace. Relationships are also a great source of strength, but as always sometimes complicated and upsetting. The character is a man struggling for grace and dignity at a time in his life when keeping his equilibrium is probably the most important thing to him. I liked the book a lot for the style and for illuminating a subject area that I'm sure I steer away from. This gently takes you there - to the subject of awareness at the end of life. Because of the journal format, it is an epistolary novel.
