Go Set a Watchman - Dive Right In [1]

Posted by: Tracy Stone on Friday, August 14th, 2015

The literary world has been delirious with excitement since the announcement in February that a second novel by Harper Lee had been “found” and was to be published. To Kill a Mockingbird [3] was Harper Lee’s first (and until now only) novel published in 1960, winner of the 1961 Pulitzer Prize, and certainly one of the most beloved novels in American history. Having recently read Go Set a Watchman [4] which, at this writing, is #1 on the New York Times Bestsellers List, and, judging by our holds, it’s a very popular book (but don’t worry we have plenty of copies!), I will attempt to answer a few questions you may have.

What is the meaning of the title?

It’s from the Bible, “For thus hath the Lord said unto me, ‘Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth.’” Isaiah 21:6. The watchman is the conscience or perhaps, moral compass, in this case one sorely needed in 1955 America.

Is Go Set a Watchman a sequel to To Kill a Mockingbird?

No. Although Scout, now known as Jean Louise, is 26 years old and returning home from New York City for a visit and the book is set shortly after the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education U. S. Supreme Court decision ending school segregation, it was written before Mockingbird. Originally submitted for publication in 1957, editor Tay Hohoff liked the nostalgic childhood reminiscences in Watchman so much she encouraged Harper Lee to rewrite or, indeed, write, a new novel centered on Scout’s childhood in small-town Alabama. After 2 years of extensive rewriting and editing, To Kill a Mockingbird was completed.

Will it ruin Atticus Finch as a true hero if I read Go Set a Watchman?

Yes, it is a definite possibility, so proceed with caution! Keeping in mind the novel was written in 1957. Atticus is no longer a human rights idol, but a flawed human being who makes compromises and commits acts of hypocrisy in an unjust society.
Is Harper Lee still living?

Yes. At 89 she is still living, but in a diminished capacity. She maintained for the past 55 years or so that she would not write another novel, and I don’t believe she ever intended “Go Set a Watchman” to be published.

Would I recommend reading Go Set a Watchman?

As a novel, no, I do not recommend it. However, it is a very interesting, thought-provoking book, and one that should be read along with the masterpiece it birthed.

Have you read Go Set a Watchman? Let us know what you think in the comments! Whether you liked it or not, you may be interested in these great reads as well:

To Kill a Mockingbird [5] by Harper Lee

One of the best-loved classics of all time, To Kill a Mockingbird has earned many distinctions since its original publication in 1960. It has won the Pulitzer Prize, been translated into more than forty languages, sold more than forty million copies worldwide, and been made into an enormously popular movie. It was also named the best novel of the twentieth century by librarians across the country.

At the center of Shields's lively book is the story of Harper Lee's struggle to create her famous novel. But her life contains many other highlights as well: her girlhood as a tomboy in overalls in tiny Monroeville, Alabama; the murder trial that made her beloved father's reputation and inspired her great work; her journey to Kansas as Capote's ally and research assistant to help report the story of the Clutter murders; the surrogate family she found in New York City. Drawing on six hundred interviews and much new information, Mockingbird is the first book ever written about Harper Lee.

Mockingbird Next Door: Life with Harper Lee [8] by Marja Mills

In 2001, Chicago Tribune journalist Mills went to Monroeville, Alabama, to attempt what other journalists had failed to do: get an interview with legendary novelist Harper Lee. Not only did she succeed but she ended up befriending both Lee and her sister, with whom Lee lived. Mills eventually moved in next door and spent 18 months chatting with the sisters, learning about family history, imbibing Southern lore, and meeting their friends. Here is her account of that time - and now maybe we can learn why Harper Lee never wrote another novel.
The Invention of Wings by Sue Monk Kidd

Kidd’s sweeping novel is set in motion on Sarah’s eleventh birthday, when she is given ownership of ten year old Handful, who is to be her handmaid. We follow their remarkable journeys over the next thirty-five years, as both strive for a life of their own, dramatically shaping each other’s destinies and forming a complex relationship marked by guilt, defiance, and estrangement. As the stories build to a riveting climax, Handful will endure loss and sorrow, finding courage and a sense of self in the process. Sarah will experience crushed hopes, betrayal, unrequited love, and ostracism before leaving Charleston to find her place alongside her fearless younger sister, Angelina, as one of the early pioneers in the abolition and women’s rights movements.

The Help by Kathryn Stockett

Jackson, Miss., in the early 1960s is a city of tradition and when recent Ole Miss graduate Eugenia Skeeter Phelan returns to the family plantation she feels it's a world ripe for change. As she observes her friend Elizabeth rudely interact with Aibileen, the gentle black woman who is
practically raising Elizabeth's two-year-old daughter, Skeeter decides to write the story of domestic relations from the help's point of view. With the assistance of Aibileen's feisty friend, Minny, Skeeter interviews a dozen of the city's maids, and the book rocks Jackson's world in unimaginable ways. With pitch-perfect tone and an unerring facility for character and setting, Stockett's richly accomplished debut novel inventively explores the unspoken ways in which the civil rights and feminist movements threatened the southern status quo.

A Time to Kill

by John Grisham

Near the rural town of Clanton, Miss., little Tonya Hailey is brutally attacked and left for dead by two drunken men. They are quickly caught in a roadside bar, where they have been bragging of their exploits. When the men appear in court days later, Tonya's father Carl bursts out of the courthouse basement and executes them with an assault rifle. Murder or executions? Justice or revenge? Carl trusts his life to local criminal lawyer Jake Brigance, who dreams of famous cases, headlines, and the big time. Jake is about to face the fight of his life, and he knows it. Not only is he up against Rufus Buckley - a tough, ambitious district attorney who realizes that a murder conviction could help him gain higher office - but he has a much bigger problem: the attackers are white, the judge is white - and Carl is black. This is a trial sure to change forever the lives of everyone involved.

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