

The Home Place

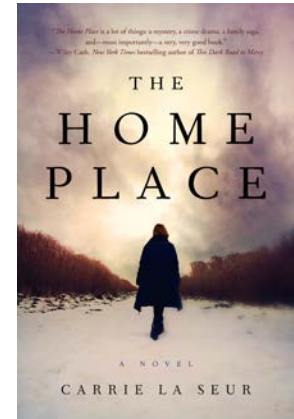
William Morrow Paperbacks

By Carrie La Seur

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Introduction

Carrie La Seur makes her remarkable debut with *The Home Place*, a mesmerizing, emotionally evocative, and atmospheric literary novel in the vein of *The House Girl* and *A Land More Kind Than Home*, in which a successful lawyer is pulled back into her troubled family's life in rural Montana in the wake of her sister's death.



The only Terrebonne who made it out, Alma thought she was done with Montana, with its bleak winters and stifling ways. But an unexpected call from the local police takes the successful lawyer back to her provincial hometown and pulls her into the family trouble she thought she'd left far behind: Her lying, party-loving sister, Vicky, is dead. Alma is told that a very drunk Vicky had wandered away from a party and died of exposure after a night in the brutal cold. But when Alma returns home to bury Vicky and see to her orphaned niece, she discovers that the death may not have been an accident.

The Home Place is a story of secrets that will not lie still, human bonds that will not break, and crippling memories that will not be silenced. It is a story of rural towns and runaways, of tensions corporate and racial, of childhood trauma and adolescent betrayal, and of the guilt that even forgiveness cannot ease. Most of all, this is a story of the place we carry in us always: home.

Questions for Discussion

1. In *The Home Place*, as in many great novels, the setting itself is a character. What are some of the details and techniques that Carrie La Seur uses to lend Billings, MT such a fantastic sense of place?
2. La Seur sets up a sharp contrast between Alma's new life in Seattle and the one she left behind in Billings. What are the key differences in your view? How does this play into the development of her character?
3. Do you believe that Alma's parents' deaths were accidental? Why or why not?
4. What, if any, is the significance of Brittany's "invisible" animals?
5. La Seur writes that Alma's regrets about her final weeks at home "have become a sort of rosary, thumbed over in her mind." She regrets not taking better care of her sister, and

cutting out Chance. Why do you think she made the choices she did?

6. What does La Seur imply Chance gives Alma that Jean-Marc does not? What different purposes do these two men serve in her life?
7. How does solving the mystery of her sister's death allow Alma to make peace with the conflicts they had in life? From what you can gather, do Alma and Vicky have anything in common?
8. Of Billings, Alma says to Chance, the perceived peacefulness was "only a veneer." "Scratch a few layers in the dirt," she says, "and there's violence all around us. Blood feuds and massacres." What are some of the ways that La Seur uses language and metaphor to convey this idea prior to Alma's revelation? Can you think of places in your own life that are similar?
9. Do you think Alma lets Helen off too easily? What would you do if you were her? What would be the best way to allow Vicky's memory to rest peacefully?
10. Do you think Alma makes the right choice by returning to Billings? What do you think she hopes to achieve? Is it just Chance that draws her back to the place, or something more?
11. If you had to pick one theme to define *The Home Place*, what would it be and why?