

# READER'S GUIDE

*In a Wide Country* by Robert Everett-Green

## INTRODUCING *In a Wide Country*

Jasper's short trip out of the city with his sometimes-model mother turns into a cross-country road-trip extending beyond the summer and into fall. Dean, the boyfriend his mother is determined to flee, vanishes in the dust rising behind the Corvair he gave her. Despite travelling together, mother and son are moving in different directions across western Canada in the summer of 1961, telling stories to get by. As Jasper and Corinne settle briefly in Edmonton, and then flee again for Vancouver, Jasper feels like an exile from a life in Winnipeg that offered stability and a place to find himself. Along the journey, however, Jasper begins to awaken his childhood stories to find the truth of his life with his mother.

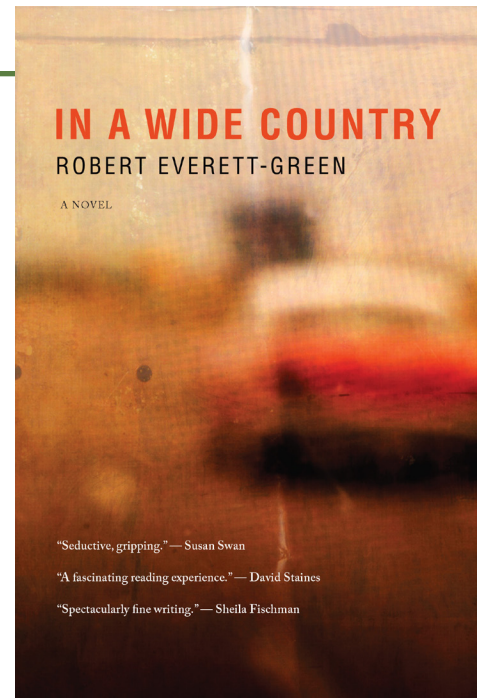
## IMPORTANT THEMES

### *Storytelling and Truth*

Jasper's life is composed of stories, from the improvised ones his mother tells him at her vanity to the version of events in his life she attempts to assert upon him. Corinne's self-mythologizing is visible in her own name change from Karen to Corinne, the stories she tells Jasper about her past with both his father and her own, her version of the flaws in her relationship with Dean, and even in the care she takes to make herself up and present a particular face. Dean, too, gives a version of history and his own stories that differ. Jasper learns from them both the ways in which the teller can profit from and mold his or her life from stories, which he uses to help Nick "see" the world and to get himself out of trouble after fights. The stories' inconsistencies, however, show the fragility of the life Corinne has constructed for herself and her son; her inability to keep up the façade in her hometown, and the repeated need to flee town underscore the difference between her stories and those of others.

### *Coming of Age*

Much of Jasper's journey centers around his newfound difference from his mother during this summer. Her conspicuous femininity begins to grate on him, and his own sexual urges begin to make appearances with Ginette, Marsha, and lingerie. He searches for models of masculinity and adulthood in Dean and Nick, wearing the story of his father's plane crash like a badge to help define his identity in the absence of a steady paternal figure. Corinne, too, seems to be searching for identity, although her search revolves less around her mother than around a search for belonging she doesn't seem able to find in men, motel rooms, or the different cities she drags her son to.



## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you think is the significance of the Drawer of Shame, and how does it fit into Corinne's self-mythologizing?
2. Do you think that anything happened between Corinne and Nick more substantial than horse riding, or was it all Jackie's imagination?
3. Discuss the significance of *Picnic* and *77 Sunset Strip* to the text.
4. Towards the end of the novel, Corinne accuses Jasper of making up their history. Do you think Jasper is a reliable narrator?
5. Compare Dr. Suan, Nick, and Corinne. In what ways are they all trying to make different concepts fit together as truth homogeneously, without invalidating either?
6. What do the two coats Jasper is given say about the person he is expected to be, and the coats' givers?
7. Why does Corinne wake Jasper so gently in the mornings? Is it representative of the rest of their relationship?



### ABOUT ROBERT

Robert Everett-Green was born in Edmonton and grew up there and on a farm in eastern Alberta. His short fiction has won a National Magazine Award (Silver), and his short non-fiction appears regularly in *The Globe and Mail*. He lives in Montreal.