

## Lonely Are the Brave

**Larry Zuckerman**

Cennan Books

(305pp)

978-1-947976-39-9

*Lonely Are the Brave is a powerful historical novel in which two veterans are pitted against each other in postwar America.*

In Larry Zuckerman's affecting historical novel *Lonely Are the Brave*, soldiers struggle after serving overseas in World War I.

Rollie is an army veteran whose homecoming is complicated by the fact that his wife has died, leaving him to care for their infant. As he takes on "women's duties," he solidifies his distance from those around him, hindering his future plans and his interactions with others. Information about his military service is doled out via hints and allusions. And Rollie becomes suspicious that Tess was unfaithful to him, amplifying the book's tension. He finds a phonograph and hidden illegal wine in the basement of his home; a sense of mystery grows.

Meanwhile, Rollie's former commanding officer, Harry, lives in the same town as Rollie. He carries a grudge and nurses political aspirations. His wife, Kay, begins to distrust her husband, finding that he has changed during his time away; he is now distant and cold. Kay reaches out to Rollie to learn more about the stranger in her bed, and Rollie's revelations change how she understands Harry and her place in the world.

These central characters become mouthpieces for a time of national change. The country that Rollie and Harry return to is not the same as the one that they left. Rollie becomes a stand-in for those who adapt to the nation's changes; he's fascinating as he cares for his daughter despite the general reluctance of men to do so. Meanwhile, Harry provides views into changing political scenes, and Kay, who had to continue on while her husband was gone, enjoys new freedoms (she got a job; she secured her own bank account); she becomes representative of the people left at home during the war, who are now somewhat more distrustful, and who saw society shift in the absence of men.

The prose is tight and direct, imparting dread around people's persistent secrets. And it ably captures the atmosphere of Lumberton, a Seattle suburb, which is populated by busybodies and dedicated to its logging industry. Through this trade, the townspeople are linked to Europe as it rebuilds; still, they are far from cosmopolitan. Thus, Rollie and Harry's neighbors reflect the growing dichotomies within their country, which now wants to isolate itself from the world's affairs but which also rises to the challenges that it faces. Fleshed out by small-town personalities who participate in company ball games and have personal conflicts, Lumberton is a compelling setting for the book's drama, which reflects the powerful, lasting impacts of overseas combat—both on those involved and on those left behind.

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JEREMIAH ROOD (February 27, 2023)

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