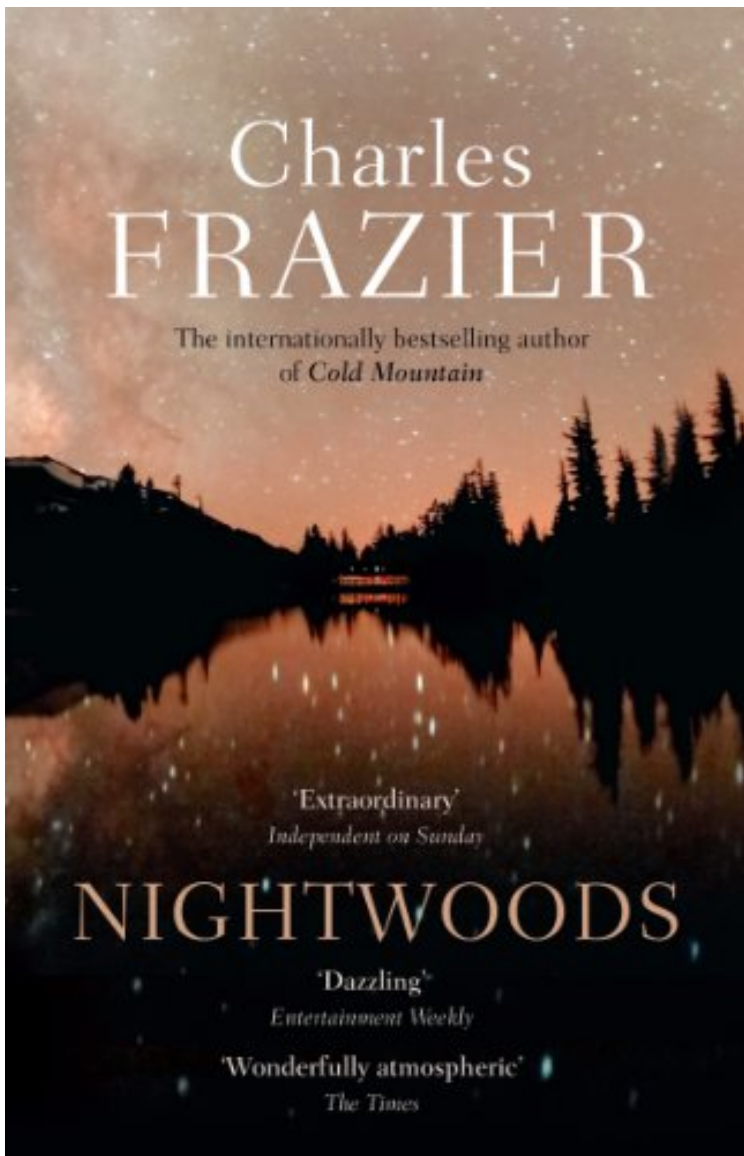


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# Nightwoods (English Edition)



Par Charles Frazier  
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Par Charles Frazier : **Nightwoods (English Edition)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Nightwoods (English Edition):

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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe main lesson Luce had learned was that you couldn't count on anybody. In the lonesome beauty of the forest, across the far shore of the mountain lake from town, Luce acts as caretaker to an empty, decaying Lodge, a relic of holidaymakers a century before. Her days are long and peaceful, her nights filled with Nashville radio and yellow lights shimmering on the black water. A solitary life, and the perfect escape. Until the stranger children come. Bringing fire. And murder. And love.ExtraitCHAPTER 1LUCE'S NEW STRANGER CHILDREN were small and beautiful and violent. She learned early that it wasn't smart to leave them unattended in the yard with the chickens. Later she'd find feathers, a scaled yellow foot with its toes clenched. Neither child displayed language at all, but the girl glared murderous

expressions at her if she dared ask where the rest of the rooster went. The children loved fire above all elements of creation. A heap of dry combustibles delighted them beyond reason. Luce began hiding the kitchen matches, except the few she kept in the hip pocket of her jeans for lighting the stove. Within two days, the children learned how to make their own fire from tinder and a green stick bowed with a shoelace. Tiny cavemen on Benzadrine couldn't have made fire faster. Then they set the back corner of the Lodge alight, and Luce had to run back and forth from the spring with sloshing tin buckets to put it out. She switched them both equally with a thin willow twig until their legs were striped pink, and it became clear that they would draw whatever pain came to them down deep inside and refuse to cry. At which point Luce swore to herself she would never strike them again. She went to the kitchen and began making a guilty peach pie. **LUCE WAS NOT MUCH MATERNAL.** The State put the children on her. If she had not agreed to take them, they would have been separated and adopted out like puppies. By the time they were grown, they wouldn't even remember each other. Though now that it was probably too late to go back, maybe that would have been a good thing. Separate them and dilute whatever weirdness they shared and ignited between them. Yet more proof, as if you needed it, that the world would be a better place if every-damn-body didn't feel some deep need to reproduce. But God in his infinite wisdom had apparently thought it was an entertaining idea for us to always be wanting to get up in one another. Also, the children were here, and what was Luce to do? You try your best to love the world despite obvious flaws in design and execution. And you take care of whatever needy things present themselves to you during your passage through it. Otherwise you're worthless. Same way with the Lodge. Luce didn't own it. She was the caretaker, sort of. Some would call her a squatter now that the old man was dead. But nobody else seemed interested in keeping it from growing over with kudzu until it became nothing but a green mound. Back at the edge of the previous century, the Lodge had been a cool summer retreat for rich people escaping the lowland steam of August. Some railroad millionaire passing through the highland valley in his own railcar had a vision, or possibly a whim, to build an earthen dam, back the river up, fill the upper end of the valley with water right to the edge of the village. Then, on the far side, build a log lodge of his own design, something along the lines of the Old Faithful Inn, though smaller and more exclusive. He must have been a better railroad executive than architect, because what he built was a raw outsized rectangle, a huge log cabin with a covered porch looking down a sweep of lawn to the lake and across the water to the town. Evidently, rich people were satisfied by simpler things in the yesteryears. Now the millionaires and the railroad were gone. But the lake remained, a weird color-shifting horizontal plane set in an otherwise convoluted vertical landscape of blue and green mountains. The Lodge persisted as well, a strange, decaying place to live in alone, though. The main floor was taken up by the common rooms, a voluminous lobby with its massive stone fireplace and handsome, backbreaking Craftsman armchairs and settles, quarter-sawn oak tables and cabinets. A long dining room with triple-hung, lake-view windows and, behind swinging doors, a big kitchen with a small table where the help once crowded together to eat leftovers. Second floor, just narrow hallways and sleeping chambers behind numbered six-panel doors with transom windows. Third floor, way up under the eaves, a dark smothering rabbit warren of windowless servants' quarters. **WHEN SHE LIVED ALONE,** Luce didn't go to the upper floors often, but not out of fear. Not really. It was little but bedsteads and cobwebs up there, and she didn't want to believe in ghosts or anything similar. Not even the portents of bad dreams. Yet the fading spirit world touched her imagination pretty strong when she was awake at three in the morning, alone in the big place. The dark sleeping floors, with their musty transient pens and cribs for the guests and their help, spooked her. The place spoke of time. How you're here and then you're gone, and all you leave for a little while afterward are a few artifacts that outlive you. Case in point, old Stubblefield, who had owned the Lodge for the past few decades. Luce visited him several times during his dying days, and she was there at the end to watch the light go out of his eyes. In the final hours, Stubblefield mostly cataloged his possessions and listed who should get what. His concerns were largely real estate, all his holdings to go to his sole useless grandson. Also a few valuable objects, such as his dead wife's silver service and lace tablecloth, perfect but for a slight rust stain at one corner. Barely noticeable. The silver candleholders were a heavy weight on Stubblefield's mind because his wife had loved them so much. Oddly, he left them to Luce, who didn't love them at all and probably never would. Easy to be disdainful and ironic toward others' false values. Still, Luce hoped that when she was at the same thin margin of life she would be concerned with looking out the window to note the weather or the shape of the moon or some lone bird flying by. Certainly not a bunch of worn-out teaspoons. But Luce was half a century younger than old Stubblefield, and didn't know how she'd think and what she would value if she made it that far down the road. All her life, the main lesson Luce

had learned was that you couldn't count on anybody. So she guessed you could work hard to make yourself who you wanted to be and yet find that the passing years had transformed you beyond your own recognition. End up disappointed in yourself, despite your best efforts. And that's the downward way Luce's thoughts fell whenever she went upstairs into the dreary past. BEFORE THE CHILDREN, Luce had learned that after dark she'd best keep to the communal lobby, with its fireplace and mildew-spotted furniture and tall full bookshelves and huge floor-standing radio with a tuning ring like the steering wheel to a Packard. She dragged a daybed from a screened sleeping porch to form a triangle of cozy space with the hearth and the radio to make herself a bedroom. The bookshelves held a great many well-read old novels and a set of Britannicas, complete but for a couple of volumes in the middle of the alphabet. Also, nearby, a Stickley library stand with an unabridged 1913 Webster's. The places where you naturally put your hands on the soft binding were stained dark, so that all you could figure was that decades of guests finished a greasy breakfast of sausage biscuits and then right away needed to look up a word. At bedtime, lamps out, the rest of the big room faded into darkness, only the fire and the radio's tubes sending a friendly glow up the nearby log walls. Luce finally fell asleep every night listening to WLAC out of Nashville. Little Willie John, Howlin' Wolf, Maurice Williams, James Brown. Magic singers proclaiming hope and despair into the dark. Prayers pitched into the air from Nashville and caught by the radio way up here at the mountain lake to keep her company. Also good company on clear nights, the lights of town. Yellow pinpoint and streaks reflecting on the shimmer of black lake water. One advantage of the village being over there on the other side was the proximity of people as the crow flies, but no other way. By car, it took the better part of an hour to go around the back side of the lake and across the dam and around the shore to town. The distance seemed shorter when Luce first got to the Lodge, due to a rowboat she found in one of the outbuildings. Town became only twenty minutes away. But the boat was rotting and loose-jointed, and on her first few trips across, she spent as much time bailing with a saucepan as rowing. And she was not much of a swimmer, at least not good enough to make it to either shore from the middle. She dragged the boat up onto the shoreline and let it dry for a few days, and then one evening at dusk, she poured a cup of kerosene on it and burned it. Flames rose chest-high, their reflections reaching across the still water toward town. After that, when she had been alone for too many days, she walked the half mile to Stubblefield's house, and the half mile farther to Maddie's, and the mile farther to the little country store, where you could buy anything you wanted as long as it was bologna and light bread and milk, yellow cheese and potted meat, and every brand of soft drink and candy bar and packaged snack cake known to man. A four-mile round-trip just to sit in a chair outside the store for a half hour and drink a Cheerwine and eat a MoonPie and observe other human beings. She always carried a book, though, in case she needed to read a few pages to avoid unwanted conversation. The past Fourth of July, Luce sat on the porch of the Lodge drinking precious brown liquor from the basement and watching tiny fireworks across the water. Bursts that must have filled the sky in town became bubbles of sparks about as big as a fuzzy dandelion at arm's length. As they began fading to black, the distant boom and sizzle finally reached the Lodge. Friday nights in the fall, light from the football field glowed silver against the eastern sky. A faint sound like an outbreath when the home team scored a touchdown. Every Sunday morning, distant church bells from the Baptists and Methodists tinkled like ice cubes in a glass, and a saying of her mother's always crossed Luce's mind: thirst after righteousness. Which Lola used as a Sabbath toast, raising a tall Bloody Mary and a freshly lit Kool in the same hand only minutes after the bells woke her. THE DAY THE CHILDREN came was high summer, the sky thick with humidity and the surface of the lake flat and iron blue. On the far side, mountains layered above the town, hazing upward in shades of olive until they became lost in the pale gray sky. Luce watched the girl and boy climb out of the backseat of a chalky-white Ford sedan and stand together, square to the world. Not really glaring, but with a manner of looking at you and yet not at you. Predatory, with their eyes very much in the fronts of their faces and scoping their surroundings for whatever next prospect might present itself, but not wanting to spook anybody. Not yet. Foxes entering henhouses, was the way Luce saw it. They sported new clothes the State had given them. A blue cotton print dress and white socks and white PF Flyers for the girl. A white cotton shirt and stiff new blue jeans and black socks and black PF Flyers for the boy. Both children had hair the color of a peanut shell, standing ragged on their heads as if the same person had done the cuts in a hurry, with only the littlest regard to gender. Luce said, Hey there, you two twins. The children didn't say anything, nor even look at her or at each other. -Hey, Luce said, a little louder. I'm talking to you. Nothing. Luce looked at their faces and saw slight concern for themselves or anybody else. They sent out expressions like they sure didn't want you to mess with them, but maybe they wanted to mess with you. She went to the back of the car, where the man

from the State was unloading a couple of cardboard boxes from the trunk. He set them on the ground and touched the smaller box with the toe of his loafer.-Their clothes, he said. And that other one is your sister's. Personal items.Luce hardly glanced down from looking at the kids. She said, What's the matter with them?- Nothing much, the man said. He thumbed the wheel to a Zippo and lit a smoke and seemed tired from the long drive. Ten hours.-Something's the matter with them, Luce said.-They've been through a bad patch.-A what?Luce stood and waited while the man took a drag or two, and then she broke in on his smoking and said, You're the one that collects a salary from the State to do this job, but you can't even talk straight. Bad patch.The man said, One doctor thought they might be feeble-minded. Another one said it's just that they saw what they saw, and they've been yanked out of their lives and put in the Methodist Home for the time it took to sort things out. The father's legal matters.-He's not their father. They're orphans.-It took time to figure that kind of thing out. We got used to certain wording.-And Johnson? Luce said.-The trial's coming up, and they'll convict him. Sit him in the big wood chair with the straps and drop the tablet in the bucket. It fizzes up, and pretty soon he chokes out. Immediate family gets an invitation.-To watch?-There's a thick glass porthole, tinged like a fishbowl full of dirty water. If there's a crowd, you have to take turns. It's the size of a dinner plate. Pretty much one at a time.-Count me in, Luce said.

From the Hardcover edition.

Revue de presse Praise for *Nightwoods*: "Nightwoods is no typical thriller. Its dazzling sentences are so meticulously constructed that you find yourself rereading them, trying to unpack their magic...the unhurried, poetic suspense is both difficult to bear and IMPOSSIBLE TO SHAKE."--Entertainment Weekly FANTASTIC ... an Appalachian Gothic with a low-level fever that runs alternately warm and chilling. The Washington Post No writer today crafts more exquisite sentences than Charles Frazier. USA Today ASTUTE AND COMPASSIONATE . . . a virtuoso construction . . . with wickedly wry dialogue reminiscent of the best of Charles Portis, Larry Brown, and Cormac McCarthy. The Boston Globe HIS BEST BOOK TO DATE. Frazier's exquisitely efficient style is matched by some finely tuned suspense. The Times (London) Frazier has taken a fast-paced genre and subverted it at every turn, offering a closer look at the nature of good and evil and how those forces ebb and flow over time. Atlanta Journal Constitution "...[A] taut narrative of love and suspense, told against a gritty background of bootlegging and violence. The characters are rich and unforgettable, and the prose almost lyrical. This is Charles Frazier at his best. ...Just mention a new novel by the Cold Mountain author, and a line will start forming." Booklist "...[T]hink Thunder Road meets Night of the Hunter meets old murder ballads. This is a suspenseful noir nightmare, complete with bootleggers and switchblades." The Daily Beast The story makes the book more than worthwhile, and the writing is as good as anything Frazier has created so far. [G]ripping story and engaging characters. Fredericksburg Free Lance-Star [E]ngages your deep interest.... The book's ending is masterful, gratifying suspense-seekers as well as readers who like things working on many levels. Asheville Citizen-Times The characters are expertly molded from the very land they inhabit, calling attention to the shallowness of the grave in which our more violent past is buried. BookPage PRAISE FOR CHARLES FRAZIER Cold Mountain Natural-born storytellers come along only rarely. Charles Frazier joins the ranks of that elite cadre on the first page of his astonishing debut. Newsweek Prose filled with grace notes and trenchant asides . . . a Whitmanesque foray into America: into its hugeness, its freshness, its scope and its soul . . . such a memorable book. The New York Times Book A rare and extraordinary book . . . heart-stopping . . . spellbinding. San Francisco Chronicle Thirteen Moons A boisterous, confident novel that draws from the epic tradition: It tips its hat to Don Quixote as well as Twain and Melville, and it boldly sets out to capture a broad swatch of America's story in the mid-nineteenth century. The Boston Globe Frazier works on an epic scale, but his genius is in the details she has a scholar's command of the physical realities of early America and a novelist's gift for bringing them to life. Time Magical . . . fascinating and moving . . . You will find much to admire and savor in Thirteen Moons. USA Today From the Hardcover edition.