



Black sheep

By Judy, Nunn

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Genre and Subject

Australian fiction

Historical fiction

Sheep ranches — New South Wales — Fiction

Murderers — Fiction

Synopsis

Orphaned at sixteen, James Wakefield was determined to be a gun shearer like his father. Now he's killed twice, changed his name, and is on the run from the law. He had his reasons for both murders, and he felt no joy in taking life. Or did he? Ben McKinnon, meanwhile, is heir to the vast Glenfinnan sheep property near Goulburn, New South Wales. He too has a secret that, if ever revealed, would shatter the privileged lives of his father, Alastair, and his sisters, Jenna and Adele. When fate brings James and Ben together, a powerful friendship is forged, both men gladly become the keeper of the other's secret. Then Ben insists his new friend come to work at Glenfinnan Station. Has James finally found the family he's always longed for? Or has the McKinnon dynasty just unwittingly adopted a black sheep?

Author Biography

JudyNunn (born 13 April 1945) is an Australian actress and author.

Judy Nunn's career has been long, illustrious and multifaceted. After combining her internationally successful acting career with scriptwriting for television and radio, Judy decided in the 80s to turn her hand to prose. The result was two adventure novels for children, *EYE IN THE STORM* and *EYE IN THE CITY*, which remain extremely popular, not only in Australia but in Europe. Embarking on adult fiction in the early 90s, Judy's three novels, *THE GLITTER GAME*, *CENTRE STAGE* and *ARALUEN*, set respectively in the worlds of television, theatre and film, became instant bestsellers. Her subsequent bestsellers, *KAL*, *BENEATH THE SOUTHERN CROSS*, *TERRITORY*, *PACIFIC*, *HERITAGE* and *FLOODTIDE* confirm her position as one of Australia's leading popular novelists.

Discussion Starters

1. Is James the only black sheep in the novel? Which other characters could be seen as the 'black sheep' of their family? How are certain moral stains passed between generations?
2. Discuss the ways 'living a lie' affected Ben and James in such markedly different ways.
3. What does the fob watch symbolise throughout the novel?
4. How do you think James's life would have panned out had he not met Ben? Do you think he would have still been successful?
5. How do the tensions between the land and the city, the agricultural and the industrial, play out throughout the novel?
6. Alastair considers breeding and bloodline 'the all-important factor' – so how does the rise of James, 'a mere shearer', through the family complicate this view? Are the compromises needed to continue the family name effective?
7. How do the stories of Jenna, Delia and Emily illustrate the status of and options for women in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries? In what ways do each of these women navigate society differently?
8. Do you feel that Josh and Emily betray Ted? How are the themes of family duty and personal ambition, fate versus action, expressed in the novel?
9. Why do you think Josh – an academically gifted, natural businessman and innate leader – turned to corruption and war profiteering? How does his storyline reflect or conflict with the messages in the nursery rhyme 'Baa Baa Black Sheep'?
10. Was James's fate at the end of the book inevitable?

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