



Once there were wolves

By Charlotte McConaghy

First published in 2021

Genre and Subject

Detective and mystery fiction

Scotland – Fiction

Wolves – Fiction

Synopsis

Inti Flynn arrives in Scotland with her twin sister, Aggie, to lead a team tasked with reintroducing fourteen grey wolves into the remote Highlands. She hopes to heal not only the dying landscape, but a broken Aggie, too. However, Inti is not the woman she once was, and may be in need of rewilding herself. Despite fierce opposition from the locals, Inti's wolves surprise everyone by thriving, and she begins to let her guard down, even opening up to the possibility of love. But when a local farmer is found dead, Inti knows where the town will lay blame. Unable to accept her wolves could be responsible, she makes a reckless decision to protect them, testing every instinct she has. But if her wolves didn't make the kill, then who did? And what will she do when the man she's been seeing becomes the main suspect? Propulsive and spellbinding, *Once There Were Wolves* is the unforgettable tale of a woman desperate to save the creatures she loves.

Author Biography

Charlotte is an Australian author living in Sydney with her partner and son. She has a Masters Degree in Screenwriting from the Australian Film Television and Radio School, and a number of published SFF works in Australia.

Her novel *MIGRATIONS* is her first foray into adult literary fiction, published in North America by Flatiron Books, and by Penguin Random House in Australia and the UK. It is being translated into over 20 languages, and adapted to film.

Fuelled by her love of nature and her interest in stories of fierce women, McConaghy's newest novel, *ONCE THERE WERE WOLVES*, the New York Times Bestseller, is a romantic mystery about a biologist charged with reintroducing wolves to the Scottish Highlands in order to rewild the landscape and bring a forest back to life.

Discussion Starters

1. The novel's epigraph is 'One beast and only one howls in the woods by night,' from Angela Carter's *The Company of Wolves*. What is the significance of this quote and how does it resonate with the story?
2. What genres does the novel combine, and how do they feed into each other and deepen the themes explored?

3. Inti and her team of biologists attempt to rewild the remote Scottish Highlands by reintroducing wolves to the landscape. In what ways do 'the wild' and 'civilisation' clash in the book? Should they be viewed as opposites?
4. Inti says: 'The children in us long for monsters to take forms we understand. They want to fear the wolves because they don't want to fear each other.' How does the novel blur the boundaries between humans and 'beasts'?
5. Inti and Aggie share a rare connection as identical twins, and this is deepened by their private sign language. Discuss the role of their relationship in the book
6. What does the novel have to say about legacies of violence and trauma and whether or not they can be broken?
7. Inti and Aggie's father becomes a passionate environmentalist who advocates for compassion and kindness, yet their mother disparages his solitary lifestyle, claiming that 'I've cared for more people in a day than that man will in his whole sorry life.' How can we strike a balance between individual and collective action in bringing about environmental and social change?
8. Inti says her mother 'had a different knowledge of what people do to each other... I chose to live by my dad's code, and it was easy until it wasn't. It's obvious now, and has been for a while. Mum was right... and now I have had enough, I have no more forgiveness left.' What stance does the novel take on forgiveness and on people's ability to change? Does it suggest that both humans and wolves have an 'essential', inflexible nature that drives their actions?
9. How does the interweaving of different time periods and settings in the book contribute to its overall atmosphere?
10. Inti's mirror-touch synaesthesia gives her the ability to feel what others feel. Would you like to have this condition? Why or why not?
11. Inti's father says that 'all creatures know love'. How are wolves depicted in the novel? What does it suggest about how humans and other animals can coexist?
12. What is the significance of the quote from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* on p. 42 – 'You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language' – in the context of the overall story?
13. The novel shares a number of elements with classic fairytales. In what ways does it both tie in to and break away from that genre?
14. What do you think the future holds for Inti and Duncan? What do you think happened to Aggie?

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