When the Evening Comes

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Abstract

When the Evening Comes explores African American experience in the rural North Carolina south. The book centers around the interracial relationship of two characters—Ben Groves and Mary Holden—after they find the body of a man left in an abandoned tobacco barn where they used to meet. They disagree over the decision to notify the authorities, a decision that leads to their breakup as Mary goes off to college and Ben is left behind to take care of his dying mother. After her death Ben learns that his birth father, a man he's never known, is black. Ben, who has always known himself to be white, is forced to reexamine his own identity as a biracial (but who can pass for white) man. This new understanding of his identity is a catalyst for him—he goes looking for Mary at her college where he navigates between roles as both a black and white-passing man, and becomes involved in the racial unrest on the campus. When the Evening Comes not only reconfigures the passing trope in a contemporary landscape, but revisits long-lasting questions pertaining to race that are embedded in our history.

And It Begins Like This, weaves together personal anecdote, history, genealogy records, passages from the Bible, literary theory and criticism, and recollections to examine the generational effects of slavery as they relate to an understanding of black female identity.