

Free Men: A Novel

Katy Simpson Smith

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From the author of the highly acclaimed *The Story of Land and Sea* comes a captivating novel, set in the late eighteenth-century American South, that follows a singular group of companions—an escaped slave, a white orphan, and a Creek Indian—who are being tracked down for murder.

In 1788, three men converge in the southern woods of what is now Alabama. Cat, an emotionally scarred white man from South Carolina, is on the run after abandoning his home. Bob is a talkative black man fleeing slavery on a Pensacola sugar plantation, Istillicha, edged out of his Creek town's leadership, is bound by honor to seek retribution.

In the few days they spend together, the makeshift trio commits a shocking murder that soon has the forces of the law bearing down upon them. Sent to pick up their trail, a probing French tracker named Le Clerc must decide which has a greater claim: swift justice, or his own curiosity about how three such disparate, desperate men could act in unison.

Katy Simpson Smith skillfully brings into focus men whose lives are both catastrophic and full of hope—and illuminates the lives of the women they left behind. Far from being anomalies, Cat, Bob, and Istillicha are the beating heart of the new America that Le Clerc struggles to comprehend. In these territories caught between European, American, and Native nations, a wilderness exists where four men grapple with the importance of family, the stain of guilt, and the competing forces of power, love, race, and freedom—questions that continue to haunt us today.



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