



DAVID

'A GLORIOUS  
WHODUNNIT'  
*OBSERVER*

GUTERSON

THE MULTIMILLION-COPY BESTSELLER

SNOW FALLING  
ON CEDARS

# SNOW FALLING ON CEDARS

David Guterson

B L O O M S B U R Y  
LONDON • BERLIN • NEW YORK

# Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Praise](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[About the Book](#)

[About the Author](#)

[For Discussion](#)

Bloomsbury Publishing, London, Berlin and New York

First published in Great Britain in 1995 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc  
36 Soho Square, London, W1D 3QY

This electronic edition published in 2010 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Copyright © 1995 by David Guterson  
Introduction copyright © 2007 by Nicholas Evans

The moral rights of the author and illustrator have been asserted

All rights reserved

You may not copy, distribute, transmit, reproduce or otherwise make available this publication (or any part of it) in any form, or by any means (including without limitation electronic, digital, optical, mechanical, photocopying, printing, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the publisher. Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 9781408806760

[www.bloomsbury.com/davidguterson](http://www.bloomsbury.com/davidguterson)

Visit [www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com) to find out more about our authors and their books

You will find extracts, author interviews, author events and you can sign up for newsletters to be the first to hear about our latest releases and special offers

*To my mother and father,  
with gratitude*

## Praise for *Snow Falling on Cedars*

'*Snow Falling on Cedars* is a vivid and spellbinding novel, made unforgettable by David Guterson's mastery of detail and his wise and generous heart. I could not put this book down' Colin Harrison, author of *Bodies Electric*

'A beautifully written book, it is in essence a whodunnit, but is so rich a read that it far outstrips its form' *Scotland on Sunday*

'As much a clever thriller as a poetic evocation of a small community ... a novel of both brilliant surface and fascinating depth' *Literary Review*

'An absorbing and beautiful work' *Guardian*

'Dramatic and suspenseful ... *Snow Falling on Cedars* announces the emergence of a skilful writer' *Times Literary Supplement*

'*Snow Falling on Cedars* recalls the great morality fictions of the 19th century. By setting his novel in the fifties, Guterson permits himself to skirt the self-referential tropes, the knowing ironies, the supremacy of desire over personal morality, that have become axiomatic in much intelligent modern fiction. It is a risky gambit, but his haunting book is the richer for it' *Sunday Telegraph*

'Compelling ... a flawlessly written first novel' *The New York Times*

# Introduction

## Nicholas Evans

Ten years ago I was in Seattle, attending one of those so-called literary dinners where authors make speeches to plug their books. I'd just finished reading *Snow Falling on Cedars* for the first time and was in that bereaved limbo you enter when you've been captivated by a book and suddenly it's over. The consolation that evening was that 'local author' David Guterson was going to be there too.

The place was packed with fans, all doubtless eager, as I was, to get their precious copy of his book personally inscribed. We expected him to transport us back to the strawberry fields and salmon-seething waters of San Pedro island. Instead, he took us to an altogether different world, the orchards of Washington State, delivering a witty and informal lecture about apple growers. It was a subject he'd been researching and soon he had us all entranced.

An hour later, he looked at his watch and, with a kind of boyish charm, said he was sorry but he would have to leave immediately or he'd miss the last ferry home. I got to shake his hand but never got my signed copy. What I did get, however, was a glimpse of what I believe helps make *Snow Falling on Cedars* so special: a searing intellect, a fascination with detail and a seemingly infinite compassion and curiosity about what it is to be human. The book business, like the movie business, increasingly likes to label things. Every new work, however original, has to belong to a genre. This extraordinary debut novel has thus been called a whodunnit, a thriller, a courtroom drama. It is all of those things but, in essence, none of them.

From the opening close-up of the man at the story's centre, sitting with dignity in the courtroom where, like the jury, we will witness his trial for murder, we know something special is happening. The court itself, with its groaning, hissing radiators, its grey light, the smell of damp coats and

boots, provides the structure of the story and becomes a kind of character itself: a living, listening, omniscient presence. Beyond its four tall, narrowly arched windows, we watch the snow fall. It is as if life on the island of San Pedro – and indeed time itself – has been suspended until a verdict is reached.

Most novelists attempt to convey a sense of place, but with Guterson we're taken to a different level of knowledge. It soon becomes clear that we are in the hands not simply of a gifted storyteller but of a compulsive researcher. Whether it's the intricacies of gill-netting salmon or of samurai swordsmanship, almost every page teaches us something new. But the detail is measured and never distracts from story or character. We get to know the island as if we have grown up there. We can smell the tang of netted salmon in the salt air, taste the freshly harvested strawberries, hear the drip of rain on the moss and fern of the forest floor.

Although the present tense of the story is on San Pedro in 1954, other places at other times are rendered just as vivid: the desert prison camp, with its stinking latrines and relentless sand-laced wind, where the island's Japanese immigrants are interned after Pearl Harbor; the blood-washed beach in the South Pacific where as a young G.I., Ishmael Chambers – local reporter, spurned lover and our guide through the maze of half-truth, lies and prejudice uttered in the courthouse – is maimed in a poorly planned, heart-thumping, hellish assault.

Guterson's handling of time is masterly. The transitions between present and past are seamless but we always know precisely where we are and through whose eyes we are watching the events unfold. With a fine economy, he opens up his characters' lives and tells us their history, their passions and triumphs, the losses, dashed hopes and disillusionments that have shaped them into who they are. Even the most minor of these people, however tangential to the plot, is given his or her own journey, their souls etched, like characters in a Chekhov play, by some hidden yearning or thwarted ambition.

Ultimately, it has to be this very quality, the novel's understanding of human nature, that has touched the hearts of the many millions who have read it. In particular, it is the compassionate light its author sheds on how the seeds of racism are sown; on the way man and woman, parent and child,

affect each other; on that exquisite pain we inflict on those we love, and who love us, the most.

I'm a slow reader and as I grow older and less patient, there is a test I've come to apply to whether a book has been worth reading. Has it, I ask myself, given me any new insight into the frenzied muddle and puzzle that life seems to be? Without wanting to be too grandiose about it, has it, in short, furthered my understanding of the human condition?

Every time I read *Snow Falling on Cedars*, the answer is an ever more resounding yes.