



County Woman: A Novel

Joan Williams

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A precisely observed portrait of the civil rights era and the gripping story of one woman's unexpected awakening

Itna Homa, Mississippi, is like many small Southern towns in the early 1960s. News travels fast, gossip even faster, and one ugly incident has the power to set the entire community aflame. Forty years ago, the murder of a local white woman shook Itna Homa to its core and resulted in the conviction—based on circumstantial evidence—of a young black man. Now desegregation at the University of Mississippi is the talk of the town, and fear and prejudice once again threaten to tear friends and families apart.

For middle-aged housewife Allie McCall, the civil rights movement offers a welcome opportunity to reconsider her own life. She is open to the new ideas about race, class, and gender that are sweeping the country, and eager to see them gain greater acceptance in her hometown. Shocking her husband, Tate, and confounding the local political establishment, Allie enters the race for town constable against a long-serving and bigoted incumbent. As a voice for progressive reform, Allie hopes to encourage her like-minded neighbors to speak up. But her quest has another, more personal component—it was Allie's mother who was killed all those years ago, and Elgie Hale, the man accused of the crime, has recently escaped from prison. Allie will risk everything—her marriage, her safety, her principles—to track down Hale and determine his guilt or innocence once and for all.

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