



Wild Wives

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Jake Blake is a private detective short on cash when he meets a rich and beautiful young woman looking to escape her father's smothering influence. Unfortunately for Jake, the smothering influence includes two thugs hired to protect her—and the woman is in fact not the daughter of the man she wants to escape, but his wife. Now Jake has two angry thugs and one jealous husband on his case. As Jake becomes more deeply involved with this glamorous and possibly crazy woman, he becomes entangled in a web of deceit, intrigue—and multiple murders. Brilliant, sardonic, and full of surprises, **Wild Wives** is one wild ride.

Wild Wives Details

Date : Published September 9th 2009 by Vintage Crime/Black Lizard (first published 1956)

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Author : Charles Willeford

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From Reader Review Wild Wives for online ebook

Ed says

This fast-paced novella is an unconventional private eye tale populated with seedy, greedy characters. Willeford, having written it under a pseudonym in 1956, rehashes the usual private-eye-falls-for-a-femme-fatale formula. But he throws in enough curveballs to keep the reader off-balance, starting with the first scene where a beautiful young lady struts into the private eye's office. Our lovers eventually make their way to no-holds-bar Las Vegas where the action grows even weirder. I'd say WILD WIVES is great fun to read on a rainy or snowy day.

The Shayne-Train says

This was a slim but satisfying noir novelette that delivers exactly what you want from a slim but satisfying noir novelette.

(MOST CONCISE. REVIEW. EVER.)

wally says

This will be the 4th or 5th Willeford I've read...the last one High Priest Of California that a review or two or more say has been paired with this one. The synopsis has some similarities to that other from Willeford...although this one features a detective, whereas the other featured a used-car salesman...detective work only figured into the story in the way that Frank "Dolly" ...I forget his last name...detected who the woman is that he met at the dance blub....(update:edit: it was Russell Haxby in the Willeford story; whereas it was Frank "Dolly" Dillon in the Jim Thompson story, A Hell of a Woman...but had I not corrected this....and who is to say I'm right?...this'd be the gospel?]

This one begins:

The rain hit hard at my window. It slowed down to a whisper, then hit hard again. All afternoon the rain had been doing this while I sat behind my desk with my feet up, doing nothing. I looked around the ratty little office and wondered vaguely what time it was.

Well it's 8:13 P.M. now on a rainy Monday evening and it's a half-hour past sunset...just getting dark here....onward and upward.

update, complete, Tuesday evening, 6:58 p.m. e.s.t.

What makes this story a joy to read is the comic elements. Jake Blake is a private investigator and it is the interactions between him and the other characters that makes this one a go. Several women enter his life and office where he works in San Francisco....some hotel...though I forget the name of it....his home and office is there.

The 1st is a younger girl, not yet sixteen, and she wants to get into the business. She's a hoot. I'm reminded of those Sunday morning movies, black and white, on the old Magnavox and then that big color beast that was the size of a coffin...Shirley Temple...the girl here is an older version of Shirley...little bit of spice and sauce added. We're going there in a handbasket, as Karl said, as have others, and this is true. So ingredients are added over time.

Then...there's another woman who seeks his services...a paying customer this time...the girl is working w/o pay.

It is the second woman and the interaction between Jake and her that mimics the story in High Priest Of California...w/o going into details, this version is a better read. Why? Why ever? Too good to be true? Those sorts of things? Yeah. Maybe that's it.

Anyway, an enjoyable story and in the end, the wages of sin is punishment so be prepared, be very prepared.

Good read. I'd read it again...this one and the other from Thompson, A Hell of a Woman.

Chris Rhatigan says

Damn, so good. Got this for less than a buck from PlanetMonk Books. This is the kind of book that you won't find in Barnes & Noble anymore--100 pages with zero filler. Protagonist Jake Blake is a sexist, racist, homophobic sleazebag of a PI. But he's entertaining and the action in the book is nearly non-stop without ever feeling forced or repetitive.

Edwin says

Willeford takes what seemingly starts out to be a typical hard-boiled private eye story and turns it on it's head with with this fast paced and insanely plotted noir.

Jim says

Well, this certainly is a fast and fun read!

Liked the twists that happened all the way to the end. My only complaint was the title.

Bran Gustafson says

This early book by Charles Willeford has depth beyond it's deceptively simple plot. At first glance, it's just another detective story, but beneath the surface is an examination of post-war America, with a noir protagonist who has been changed by the war he fought in, and even may be suffering from PTSD beneath his always cool, sarcastic exterior.

Not Willeford's best work, but definitely worth reading if you like noir with a little more depth.

Paul says

Enjoyable, quick little read. Great cover!

Paul says

Interesting novel, utterly bleak and delivered in pithy prose style by Willeford. The narrative is punctuated by moments of excess: casual scenes of dialogue explode into savage violence. A conversation between the protagonist/narrator, his client/lover and her husband is interrupted by her incessant screaming and a close-quarters bout of fisticuffs between the two men. It's hard to tell if this is a cruel fantasy or a deadpan satire of the hardboiled genre (Spillane et al). Given the qualities of Willeford's later work, I'm edging towards the latter.

The protagonist, like Willeford, is a veteran of WWII, and the climax is structured like a PTSD flashback (to use the parlance of our, not Willeford's times), beginning with the protagonist's memory of seeing his first dead body by a roadside whilst traveling in a column in Europe, and ending with him crawling through a ditch, flanking an 'enemy position', in mimicry of his military service.

A fascinating novel.

Drew says

At 93 pages, this book is more like a novella than a novel, which makes sense, as it was originally issued in 1956 as the second half of a double novel, with Willeford's "High Priest Of California" in front of it. Like a B-movie at a double feature, the second half of a double novel doesn't really have to be that long. Willeford's "Wild Wives" is also similar to a B-movie in that it has an action-packed plot, with lots of lurid sex and violence. Finally, like a B-movie, it spends a great deal of its rather short length making little coherent sense. Instead, we follow narrator Jake Blake, a small-time private eye who's always behind on his bills, through a few days of adventures that don't seem to have much connection to each other. Blake is the sort of amoral sociopath that occupies the main role in many of Willeford's early novels, and he rises to the occasion by lying to, beating up, or sleeping with pretty much everyone he runs into for the first half of the novel. Somehow, though, he retains our sympathy, or at least some of it, and when it seems like it all might come back around to bite him in the ass towards the end of the novel, other readers may find themselves, as I did, rooting for him to somehow get away with it all. It'd be wrong for me to comment too much on the climax of the novel, but I will say that it leaves you conflicted as a reader, and highlights Willeford's working-class existentialism. For a quickly-paced noir novel with plenty of subtext about the pointlessness of modern American society, you can't go wrong here. The only disappointing thing about "Wild Wives" is that it's a \$12.95 trade paperback with, as I said, only 93 pages of text. You'd do better to hunt down the Re/Search reissue that pairs it with "High Priest Of California," but then again, it's out of print, and for all I know it commands collector's prices on the secondary market. You can't win.

Richard says

Wild Wives begins with a beautiful, young femme fatale walking into a private detective's office. Sound familiar? Yep, it's a well-used, ordinary convention in hard-boiled detective fiction. But writer Charles Willeford is anything but ordinary. As he did in the last Willeford book I read, *Pick-up*, he turns the genre on its head. In the first two pages of *Wild Wives*, we realize that the femme fatale is a 16-year-old girl, who shoots the detective with a water pistol, bends over his desk, and proceeds to ask him for a spanking.

Thus begins this bizarre, sleazy little hard-boiled novella that has a hefty dose of sex and violence, not to mention a fitting title!

Tfitoby says

Cockfighter keeps popping up on one shelf or another of my recommendations here on Goodreads so when I found this classic hard-boiled novel in an op-shop for \$1 I knew I HAD to try Charles Willeford for myself.

And I wasn't disappointed. It's a tiny novella filled with seedy and conflicted characters and a simple yet convoluted plot. Perfect pulp material.

Three separate parts are vivid in my mind for different reasons; the first being the description and behaviour of Barbara Ann Allen is graphic and shocking in its content like a slap to the face with a block of ice, if you weren't sure that this novel was going to be anything different than a cheap Dashiell Hammett knockoff already then by page 4 you will be 100% convinced.

Willeford follows this up with some gratuitous and unnecessary violence; first you're given a hint as Jake Blake nonchalantly attacks a man without prior warning and a few pages later what amounts to a hate crime with some self-loathing thrown in and some latent homosexuality undertones, is as brutal a beating as I've seen described in literature for quite some time.

The final image I'll leave you with is the climax, Willeford manages to pull a rabbit out of a hat when you didn't even see the hat or the arm reaching in to it, with as true a depressing, existential and classically pulp noir ending as you've ever read.

A fast and enjoyable read but not long enough to truly be called amazing.

Cathy DuPont says

Willeford's description of characters is unique and all his own which is just one reason I like to take a break with his books.

This one is shorter than most books and I can't point to one person as the real 'bad guy' since every person has his (or her) flaws, deep flaws. One reviewer said 'deadpan' humor, and another said 'wry off-beat humor.' I agree with both. Charles Willeford gave writers who read him and who came after him, something to use in

their writing. I'm sure Willeford would have been flattered. Maybe.

James Thane says

First published in 1956, *Wild Wives* is a short but very entertaining novel from Charles Willeford, the author of *Miami Blues* and a number of other crime novels.

Jake Blake is a struggling San Francisco P.I. who lives in the same cheap hotel where he has his office. One slow afternoon, Florence Weintraub, the inevitable Hot Babe essential to the beginning of practically any classic P.I. story, waltzes into his office insisting that she's desperately in need of his help. Even though she's twenty-six years old, her father allows her absolutely no freedom whatsoever and has her accompanied wherever she goes by two goons who are allegedly there to protect her. She'd just like a couple of hours to herself, she says. Could Jake possibly help her lose the two thugs?

Well, of course he can, for twenty-five bucks a day plus expenses. And when the lovely Florence agrees to the terms, one thing inevitably leads to another. Florence is very attracted to Jake and once they finally elude her guardians, they go out to dinner, which Jake naturally adds to the expense account. Other more interesting activities accompany the dinner, and Florence insists that she'd like to see Jake again the following day.

Complications ensue and poor Jake soon finds himself entangled in a mess he never envisioned when he accepted Florence's seemingly simple assignment. It's an engaging story with plenty of Willeford's deadpan humor and enough action to propel the story forward at a fairly rapid clip. While not quite on a par with some of Willeford's better known books, it's still a fun read and will appeal especially to those who have read and enjoyed the author's other work.

Kathy Davie says

A hardboiled PI who's just a bit desperate for cash.

My Take

This was a bit Alfred Hitchcock with a flavor of *39 Steps* about it. I kept waiting for one betrayal, but got several others.

For a private investigator, Blake seems a bit clueless and pretty lazy. Letting those thugs get the jump on him. He simply takes Florence's story at face value. Jumps to conclusions. Fluffs off Bobby.

It seems too that a guy like him would have reacted quite differently to Davis's come-on. That was just not believable. And what was with his bundling up his suit like that to get rid of it? It was like he had something to hide. Then there's the motorcycle cop at the end. If Blake was accused of this particular murder, why would the cop give him his gun??

Willeford did capture the flavor of the times though, and his characterizations were otherwise right on the money if somewhat exaggerated. Something of a necessity in a story as short as this---102 pages.

The Story

Work is slow and Jake Blake jumps at the chance for some easy money helping out a beautiful dame with cash to burn. Too bad he didn't question the circumstances.

Then karma rolls back to bite for his treatment of Bobby.

The Characters

Jake Blake is a hardboiled, cocky private investigator whose business isn't doing well.

Florence Weintraub is a much put-upon twenty-six-year-old whose daddy has surrounded her with bodyguards. **Milton Weintraub** is an architect involved in a number of city projects and they seem to have some sort of sick relationship. **Ferguson** and **Melvin** are the bodyguards.

Detective Sergeant Ernest Tone is a friend. **Lieutenant Stanley Pulaski** is not.

Freddy Allen is a gay man supported by a wealthy art dealer, Jefferson Davis. His sister **Barbara Ann** is a pushy troublemaker who really doesn't deserve what Blake sets her up for. But then, neither does he.

Jefferson Davis is a fellow resident of the hotel and he isn't sure if he has a problem or not.

The Cover

The cover is very 1940ish, 50ish with its fluorescent pink appearing in the background wallpaper, the title, and a curved border at the bottom. The wallpaper itself is a white bamboo print against a radial gradation of pink scattering to gold. Then there's the black-and-white of Florence Weintraub in her diamonds and marabou-trimmed dress.

The title is a misnomer as it's only one wild wife.
