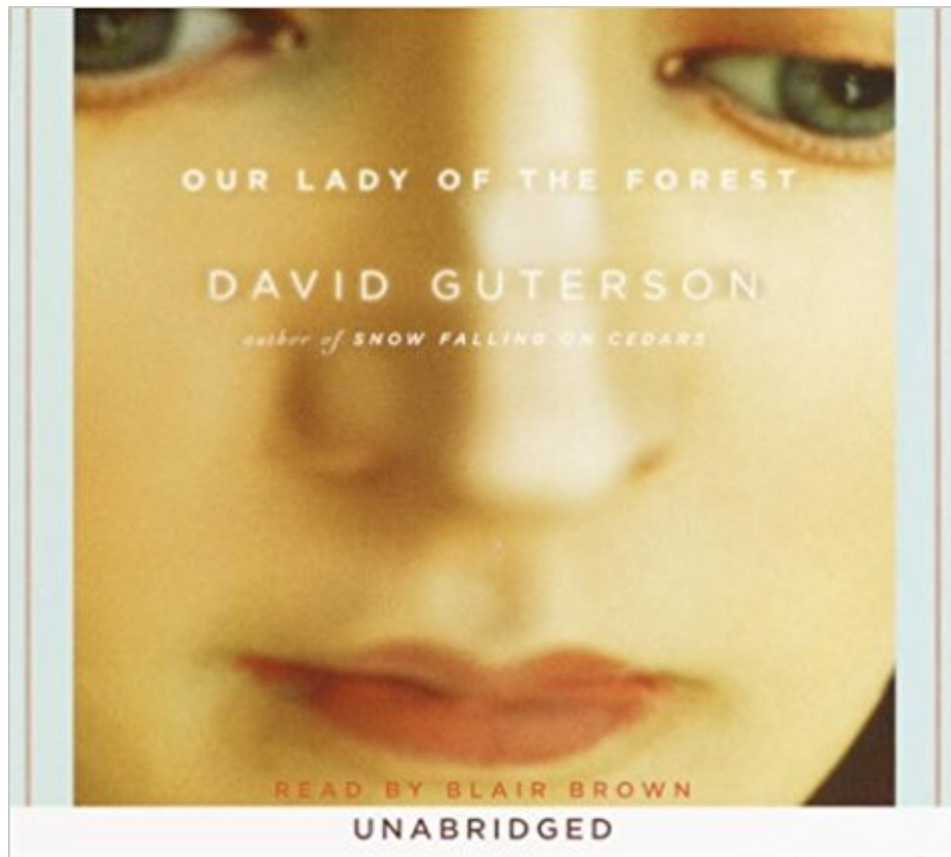


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# Our Lady Of The Forest



## Synopsis

From the best-selling author of *Snow Falling on Cedars* "an emotionally charged, provocative new novel about a teenage girl who claims to see the Virgin Mary. Ann Holmes seems an unlikely candidate for revelation. A sixteen-year-old runaway, she is an itinerant mushroom picker who lives in a tent. But on a November afternoon, in the foggy woods of North Fork, Washington, the Virgin comes to her, clear as day. Father Collins "a young priest new to North Fork" finds Ann disturbingly alluring. But it is up to him to evaluate "impartially" the veracity of Ann's sightings: Are they delusions, or a true calling to God? As word spreads and thousands, including the press, converge upon the town, Carolyn Greer, a smart-talking fellow mushroomer, becomes Ann's disciple of sorts, as well as her impromptu publicity manager. And Tom Cross, an embittered logger who's been out of work since his son was paralyzed in a terrible accident, finds in Ann's visions a last chance for redemption for both himself and his son. As Father Collins searches his own soul and Ann's, as Carolyn struggles with her less than admirable intentions, as Tom alternates between despair and hope, *Our Lady of the Forest* tells a suspenseful, often wryly humorous, and deeply involving story of faith at a contemporary crossroads. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

Audio CD

Publisher: Random House Audio; Unabridged edition (September 30, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0739307541

ISBN-13: 978-0739307540

Product Dimensions: 5.7 x 2 x 4.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces

Average Customer Review: 2.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (113 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #3,454,551 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #4 in [Books > Books on CD >](#)

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## Customer Reviews

In contrast to a couple of other reviewers below, I, as a Catholic, found this book to be an amazing feat of poetic, insightful analysis of the tensions that we all strive to resolve in some manner, between the frailty and caprice of our human nature, especially in the area of sexuality, and our

desire for greater faith and grace, and between the "Church" as simultaneous institution and living organism. As a happily married parent of three children and very active in "mainstream" parish Catholic life, having been involved in charismatic Catholicism and Marian devotional groups, having traveled to Medjugore in the late 80's, having witnessed a supposed "Marian Locutionary" and the surrounding "hoopla" in the Chicago area at about that same time, having seen saints and shams, and having a rather broad knowledge of the various theological, philosophical and mystical topics interjected and alluded to, "en passant," such as Manichean Cosmogony, Kaballah, and Platonic solids, I thoroughly enjoyed the perceptive character development of the various personalities involved, whom the author uses to embody and present the various elements of conflict. Through these personalities and their encounter with this unfolding apparition and the "visionary," we see our humanity exposed, and the Grace of God working in unusual, subtle and surprising ways in dark and hidden undercurrents. In the end, we find that God does indeed "work in mysterious ways" and most often in spite of our foolishness and weakness! For the reviewers who accused the author of being "anti Catholic" and too focused on sex, I would say just the opposite. Yes, if you are offended by the laying bare of our human condition, as in the stark portrait offered in Tom Cross, or the "un-priestly" struggle of Fr.

Our Lady of the Forest runs in fits and starts. This story of young girl who is having visions in the primeval forests of the Pacific Northwest is initially compelling, but then gets more tangled and confusing as it goes along. This is a complicated feat because the novel does not concentrate on an extraordinary amount of characters or themes, yet somehow you find yourself losing your way. Anne, the "Joan of Arc" of the story, is a well drawn character who we are intensely interested in, despite Guterson's error of giving away most of Anne's tortured background right off. However, her friend, sceptic, and chief disciple is made out to be nothing more than a caricature of her own irony. There is no heart beating there, even though the author bestows her with heavy-handed secular motivations such as wanting to steal from the massive collections to fund her winter in the tropics. Indeed, all of the characters aside from Anne and Tom Cross, (an unemployed logger who is mean to the core, but obviously searching for healing,) are just mouthpieces to state religious and philosophical questions that anybody with even a freshman Introduction to Philosophy or Theology class already knows. Within the first few pages we get stuff from Aquinas, Pascal's wager, etc. However, the book doesn't go on to illuminate these ideas or fulfill their arguments. Rather, we get long digressions that ultimately prove frustrating, not in their content, but in their context. The community and the world in which Guterson has set his story is indeed fascinating, but perhaps the

book is too short. I had a feeling that Guterson has too many things going on to be accommodated by the brief length. It seems as if the story ends too soon.

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