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Book Review - Sleeping Above Chaos: A Black Mountain Novel

Jon Hansen

Kennesaw State University, jhansen@kennesaw.edu

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Off the SHELF

Sleeping Above Chaos: A Black Mountain Novel
by Ann Hite (Mercer University Press, 2016:
ISBN 978-0-88146-584-6, \$17.00)

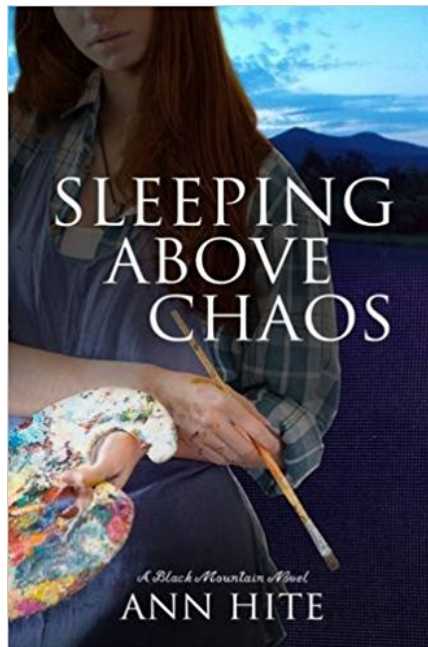
Sleeping Above Chaos is a lively soap opera of a book. Set in the fictional town of Swannanoa Gap, deep in the north Georgia mountains, it tells about the relationships of two brothers, Buster and Lee Wright, and a woman, Ella Ruth Allen, through the 1940s and '50s. This book is a semi-sequel to her previous novels, using some of the same characters and setting; however, it stands alone quite easily.

The book is an excellent example of Faulkner's famous quote from *Requiem for a Nun*: "The past is never dead. It's not even past." The saying is practically a cliché when used to describe Southern literature, but it definitely fits. The characters are pursued by their pasts, and try as they might, they can't outrun them. A clear example of this is Paul Allen, Ella Ruth's long absent father, who is also an important figure to the plot. As we can see at the beginning of the book, when he returns to reclaim Ella Ruth from her grandparents, he is not a kind man:

Paul Allen walked through the room with the frame of Ella Ruth's iron bed.
"That sure looks too big for her room," the new wife said in a high-pitched voice.

Paul Allen stopped, a vein popping out on his forehead like a ridge of mountains.
"Woman, if I need your talk, I'll ask for it."

To Hite's credit, while Allen is a major source of conflict, he is not the sole cause of it by any means. The characters are realistically drawn, each having feelings and opinions and grudges about each other for all sorts of reasons. More importantly, these attitudes motivate them to take action. This keeps things moving along briskly. World events also take a hand, with the start of World War II bringing unexpected challenges.



As seems common for certain kinds of Southern literature, the residents of Swannanoa Gap are visited on occasion by "haints," or ghosts. These are kept somewhat subtle, mainly appearing in dreams or visions, and just subtle enough to suggest their appearance might have been in the characters' imaginations. On the whole, *Sleeping Above Chaos* is a very entertaining read and does much to make the reader want

to return to the town of Swannanoa Gap.

Recommended for public libraries and adult readers.

*Jon Hansen is Head of Virtual Services at
Kennesaw State University*