

# READING GUIDE: Seyward Goodhand's *Even That Wildest Hope*



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Hello Dear Readers.

Thank you for discussing *Even That Wildest Hope*! I thought in this guide I'd try answering imaginary questions I wish someone would ask.

**Why is the book so violent?** It's only a bit violent. The stories bring to consciousness normal things we do, like eating or being ambitious.

**That seems kind of abstract.** Well, I also have a more personal answer. Like many if not all families, mine has dark domestic secrets going back for generations on both sides. A lot of men abusing women, and women siding with their husbands against their daughters, and fathers abusing sons. A real mess. On the other hand, my family is pretty funny and the people in it have a buoyant come-what-may attitude I admire. All of these impulses are my inheritance: the predatory one that sort of consumes another person in order to self-enlarge, the quiet, complicit, fearful attitude that joins forces with the abuser and self-victimizes, and the life-affirming, joyful attitude that keeps on trucking despite it all. My stories very intentionally tap into these dangerous and redemptive emotions. I think self-deception is the most dangerous thing in the world. Not only do we deceive ourselves about our violent, unflattering impulses, we deceive ourselves about our very simple, vulnerable hopes and loves. I hope the book makes you feel how weak, dependent, and lonely we all are, and that this makes you happy. I think this is where our power lies.

**Can we look to art for moral instruction?** Yes, of course. People who say no are closet status-quoists. "I go to art to not be political, or ethical, to escape life?" Yeah right. Art is just a part of life, not something else. I think a story or poem is doing something moral if it takes you past received attitudes and ideas.

**The book looks to older literatures.** Why? Hannah Arendt begins *The Human Condition* with an observation that's really influenced me. We're so technologically and scientifically brilliant, but what do we do with all this intelligence and skill? We invent the atomic bomb. Why is it that we're so smart about details and processes but so thoughtless when it comes to asking simpler questions. Like, why are we doing this? Writing this book, I looked to literatures of the past like *The Epic of Gilgamesh* because Gilgamesh is one of the first things ever written. It emerges a mere 6,000 years ago, when humans formed city-states and organized themselves in terms of property relations. What I discovered is that even back then, the writer of the epic is very concerned with our desire to dominate and destroy nature in order to enlarge ourselves. The writer seems appropriately afraid that human technological power might exceed the limits of our control, and at the same time, celebrates our technological advances. We've struggled with the same paradox for a very long time.

**Why are all the stories so different?** I think every literary mode and register has developed a way to take us beyond our comfort zones. I was trying on a lot of hats here, hoping to transcend my perspective. I think this is what costumes can do. Don't you find when you dress up, there's a weird little creature in you that suddenly springs to life?

**This book has "Hope" in the title—where's the hope?** I hope if we find the courage to be sad and afraid we can experience the depths of love.

Warmly,  
Seyward