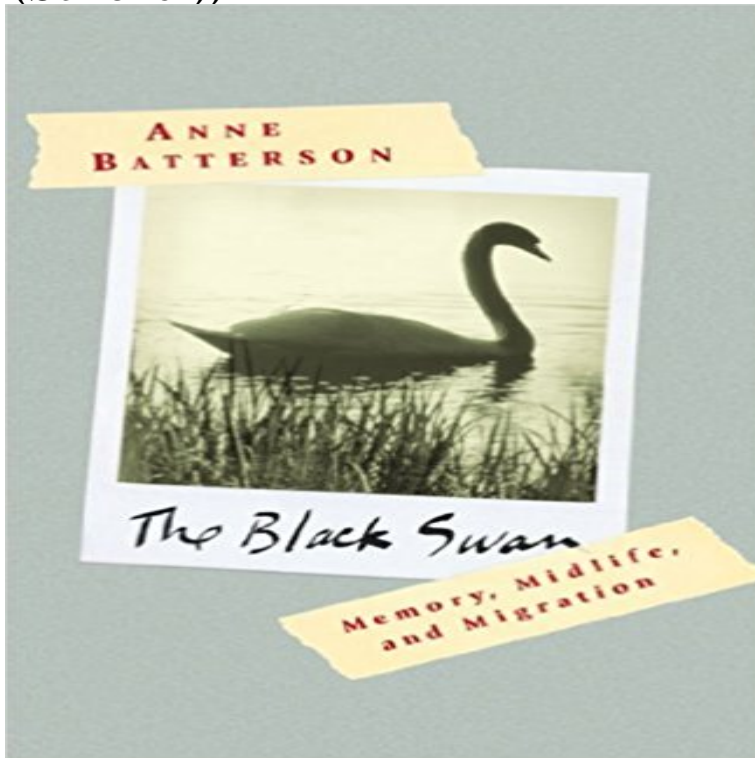


The Black Swan: Memory, Midlife, and Migration (Lisa Drew Books (Scribner))



Set against a spontaneous cross-country road trip following the migrating birds, this passionate, lyrical memoir is one woman's reflections on midlife, her important personal relationships, her kaleidoscopic past, and her uncertain future. To fifty-six-year-old Anne Batterson, a woman whose life has been filled with adventure -- as a commercial pilot, an international skydiving champion, a trekking guide in Nepal -- her husband's decision to retire felt like a death sentence. Yearning for some way to reconcile herself to the future that was rapidly unfolding before her, she packed up her VW camper and hit the road with maps, bird guides, and little else except the desire to follow the fall migration and the bone-deep hunch that birds had something important to teach her. In this beautifully written narrative of that extraordinary trip, Batterson writes movingly not only about her experiences with the birds but also about the people she loves, has lost, and connects with along the way. Events from the present trigger vivid stories from the past. In the chapter *The Journey Within the Journey*, a long, lonely night in a deserted campground in Virginia conjures up the ghosts of a desperate solo road trip she made when she was twenty-one. A towering cumulus cloud in Illinois brings back a breathtaking free fall into a similar cloud in *My Time as a Bird*. An encounter with a great blue heron summons a compelling account of her mother's last afternoon in the world. *Bears in the Woods* describes a run-in with two

Deliverance-type men in West Virginia, which brings back the murder of a dear friend in the woods of Connecticut. By the end of the journey, the ghosts of the past, like the author herself, have become part of a more fluid, more spiritual reality -- wild and spare and elegant and timeless -- one that is always out there, quickening on the far side of reality. A unique mix of memoir and nature writing, The Black Swan is a charming story of a woman's odyssey.

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