



The Den

Abi Maxwell

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A luminous, hypnotic story of youth, sex, and power that tells of two young women who find themselves ostracized from the same small New England community for the same reasons--though they are separated by 150 years.

Henrietta and Jane are fifteen and twelve, growing up in a farmhouse on the outskirts of town. Their mother is a painter, lost in her art, their father a cook who's raised them on magical tales about their land. When Henrietta becomes obsessed with a boy from town, Jane takes to trailing the young couple, spying on their trysts--until one night, Henrietta vanishes into the woods. Elspeth and Claire are sisters separated by an ocean--Elspeth's pregnancy at seventeen meant she was quickly married and sent to America to avoid certain shame. But when she begins ingratiating herself to the town's wealthy mill owner, a series of wrenching and violent events unfold, culminating in her disappearance. As Jane and Claire search in their own times for their missing sisters, they each come across a strange story about a family that is transformed into coyotes. But what does this myth mean? Are their sisters dead, destroyed by men and lust? Or, are they alive and thriving beyond the watchful eyes of their same small town? With echoes of *The Scarlet Letter*, Abi Maxwell gives us a transporting, layered tale of two women, living generations apart yet connected by place and longing, and condemned for the very same desires.

The Den Details

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Author : Abi Maxwell

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Fred says

Requested Library order ebook & CD

Chris says

Abi Maxwell has written a lush and luminous gem of a novel: heartbreaking in some moments, heartwarming in others, and always rich with wonder and surprise. The Den is a book with depth and mystery and soul.

Mischenko says

This book is about two different women and their families. Both women are living on the same farm in New Hampshire, but one during the 1850s and the other around 150 years later.

The first story is told by 12-year-old Jane, younger sister to Henrietta. It's a coming-of-age story and her sister Henrietta is becoming quite promiscuous in her teen years at age fifteen. The girls are left alone often as their parents are busy. Henrietta takes interest in a local boy named Kaus and then a married doctor. She seems wild and oblivious to rules. Jane, like any younger sister, has an interest in everything Henrietta is doing, but doesn't always agree with her behavior. Jane is a few years behind Henrietta and really has no interest in being reckless, but she's still very curious and quite of a nuisance to her sister. When Henrietta shows up missing, everyone questions what happened to her and frantically, they attempt to find her. Henrietta's parents are angry, but it's Jane who's deeply saddened and affected by her absence. Where did Henrietta disappear to?

In the second story, we meet Elspeth, who's living in the mid-19th century. After becoming pregnant, she's forced to quickly marry and leave her home country in Scotland. Her husband—who's already in America—tells her it'll be a better, 'richer' life for them in America. After relocating to New Hampshire with her husband, she moves on to have more children, but she's very bored and longs for home. She misses her family—mainly her sister Claire. She keeps in touch with Claire by sending letters to her. Because she can't afford books yet, she develops an interest in writing romance stories instead. As she writes her fantasies, she wonders what it would be like to be one of these characters she writes about. This eventually catches up with her as she carelessly immerses herself into a dangerous predicament with her husband's boss.

The stories alternate between Jane and Henrietta to Elspeth and Claire. As Jane and Claire attempt to find out what's happened to their sisters, both discover an old myth about a family who had been transformed into coyotes. How are their sisters connected to this story? As you keep reading, you'll discover some interesting links between these two families and their outcomes. I love books like this that fit together like a puzzle, and there are many different pieces between the two stories.

I enjoyed both narratives, but found the beginning a tad boring for my tastes and I had to push myself to keep reading it. I'm glad I did because it wasn't long after that the pacing picked up—the layers started coming together, everything unfolded, and I was enthralled. Once you start putting the clues together, it's hard to stop until the end, and what an ending it was. All I could do was sit and process everything for some time

afterward. This book was never predictable—I found it interesting, captivating, unique, suspenseful and even shocking at times. It was quite a refreshing read.

Some of the themes in this book include coming of age, family, love, independence, motherhood, isolation, and forgiveness, but the stories are ultimately about power over women, how women are punished for their behaviors, and in turn how their predicaments and choices affect others, their futures, and the futures of their families.

I won this book as a giveaway on Goodreads and would like to thank Goodreads, the publisher and the author for sharing this book with me.

4.5****

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