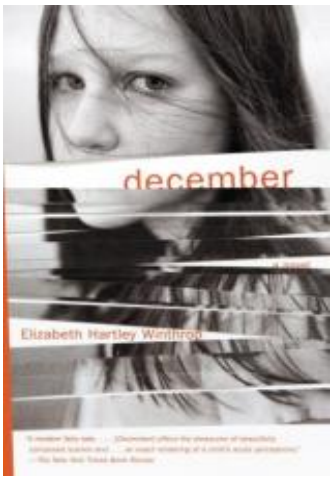
December

by Elizabeth Hartley Winthrop



About the Book

A spellbinding novel about a troubled young girl and a family in crisis, and a gripping, astonishing portrait of recovery and self-determination.

When **December** opens, eleven year old Isabelle hasn?t spoken a word in nearly a year. Four psychiatrists have abandoned her, declaring her silence to be impenetrable. Her parents are at once mystified and terrified by their daughter?s withdrawal, and by their own gradually loosening hold on the world as they?ve always known it. Isabelle?s private school, which has until now taken the extraordinary step of allowing her to complete her assignments from home, is on the verge of expelling her, forcing her parents to confront the possibility that what once seemed a quirk of adolescence, a phase, is perhaps a lifelong transformation, a swift and total retreat from which their daughter may never emerge. *December* paints an unforgettable picture of a family reckoning with a bewildering crisis, and of a critical month in the life of a bright, fascinating girl, locked into an isolation of her own making and from which only she can decide to break free.

Compulsively readable and deeply affecting, **December** is a work of marvelous originality and emotional power from a prodigiously gifted young writer.

Discussion Guide

1. Why did Isabelle stop speaking?

2. Did you like the author?s decision to include Isabelle?s voice as one of the narrators? How would the book have been different if it had been told from one perspective, just the parents? perspective, or only Isabelle?s? Do you think this enriched the book or made it less dramatic?

3. If Isabelle were your child, how would you handle the reality of her not speaking? Do you think that Wilson and Ruth are right to order for Isabelle in restaurants and pretend as if everything is fine?

4. What does Isabelle mean when she thinks, ?Sometimes, the safety she's created by her silence is more terrifying than the world from which she wanted to withdraw? (p. 85)?

5. In what ways is every member of the Carter family ?as guilty of silence, really, as the next? (p. 110)?

6. The teacher at the mother-daughter art class says to Ruth, with regard to her refusal to indulge Isabelle?s behavior, ?Discipline is an important component of art? (p 143). To what extent is Isabelle?s silence a form of discipline? To what extent is it connected to her art? Do you think Isabelle needs more discipline or less to overcome her silence?

7. ?The doctor won?t succeed, he thinks; not one of them has. But Africa, he thinks?he is more certain than ever that somehow, the answer lies in Africa? (p 157). Why does Wilson get so hung up on Africa, after such small encouragement from Isabelle at the start of the book? How do you feel Wilson understands his daughter?s situation? How does Ruth? How does Jimmy?

8. What enables Isabelle to start speaking again?

9.How do Isabelle, Ruth, and Wilson change over the course of the book? Who do you think changes the most or the least and why?

Author Bio

Elizabeth Hartley Winthrop was born and raised in New York City. She earned her B.A. from Harvard University and her M.F.A. in fiction from the UC Irvine, where she was the recipient of the Schaeffer Writing Fellowship. She is the author of FIREWORKS, DECEMBER and THE WHY OF THINGS. She lives in Massachusetts with her husband, daughter and St. Bernard.

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Publication Date: July 14, 2009

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Vintage

ISBN-10: 0307388573

ISBN-13: 9780307388575