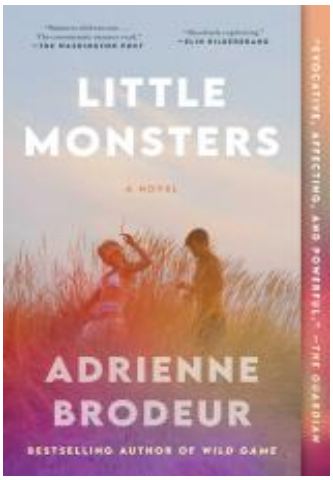
Little Monsters

by Adrienne Brodeur



About the Book

From the author of the bestselling memoir WILD GAME comes a riveting novel about Cape Cod, complicated families and long-buried secrets --- for fans of the *New York Times* bestsellers THE PAPER PALACE and ASK AGAIN, YES.

Ken and Abby Gardner lost their mother when they were small, and they have been haunted by her absence ever since. Their father, Adam, a brilliant oceanographer, raised them mostly on his own in his remote home on Cape Cod, where the attachment between Ken and Abby deepened into something complicated --- and as adults their relationship is strained. Now, years later, the siblings? lives are still deeply entwined. Ken is a successful businessman with political ambitions and a picture-perfect family, and Abby is a talented visual artist who depends on her brother?s goodwill, in part because he owns the studio where she lives and works.

As the novel opens, Adam is approaching his 70th birthday, staring down his mortality and fading relevance. He has always managed his bipolar disorder with medication, but he?s determined to make one last scientific breakthrough. So he has secretly stopped taking his pills, which he knows will infuriate his children. Meanwhile, Abby and Ken are both harboring secrets of their own, and there is a new person on the periphery of the family --- Steph, who doesn?t make her connection known. As Adam grows more attuned to the frequencies of the deep sea and less so to the people around him, Ken and Abby each plan the elaborate gifts they will present to their father on his birthday, jostling for primacy in this small family unit.

Set in the fraught summer of 2016, and drawing on the biblical tale of Cain and Abel, LITTLE MONSTERS is an absorbing, sharply observed family story by a writer who knows Cape Cod inside and out --- its Edenic lushness and its snakes.

Discussion Guide

1. Brainstorm some adjectives you would use to describe Adam, Ken, Abby, Steph and Jenny. Do they share any words in common? What aspects of their identities create the biggest rifts and points of connection between them? Who most resonates with you?

2. Why do you think Adrienne Brodeur chose to set LITTLE MONSTERS in the summer of 2016? How does the charged political atmosphere affect the characters? relationships to each other? What would have happened if the novel took place in the summer of 2017, or the summer of 2012?

3. As Abby?s best friend and Ken?s wife, Jenny is enmeshed in the Gardner family; Steph, on the other hand, is only just introducing herself to the relations she didn?t know she had. Compare and contrast Jenny and Steph?s arcs as they (re-)calibrate their place in this complicated family.

4. The attitude gap between the men and women of the Gardner clan regarding gender figures prominently in LITTLE MONSTERS. Think back to when this difference results in conflict. Who did you align with in those moments? Did you find the character with whom you did not agree sympathetic in any way?

5. Steph has just had a child, Abby is pregnant, and Emily?s premature death --- as well as the short-lived stepmothers who succeeded her --- shape the remaining Gardners in both subliminal and obvious ways. What is the role of motherhood in LITTLE MONSTERS?

6. Cape Cod --- its beauty and wildness --- is a core piece of the novel?s fabric. What were some of your favorite descriptive lines evoking the landscape? Would this book feel different if it was set in New York or California?

7. Ken?s therapy sessions and Adam?s bipolar disorder are the sites of important emotional momentum in LITTLE MONSTERS. Why do you think Brodeur chose to make mental health --- specifically of the male characters --- a key element of their respective characterizations?

8. David is a more minor character, despite his intense and long-held connections to both Ken and Abby. What do you think of him, especially as another third point in a relationship triangle in which Ken and Abby find themselves? Do you think he and Abby will end up together in the end, or will they have a less conventional arrangement?

9. Why do you think Brodeur titled the novel LITTLE MONSTERS, yet the name of Abby?s painting is the singular ?Little Monster??

10. We learn the contours of Ken and Abby?s childhood via flashes of memory --- not all of them reliable. Point to some sentences or passages in the beginning of the novel that hint at the siblings? complex dynamic. Having finished the book, how would you characterize what happened between them when they were young? How would you characterize their relationship now --- and how do you imagine it will affect the other characters in their life?

Author Bio

Adrienne Brodeur is the author of the novel LITTLE MONSTERS and the memoir WILD GAME, which was selected as a Best Book of the Year by NPR and *The Washington Post* and is in development as a Netflix film. She founded the literary magazine *Zoetrope: All-Story* with Francis Ford Coppola, and currently serves as executive director of Aspen Words, a literary nonprofit and program of the Aspen Institute. She splits her time between Cambridge and Cape Cod, where she lives with her husband and children.

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