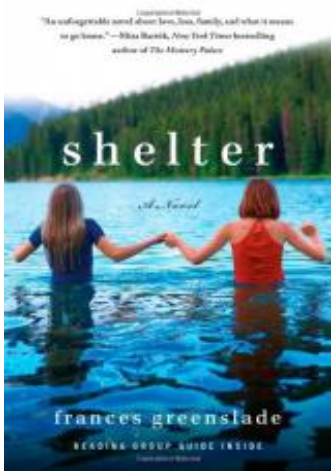
Shelter

by Frances Greenslade



About the Book

Two young sisters search for the truth behind their mother?s sudden, mysterious disappearance.

For sisters Maggie and Jenny growing up in the Pacific mountains in the early 1970s, life felt nearly perfect. Seasons in their tiny rustic home were peppered with wilderness hikes, building shelters from pine boughs and telling stories by the fire with their doting father and beautiful, adventurous mother. But at night, Maggie --- a born worrier --- would count the freckles on her father?s weathered arms, listening for the peal of her mother?s laughter in the kitchen, and never stop praying to keep them all safe from harm. Then her worst fears come true: Not long after Maggie?s tenth birthday, their father is killed in a logging accident, and a few months later, their mother abruptly drops the girls at a neighbor?s house, promising to return. She never does.

With deep compassion and sparkling prose, Frances Greenslade?s mesmerizing debut takes us inside the devastation and extraordinary strength of these two girls as they are propelled from the quiet, natural freedom in which they were raised to a world they can?t begin to fathom. Even as the sisters struggle to understand how their mother could abandon them, they keep alive the hope that she is fighting her way back to the daughters who adore her and who need her so desperately.

Heartbreaking and lushly imagined, **Shelter** celebrates the love between two sisters and the complicated bonds of family. It is an exquisitely written ode to sisters, mothers, daughters, and to a woman?s responsibility to herself and those she loves.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the different women who play the role of mother to Maggie and Jenny. Could any be labeled ?good? mothers, or at least ?better,? than the others? What is the author saying about motherhood, and our expectations of mothers?

2. The majority of the novel is told entirely from Maggie?s perspective. Do you ever wonder about Maggie?s reliability as a narrator? Why or why not?

3. Maggie often takes off on her own, hitch-hiking and camping without adult supervision or permission. What does she find in nature that she doesn?t find at home? How is her relationship with nature different from Jenny?s?

4. Maggie calls herself a born worrier and exhibits a lot of maturity for her age. How much of this is a result of her upbringing and family circumstances? How much is innate?

5. Maggie can?t decide if she pities Chiwid or envies her. What is it about Chiwid?s life that Maggie envies? What does this tell us about Maggie?

6. How does the experiences of spending their vulnerable early teenage years without a mother influence Jenny and Maggie? How do they individually deal with this abandonment?

7. Irene?s relationship with Emil is a strange, albeit loving one. How does knowing their backstory affect your understanding and opinion of Irene? To what degree do you sympathize with Irene and the choices she made?

8. There are many mystical elements to the storytelling in **Shelter**. Why do you think Frances Greenslade chose to tell the story this way?

9. Describe your reactions to the section of the novel comprised of letters from Jenny to Maggie. What did you learn about the two sisters' relationship from these letters? Was there a certain part of Jenny's letters that particularly stood out for you? Describe.

10. Jenny decides to keep her baby. How do you think her own upbringing and relationship with her mother impacted this decision? What would you have advised her to do?

11. The setting of **Shelter** shifts between rural life, town life, and city life: Duchess Creek, to Williams Lake, to Vancouver. How do these different settings shape the story?

12. Other people are caught up in the Dillons? lives: Ted and Bea, Rita, Vern and his Uncle Leslie. How do you think each of these people contributes to shaping Maggie and Jenny as they are growing up?

13. In your opinion, was Irene planning to return? What do you think her vision was for the future?

14. Reflect on your own experiences with mothers and motherhood. How familiar or unfamiliar are the struggles the characters face?

15. The novel closes with Jenny and Maggie building a new family together, planning a cabin on the land Jenny inherited from Emil. What do you imagine their lives will be like in five years? Ten years?

ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB

1. There is a special section dedicated to book clubs on Frances Greenslade's website (www.francesgreenslade.com), which includes a **Shelter** soundtrack of songs from the 1960s and 1970s, a photo album from Greenslade's travels in British Columbia, and reading list of books that Greenslade referenced while writing **Shelter**. Consider listening to the **Shelter** playlist during your discussion or looking at the pictures of British Columbia with your group.

2. Potato Mountain is a real place. You can see pictures online at http://www.summitpost.org/potato-mountain/images/p-282243. Discuss with your book club how well the photos match what you envisioned while reading the book.

3. When was the last time you went hiking? Plan a hike or a walk outdoors with the group. To find local trails in your area, visit www.trails.com. Consider trying to build a model of the shelter Maggie builds with her father.

Author Bio

Frances Greenslade is the author of two memoirs and is the winner of the Saskatchewan Book Award for Non-Fiction. She teaches English in Penticton, British Columbia.

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