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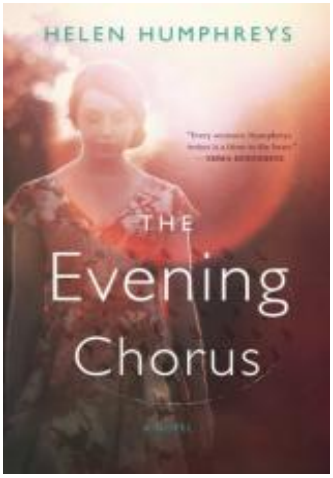
The Evening Chorus

by Helen Humphreys



About the Book

Shot down on his first mission, James is taken to a German POW camp. To bide the time, he studies a family of birds. Some prisoners have been taken out of the camp and shot; some plot escape. And then, one day, the Kommandant invites him for a drive.

With James away, his young war bride Rose is free in a way she has never known --- working as an air raid warden, roaming the countryside with only her dog as company. Until a furloughed soldier brings new choices.

And then James?s sister, Enid, is bombed out of London. She loses her home and her lover in one tragic, impersonal act of war. Her only refuge is her brother?s --- Rose?s --- home. Each is protective of her secrets, but the two form a surprising friendship.

Each of these characters will find liberty amid war?s privations and discover confinements that come with peace. From a writer of ?delicate and incandescent? (*San Francisco Chronicle*) prose, THE EVENING CHORUS offers a beautiful, spare examination of the natural world and the human heart.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel opens with James Hunter in a German POW camp during World War II. He is one of approximately 2,000 prisoners. How do the prisoners pass the time while they are in the camp? How do their choice of activities divide the men?

2. James forms an unlikely friendship while he is a prisoner of war. What is the common ground that unites these two very different men?

3. The men in the POW camp write letters home to their loved ones, and they depend on receiving letters back to maintain their morale. What is the mistake that James makes when corresponding with his young wife, Rose?

4. Rose and James married in haste at the start of the war, as many couples did back then. James?s absence takes its toll on the marriage, and Rose strays. Should she have given the marriage more of a chance? What would she have discovered if she had?

5. When James?s sister, Enid, is forced to come and stay with Rose in the country after being bombed out of her London flat, what does she do to pass the days and keep herself sane while she is there?

6. The second half of the novel takes place after the war. What has happened to the three main characters? Are they more happy, or less happy, in the postwar years?

7. What is the role of the natural world in the novel?

8. There is a 10-year gap between the first part of the novel and the second. How does the passing of time offer perspective and alter how the characters feel about their actions in the first part of the story? What have they learned from this passage of time?

9. The war has changed the lives of everyone in the story. If there had been no war, what do you think the lives of James, Rose and Enid would have been like?

Author Bio

Helen Humphreys? novels include several *New York Times* Notable Books of the Year. Among other awards, she has received the Lambda Prize for fiction and was long-listed for the Dublin Impac. She has written four books of poetry, six novels and two works of creative nonfiction.

Critical Praise

"Humphreys (NOCTURNE, 2013, etc.) offers a heartbreaking yet redemptive story about loss and survival...Humphreys deserves more recognition for the emotional intensity and evocative lyricism of her seemingly straightforward prose and for her ability to quietly squirrel her way into the reader?s heart."

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