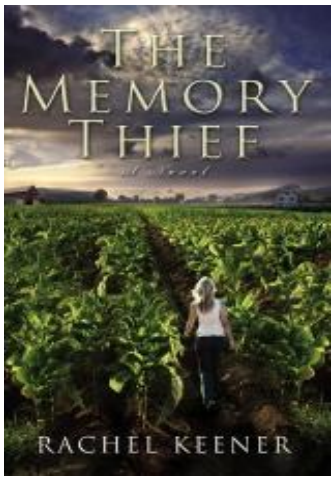
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The Memory Thief

by Rachel Keener



About the Book

When Angel sets fire to her childhood home, it isn?t the end --- it?s the beginning. Left with nothing but a few memories in her pocket and the vague notion that somewhere out there is someone who may want her, Angel escapes into the fields of tobacco, the only place she has ever felt safe. Hidden by those green-gold leaves, she sets her eyes on the mountains and believes someone waits for her there.

Discussion Guide

1. Angel avoids the advances of men describing them as ?horizontal lines? that don?t lead anywhere, while Hannah is easily charmed by the first boy that pays her any attention. What are the reasons for this difference?

2. Angel believes being pretty is ?useful,? to help her get what she needs. Hannah finds beauty seductive and craves affirmation of her own beauty. Mother believes beauty is unnecessary and dangerous. Who do you agree with most? Do you think Mother is right that beauty is particularly important to Hannah because she is a ?true artist??

3. Why does wanting scare Mother? Is it just because of Leah, or is there something else that troubles her? Does Angel get what she wanted? Does Hannah? Does Mother?

4. Angel believes that lies are mercy. Is she right?

5. Why doesn?t Father?s drawn bridge work for Hannah? Why does Father say they?ve worn themselves out trying to build their own bridge?

6. Why, even though Hannah was taught so differently, was it easy for her to let Sam pull her close under that Live Oak tree? Why did the alarms she was taught to hear not work for her?

7. Why is Bethie able to escape Mother?s hold on her, form her own beliefs, and enjoy a normal adulthood? Why isn?t Hannah able to do the same?

8. Did Hannah abandon Angel because she didn?t fight Mother to keep her?

9. Did Hannah, rocking in the empty nursery, really hear Angel cry out to her over the baby monitor?

10. Bethie says ?emptiness is the miracle canvas.? Do you agree?

11. At first glance, Angel and Hannah have very different childhoods. But as their stories develop, shared themes emerge. In what ways were their childhoods similar? Do you think one of them had a worse childhood than the other?

12. Do you agree with Daniel, that ?love is an emergency?? How was love an emergency in this novel?

13. Mother cries that she put ?stones over [her] children.? What were those stones? Were they ever lifted off, or did her children simply learn to live in spite of them?

14. Why was it so important to Angel to tell her story? Why wasn?t it enough just to be reunited with her mother?

15. When Angel wakes up tied down in the basement, she decides that ?blood isn?t nearly as important? as she always thought when it comes to defining a family. What makes a family? Is it shared beliefs, like a bridge? Is it shared desires, like whiskey? How much does ?blood? matter?

16. Who is the memory thief? Are there multiple memory thieves in this novel?

17. Angel believes there are only two kinds of people in this world: Swarms, and those stuck waiting beneath the sycamore tree. Which category does Mother belong to? Father? Bethie? What do you think the future holds for Angel? Does she make it out from under the sycamore tree? What about Hannah?

Author Bio

Much of Rachel's writing is influenced by her Appalachian heritage, and her childhood spent in the mountains of Southwest Virginia and the foothills of East Tennessee. A graduate of Carson Newman College, Rachel moved to North Carolina to attend law school at Wake Forest University. It was there, during class, while her husband took notes for the both of them, that Rachel began to scribble the ideas that would become her first novel **The Killing Tree**. By the time she completed law school she had more than a degree, she had a manuscript, and finally, a clear idea of what she wanted to be "when she grew up." Today, Rachel and her husband call the Winston-Salem area home. She spends her days being a momma to their two little boys. And at night, she writes. Visit her at http://www.rachelkeener.com.

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