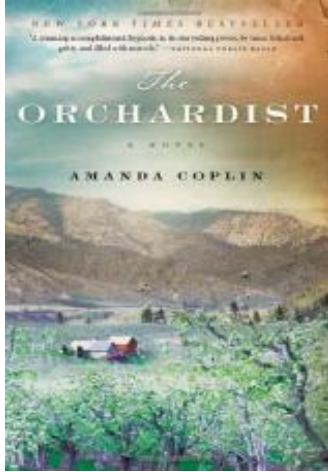


The Orchardist

by Amanda Coplin



About the Book

At the turn of the 20th century, in a rural stretch of the Pacific Northwest, a reclusive orchardist, William Talmadge, tends to apples and apricots as if they were loved ones. A gentle man, he's found solace in the sweetness of the fruit he grows and the quiet, beating heart of the land he cultivates. One day, two teenage girls appear and steal his fruit from the market; they later return to the outskirts of his orchard to see the man who gave them no chase. Feral, scared, and very pregnant, the girls take up on Talmadge's land and indulge in his deep reservoir of compassion. Just as the girls begin to trust him, men arrive in the orchard with guns, and the shattering tragedy that follows will set Talmadge on an irrevocable course not only to save and protect but also to reconcile the ghosts of his own troubled past.

Transcribing America as it once was before railways and roads connected its corners, Amanda Coplin weaves a tapestry of solitary souls who come together in the wake of unspeakable cruelty and misfortune. She writes with breathtaking precision and empathy, and in *THE ORCHARDIST* she crafts an astonishing debut novel about a man who disrupts the lonely harmony of an ordered life when he opens his heart and lets the world in.

Discussion Guide

1. How would you describe William Talmadge, the title character of *THE ORCHARDIST*? What adjective best describes his character? What are the factors that have shaped the man he is?
2. Though he is mostly alone, Talmadge has two good friends, the herbalist Caroline Middey and the Indian horse catcher Cleo. What draws these three people together?
3. When Talmadge first meets the young sisters, Della and Jane, they are stealing his fruit. Why isn't he angry with them? Why does he want to help them? What does he see in them that others might not?

4. Jane told Della that their unborn children were a gift. "They were blessed, said Jane. "It would be themselves they give birth to, only better. That was why she and Della must work so hard to protect them, their children. In protecting the children, Jane and Della would save themselves." Why does Jane tell Della this?
5. Talk about the sisters and the bond they share. Could most people survive the pain and shame of what they were forced to endure? What propels Jane's definitive act? What stops Della from following her? How do these choices reverberate in the years and events that follow?
6. Explore Della's character. Is she a good person? What drives her restlessness? Why is she driven by revenge? Why can't she find solace with Talmadge and Angelene in the orchard?
7. If he could articulate it, how would Talmadge define his relationship to Della? Do you think he thought of himself as Angelene's father? What about Angelene? Though he adored Angelene, "the emotion --- the severity of it --- also made him afraid." What was the root of Talmadge's fear? Why can love be simultaneously wondrous and terrifying?
8. Is there anything Talmadge could have --- should have --- done to keep Della with him and Angelene in the orchard? What hold did Della have on him? Did his concern for Della and his longing for her overshadow his relationship with Angelene?
9. Discuss Angelene and Della. How do they view one another? What kind of person does Angelene grow up to be? How might her life have been different if Della had been present?
10. Could you live as Talmadge did? Do you think he was lonely? Did he enjoy his solitude? What about Caroline, Clee, Della, Angelene? Were they lonely? How is being alone different from being lonely?
11. Talmadge insists that Della should return to the Orchard for Angelene. Caroline questions this. "Do they want each other? Does Angelene even want her, Talmadge?" she asks. He replies. "It doesn't matter what we want. It's blood." How important is blood to family? Are Talmadge, Angelene, and even Caroline a family? Would Talmadge agree with your assessment? What about Angelene and Caroline? What ties individuals together as family? Though they themselves cannot define it, what do each of these characters need from the other --- including Della?
12. Late in the novel, Talmadge watches Angelene working in the cabin. "She was the dream of the place that bore her and she did not even know it." Explain what he means
13. What is the significance of the landscape and the natural world in the novel? How does it relate to and shape the characters and the lives they lead? Can you think of some other books for which landscape is integral to the story? In the century since the novel's setting, we have built over much of our farmland and open spaces. How has this affected us as individuals and as a society? What have we gained? What's been lost?

Author Bio

Amanda Coplin was born in Wenatchee, Washington. She received her BA from the University of Oregon and MFA

from the University of Minnesota. A recipient of residencies from the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and the Omi International Arts Center at Ledig House in Ghent, New York, she lives in Portland, Oregon.

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