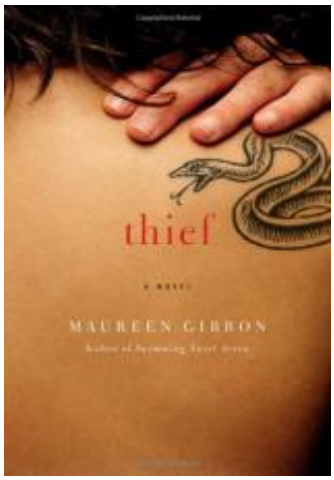
Thief

by Maureen Gibbon



About the Book

A provocative novel that examines the very heart of human endurance, **Thief** introduces readers to a heroine they will not soon forget. The target of a brutal crime at age sixteen, Suzanne has struggled with an inner turbulence for most of her adult life. Yet she defies conventional wisdom about survivors. Seeing herself as neither a shattered victim nor a vigilante, Suzanne embarks on a series of powerful but ultimately unsuccessful relationships. Then one summer she rents a cabin in the north woods of Minnesota, isolated from everything but her memories and her hunger for intensity. Through personal ads, she embarks on two liaisons. One of them begins as a gritty correspondence with a convict named Alpha Breville. The other brings her close to a drifter who is part angel, part howling dog. Through both men, Suzanne begins to probe the truth about herself --- and the truth about the long-ago night that has imprisoned her, body and soul.

The questions and discussion topics that follow are designed to enhance your reading of Maureen Gibbon?s Thief. We hope they will enrich your experience as you explore this unique portrait of trauma and its aftermath.

Discussion Guide

1. How did Suzanne?s story change your understanding of victimhood and survival? Why does Suzanne look for a way to forgive herself for being raped? Why would a woman blame herself for an act of violence someone else committed?

2. Discuss the title. What is stolen in this novel? Who are the thieves (including those who stole Alpha Breville?s innocence when he was young)?

3. Maureen Gibbon?s writing has been compared to the work of Kate Chopin, Anaïs Nin, and Colette. What is your reaction to her frank depictions of women?s sexuality? Would your reaction be different if these scenes had been written by a man?

4. At first, Suzanne wants to write letters that torture Breville. How does the balance of power shift between them throughout the novel? What motivated Breville to respond to Suzanne?s ad, knowing it could only lead to him being tantalized? What does their relationship teach them about themselves?

5. The author was herself a victim of rape at age 16 and later wrote about the experience in various forums, including The New York Times Magazine. She has also worked as an advocate for rape victims, which taught her that there is no single correct way to react after being a target of sexual violence. How does this knowledge of the author?s personal history affect your reading of her novel? Should authors? experiences be part of the conversation when discussing their fiction?

6. How does Suzanne?s past influence the way she copes with the aftermath of rape? Do her strategies liberate her or wound her further?

7. Is **Thief** a love story? If so, is it an entirely tragic one or one with hope?

8. Discuss the various men Suzanne invites into her life, including Julian (who is adept at reinventing himself); her high school boyfriend Cree; the unstable Richaux; and her fatherly landlord, Merle, as well as Breville and the cowboy (Brill). What do these characters indicate about Suzanne?s evolving needs?

9. How do the settings reflect Suzanne?s experiences? Why does she choose a prolonged rural sojourn over life in the Twin Cities? What natural state does she enjoy while swimming in a lake? How does her state of mind change when she has to conform to the regulations of prison? Which ?settings? in your life story have shaped you in significant ways?

10. In this day of email, texts, and tweets, what role do handwritten letters and phone calls play in our lives? To whom do you still write letters? Why? What can be conveyed in a phone call that can?t be conveyed by electronic media? Do personal ads and online dating services create unrealistic illusions? How do communications between Suzanne and Breville change after they meet in person?

11. What does Suzanne?s willingness to correspond with an incarcerated rapist say about her? Is it an extreme act that shows a lack of boundaries, or a brave attempt to understand a truth no matter the cost? Does Breville have much in common with Frank L --- and Keil Ward?

12. The author chose first-person narration for Thief, allowing Suzanne to tell her story. What do Suzanne?s voice and storytelling style tell you about her?

13. Does Breville deserve to win an appeal? Was he wronged by the legal system? How did your opinion of him shift throughout the novel?

14. What do the novel?s closing scenes say about scars and healing? Is Suzanne healed in those scenes, or simply transformed? Ultimately, what message does Thief send to survivors of rape?

15. Gibbon?s previous novel, Swimming Sweet Arrow, and her book of poems, Magdalena, feature women who attempt to navigate life?s currents on their own terms. What themes are woven throughout all of Gibbon?s depictions of women? In what ways does Suzanne nonetheless represent a departure for Gibbon?

Author Bio

Maureen Gibbon is the author of **Swimming Sweet Arrow**, a novel, and**Magdalena**, a collection of prose poems. A graduate of Barnard College and the Iowa Writers? Workshop, she has received a Bush Foundation Artist Fellowship, two Loft McKnight Artist Fellowships, and a residency at the Santa Fe Arts Institute.

Her writing has been translated into French, German, Norwegian, and Spanish, and has appeared in *The New York Times* and *Playboy* and on nerve.com. She lives in northern Minnesota, where she teaches writing. Visit her at http://www.maureengibbon.com.

Critical Praise

"Gibbon writes beautifully of the heartbreaking gulf between expectation and reality that women continue to endure, and the tragedies that await those who refuse to abide by these difficulties. It is her heroine?s refusal to be afraid, her understanding of the violence at the heart of things, her embrace of the world?s beauty, and her great conscience that save her, and inspire the reader."

Thief
by Maureen Gibbon

Publication Date: April 27, 2010
Paperback: 192 pages
Publisher: Sarah Crichton Books
ISBN-10: 0374274541
ISBN-13: 9780374274542