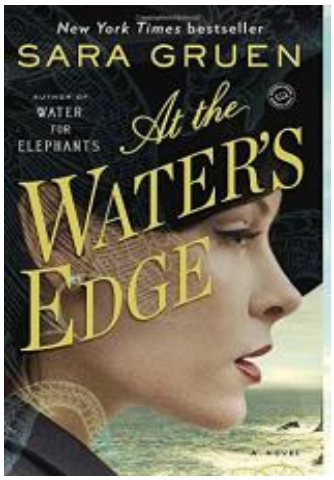
At the Water's Edge

by Sara Gruen



About the Book

In this thrilling new novel from the author of WATER FOR ELEPHANTS, Sara Gruen again demonstrates her talent for creating spellbinding period pieces. AT THE WATER?S EDGE is a gripping and poignant love story about a privileged young woman?s awakening as she experiences the devastation of World War II in a tiny village in the Scottish Highlands.

After disgracing themselves at a high society New Year?s Eve party in Philadelphia in 1944, Madeline Hyde and her husband, Ellis, are cut off financially by his father, a former army colonel who is already ashamed of his son?s inability to serve in the war. When Ellis and his best friend, Hank, decide that the only way to regain the Colonel?s favor is to succeed where the Colonel very publicly failed --- by hunting down the famous Loch Ness monster --- Maddie reluctantly follows them across the Atlantic, leaving her sheltered world behind.

The trio find themselves in a remote village in the Scottish Highlands, where the locals have nothing but contempt for the privileged interlopers. Maddie is left on her own at the isolated inn, where food is rationed, fuel is scarce and a knock from the postman can bring tragic news. Yet she finds herself falling in love with the stark beauty and subtle magic of the Scottish countryside. Gradually she comes to know the villagers, and the friendships she forms with two young women open her up to a larger world than she knew existed. Maddie begins to see that nothing is as it first appears: The values she holds dear prove unsustainable, and monsters lurk where they are least expected.

As she embraces a fuller sense of who she might be, Maddie becomes aware not only of the dark forces around her, but of life?s beauty and surprising possibilities.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel takes place during World War II. Is the war setting a distraction, or does it contribute to the success of the novel? Would changing the time frame change the meaning of the novel? How did the austerity of the times affect Maddie, who was used to a life of luxury? Have you ever discussed what things were like during the Great Depression and World War II with family members who lived through it? What stories did they share with you?

2. *?What I learned over the past year was that monsters abound, usually hiding in plain sight.?* Monsters come in all different forms in AT THE WATER?S EDGE. What are some of the monsters in the novel? How are they different from what you might expect?

3. Throughout AT THE WATER?S EDGE, Maddie transforms from a woman who is spoiled, naïve and helpless to one who is brave and capable. What and who are the major influences that lead her to change? What are the biggest lessons Maddie learns throughout the course of the novel?

4. Discuss the novel?s ambiguity concerning the supernatural. How does Gruen blend mystical elements into the narrative?s realism?Did Ellis and Hank find the Loch Ness Monster after all?

5. Do you think Maddie and Ellis were ever truly in love? What did you think of Ellis? Did you sympathize with him? Did Ellis change as a character in the course of the novel or did the changes all take place within Maddie?

6. How did you feel about Hank? Did he evolve during the course of the novel, or did his character remain the same?

7. The idea for AT THE WATER?S EDGE came to Sara Gruen during a visit she took to Scotland. She became fascinated with the ruins of old castles, the wild beauty of nature and Scottish history and folklore. Discuss the role the landscape and atmosphere of Scotland plays in the novel.

8. Discuss the evolution of Maddie and Angus?s relationship. What were some of Angus?s qualities that Maddie grew to most admire? At what point do you think she realized she loved him?

9. AT THE WATER?S EDGE explores humanity at its most base, as well as its most noble. Can you give some examples of both from the story? In the end, what kind of statement do you think Gruen makes about human nature?

10. Before she goes to Scotland, Maddie only has Ellis and Hank as friends. How do the female friendships she develops in Scotland shape her in new ways?

Author Bio

Sara Gruen, the author of AT THE WATER?S EDGE, APE HOUSE and WATER FOR ELEPHANTS, moved to the United States from Canada in 1999 for a job as a technical writer. She was laid off in 2001 and decided to pursue a lifelong dream of writing fiction. She has published five novels, each involving animals as full-fledged characters; the first two, RIDING LESSONS and FLYING CHANGES, about horses, were published as mass market originals. Gruen lives in North Carolina with her husband, three sons and a menagerie of rescued animals. She donates a portion of her earnings from all of her books to various animal charities.

Photo Credit: © Tasha Thomas

Critical Praise

"I devoured this book. Sara Gruen has proven herself, once again, to be one of America's most compelling storytellers.... You might be tempted to rush to get to the answers at the end --- but don't --- or you'll miss the delectable journey that is Gruen's prose."

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