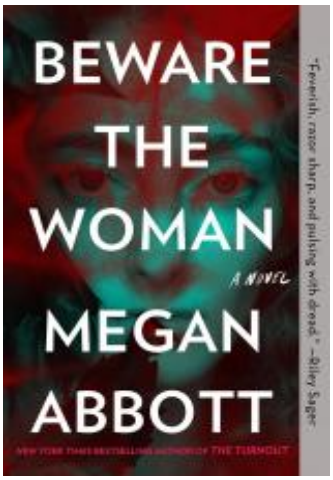
Beware the Woman

by Megan Abbott



About the Book

By the "master of thinly veiled secrets often kept by women who rage underneath their delicate exteriors" (*Kirkus Reviews*), BEWARE THE WOMAN is Megan Abbott at the height of her game.

Honey, I just want you to have everything you ever wanted. That?s what Jacy?s mom always told her. And Jacy felt like she finally did. Newly married and with a baby on the way, Jacy and her new husband, Jed, embark on their first road trip together to visit his father, Dr. Ash, in Michigan?s far-flung Upper Peninsula. The moment they arrive at the cottage snug within the lush woods, Jacy feels bathed in love by the warm and hospitable Dr. Ash, if less so by his house manager, the enigmatic Mrs. Brandt.

But their Edenic first days take a turn when Jacy has a health scare. Swiftly, vacation activities are scrapped, and all eyes are on Jacy?s condition. Suddenly, whispers about Jed?s long-dead mother and complicated family history seem to eerily impinge upon the present, and Jacy begins to feel trapped in the cottage, her every move surveilled, her body under the looking glass. But are her fears founded? Or is it paranoia, or cabin fever, or --- as is suggested to her --- a stubborn refusal to take necessary precautions? The dense woods surrounding the cottage are full of dangers, but are the greater ones inside?

Discussion Guide

1. Author Megan Abbott prefaces BEWARE THE WOMAN with a quote from Erica Jong. Discuss this quote as it relates to the title. How did this prime your reading of the text?

2. From the beginning, we witness a certain ferocity to Jed and Jacy's relationship. Discuss the impact of starting the story where it begins --- with Jed and Jacy on their way to Dr. Ash. How would your reading of the novel differ if it had started at the onset of Jed and Jacy's relationship?

3. Jed says he had never been in love before Jacy; he'd only been sick with love. How do you distinguish these two experiences? In what ways do fear and love interact in this novel?

4. In the early chapters, Jacy says, ?I felt silly. I was silly. The hormones, yes. The hormones are killing, killing. It's just the hormones, I swear.? How this quote speak to common perceptions around the female body? Discuss what this reveals about Jacy's state of mind and to what extent it foreshadows the story's later events.

5. Early on, Jacy's mother tells her, ?We all marry strangers.? To what extent do you think this is true, or does it suggest more about Jacy's mother?

6. The idea of consciousness is explored throughout BEWARE THE WOMAN. In the context of this story, what does it mean and take to be ?awake? for each of the characters?

7. Each woman's "onstage" illustration places them in a more vulnerable light than the men. To what extent are all the women's paths parallel?

8. BEWARE THE WOMAN takes place in the remote Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Describe the elements of the location and how it lends itself to the themes of the story. Discuss how ideas of home interact with place, especially in relation to where Jed feels most comfortable.

9. The mountain lion makes its presence known a few times in the story. Discuss why you think Abbott chose the moments she did to reveal these creatures and what they might symbolize. How does each character react to the lion, and what does this reveal about them?

10. Caretaking is a big theme in the novel. How do the women in this story protect their own and each other? How does this contrast with how the men nurture others in this story?

11. Describe Dr. Ash's characterization --- how Jacy sees him at first, then later as the story progresses. How does he view his place in the world? What do you think he ultimately wishes for his son?

12. BEWARE THE WOMAN speaks to how violence and tragedy can infiltrate both the human body and psyche. In which scenes did you most viscerally discern the connection between body and mind, and for which characters? Why?

13. A shocking act of violence is revealed toward the end of BEWARE THE WOMAN. How did you react to the incident? Describe the emotions it spurred.

14. What do you think will happen with Jacy and Jed?

Author Bio

Megan Abbott is the Edgar Award-winning author of 12 crime novels, including YOU WILL KNOW ME, GIVE ME YOUR HAND and the *New York Times* bestseller THE TURNOUT, the winner of the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize. She received her Ph.D. in English and American literature from New York University, and her writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, the *Paris Review* and the *Wall Street Journal*. "Dare Me," the series she adapted from her own novel, now streaming on Netflix.

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