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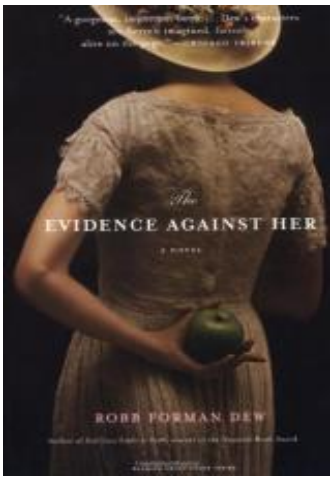
The Evidence Against Her: A Novel

by Robb Forman Dew



About the Book

On a bright September day in 1888, in the town of Washburn, Ohio, three children are born within hours of one another?Robert Butler, Lily Scofield, and Lily?s first cousin, Warren?and they are nearly inseparable from birth. When Robert and Lily marry, Lily feels assured that she will always have as her own the two people she has most loved all her life. The charmed circle Lily has always imagined is threatened when Agnes Claytor, a young woman from another prominent Washburn family, falls in love with Warren Scofield?disrupting not only life within the Scofield and Claytor families but in the small town of Washburn itself.

At its heart, **The Evidence Against Her** is about romance?the romance of the close ties of childhood, the romance of new love, of ambition, and of family myth. Robb Forman Dew traces the origin of an American family from its inception, with the gradual confluence through marriage of the Scofields, the Butlers, and the Claytors. Although it is the women of these families who bear the brunt of the responsibility for family happiness, the her of the title is as slippery and hard to pin down as the evidence itself.

The Evidence Against Her is about the persistently human pursuit of happiness even in the face of all the evidence that it may not be achieved. Robb Forman Dew paints her largest canvas thus far, offering readers a whole world to inhabit, remember, and wonder about long after the book is finished. This is a tender, luminous story that readers will ache to follow into the next generation.

"**The Evidence Against Her** is Robb Dew's masterpiece, a moving story of family and history that has all the makings of a classic. No one writes more beautifully of place, and no one sees more wonderfully into the patterns of life and time."

Discussion Guide

1. The author goes to great lengths to give us an idea of the life of girls at school. Do you think there was any humor underlying these descriptions? Why do you think these details are so thoroughly investigated? Are there other books you can think of in which the lives of girls are considered interesting?

2. Compare the family structures of the Butlers, Scofields, and Claytors. Are the families more alike or more disparate behind closed doors? How do Catherine, Audra, and Lillian compare as mothers? What about Dwight, Leo, and John? Do the men or the women of the family hold more influence or bear more responsibility for each family's happiness?

3. Lily Scofield can be, by turns, a somewhat enigmatic figure in the town of Washburn. How does our understanding of Lily shift as the book progresses? Were there moments of great surprise when you discovered something about her that you wouldn't have expected, or when points of character were revealed that you found shocking? What do you think motivates her actions, both within her "inner circle" and to the town at large?

4. Lily at first seems to be a young woman who has everything she could want. Does that make her someone with whom it's hard to sympathize? Have you ever had a friendship that is at all like the relationship Lily and Agnes have by the end of the novel?

5. Catherine Claytor is obsessed with beauty and appearances. How does this influence Agnes's state of mind, her actions, and her relationships with other people? Are there traits of Dwight Claytor that contribute to Agnes's development?

6. When Agnes becomes absorbed with her own life and begins to let the events of the Claytor household take care of themselves, did you think she was selfish? Why do you think that Catherine finally stepped in and became happier and more organized? Did you find the moments when Agnes and her mother are giving Bandit a bath ominous or moving or both?

7. Is Agnes attracted to Warren Scofield or does she only see him as a way to escape her own family? Does Warren love Agnes, or is it only time for him to settle down? How does life under the Scofields' roof affect Agnes? Does Agnes discover anything unexpected about the household? How does Warren and Agnes's marriage affect the family relationships?

8. The death of John Scofield seems to have several different versions, depending on whose viewpoint one takes. Which do you think is the correct one? Does it matter what the absolute truth is?

9. What other anecdotes, occurrences, and myths seem to be subject to interpretation in the book? How do the different versions come to be? Are there similarities in the way stories, opinions, and lore become altered? Do these small differences influence future events?

10. Warren is startled to discover that the statue in Monument Square reads "Our Country! By that dread name . . ." instead of "that dear name." What is the irony of this realization? Does this hold any significance when placed in the context of the previous question?

11. Discuss the nature of the original "trio's" relationship. What were your expectations of how they would live as adults? Compare this to the relationships of young Betts and Trudy, and of the "twins." Is this history repeating itself or

are things different for the new generation?

12. At the end of the book, Agnes begins to believe that she has managed to create a happy family, and she believes it will go on forever and ever. Do you think that's what will happen? In light of the fact that this is the first of a planned trilogy, do you think this might be a bit of foreshadowing?

13. Who do you think is the "her" of the title? And what is "the evidence"? Does the title change your assessment of the book? Do you think there is a single answer to this question, or does it seem to be purposely ambiguous? Did you ever stop for a moment while reading this book in order to reconsider a moment in your own life?

Author Bio

Robb Forman Dew is the author of the novels DALE LOVES SOPHIE TO DEATH, for which she received the National Book Award, THE TIME OF HER LIFE and FORTUNATE LIVES. She also penned the *Washburn Trilogy* (THE EVIDENCE AGAINST HER, THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER and BEING POLITE TO HITLER), which chronicles the evolution of American family life through the 20th century, as well as a memoir, THE FAMILY HEART. She lives in Williamstown, Massachusetts, with her husband, who is professor of history at Williams College and the author of several books of Southern history.

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