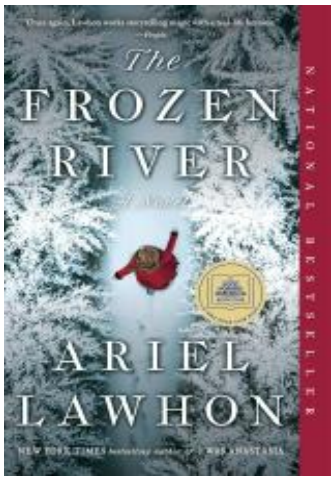
ReadingGroupGuides
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The Frozen River

by Ariel Lawhon



About the Book

From the *New York Times* bestselling author of I WAS ANASTASIA and CODE NAME HÉLÈNE comes a gripping historical mystery inspired by the life and diary of Martha Ballard, a renowned 18th-century midwife who defied the legal system and wrote herself into American history.

Maine, 1789: When the Kennebec River freezes, entombing a man in the ice, Martha Ballard is summoned to examine the body and determine the cause of death. As a midwife and healer, she is privy to much of what goes on behind closed doors in Hallowell. Her diary is a record of every birth and death, crime and debacle that unfolds in the close-knit community. Months earlier, Martha documented the details of an alleged rape committed by two of the town?s most respected gentlemen --- one of whom has now been found dead in the ice. But when a local physician undermines her conclusion, declaring the death to be an accident, Martha is forced to investigate the shocking murder on her own.

Over the course of one winter, as the trial nears, and whispers and prejudices mount, Martha doggedly pursues the truth. Her diary soon lands at the center of the scandal, implicating those she loves, and compelling Martha to decide where her own loyalties lie.

Clever, layered and subversive, Ariel Lawhon?s newest offering introduces an unsung heroine who refused to accept anything less than justice at a time when women were considered best seen and not heard. THE FROZEN RIVER is a thrilling, tense and tender story about a remarkable woman who left an unparalleled legacy yet remains nearly forgotten to this day.

Discussion Guide

1. How did life in Hallowell in 1789 surprise you? Did the characters act as you expected for the historical period? What revelations were most interesting to you? How does our contemporary notion of the American dream apply to these

characters?

2. Throughout the novel, Martha is frequently called to deliver babies from women of all walks of life. Have you or anyone you know delivered a child with the assistance of a midwife? Which laboring mother did you feel most connected to?

3. ?Memory is a wicked thing that warps and twists. But paper and ink receive the truth without emotion, and they read it back without partiality.? (p 39) Martha?s diary is a critical component of the novel, and a key piece of evidence in Rebecca?s trial. Have you ever kept a diary? If not, did reading THE FROZEN RIVER influence you to start?

4. Much of the novel?s action focuses on the legal process surrounding Rebecca Forster?s assault and Martha?s testimony. Were you surprised at the way the 18th-century judicial process unfolded? Do you think Rebecca?s story would have been received differently in a contemporary courtroom?

5. The Ballards are an incredibly close-knit family. Did you have a favorite character among Martha and Ephraim?s brood? Was there a relationship between one of Martha?s children and their suitors that you were particularly cheering for?

6. Experts are few and far between in Hallowell, making Martha and Doctor?s medical knowledge all the more important, and making Doctor Page?s poor advice especially dangerous. Would you have acted differently in Martha?s place to warn the townspeople about Page?

7. Martha and her daughters spend much of the novel immersed in everyday household labor such as making candles, baking bread, weaving and killing chickens. Were there any 1780s tasks you?d be interested to try for yourself?

8. What did you think of the way Martha and Ephraim?s past is revealed in the interstitial chapters? What did those glimpses of their earlier years reveal about them as the 1789 story unfolded? Which moments in their love story struck you most deeply?

9. Martha says the townspeople dislike her. Ephraim disagrees: ?They respect you. Perhaps occasionally fear you. It?s not the same thing.? (p 56) When is it better to be honest than it is to be well liked?

10. Sally and Sarah are set up in opposition to each other throughout the novel, and Martha guesses incorrectly about both of their futures. Did you see those plot twists coming? Would you have acted differently toward either woman if you had been in Martha?s shoes?

11. Martha?s final confrontation with North has lasting consequences for both of them. Do you think justice was done? What about in regards to Rebecca?s assault and Burgess? killing? Would you have made the same choice as Martha?

12. If THE FROZEN RIVER was adapted for film or television, who would you cast in the leading roles? Are there any components of the story you think would be especially striking to see acted out on screen?

13. Did you read the author?s note? If so, did it change your evaluation of Martha?s life and the story of the ?year of the long winter??

Author Bio

Ariel Lawhon is a critically acclaimed, *New York Times* bestselling author of historical fiction. Her novels include THE PIRATE QUEEN; THE FROZEN RIVER, CODE NAME HÉLÈNE; I WAS ANASTASIA; FLIGHT OF DREAMS; THE WIFE THE MAID AND THE MISTRESS; WHEN WE HAD WINGS (co-written with Kristina McMorris and Susan Meissner); and BARRIERS TO ENTRY, an Amazon Original Short Story. Her books have been translated into numerous languages and have been "Good Morning America" Book Club, LibraryReads, One Book One County, Indie Next, Costco, Amazon Spotlight, and Book of the Month Club selections. She lives in the rolling hills outside Nashville, Tennessee, with her husband and four sons. She splits her time between the grocery store and the baseball field.

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