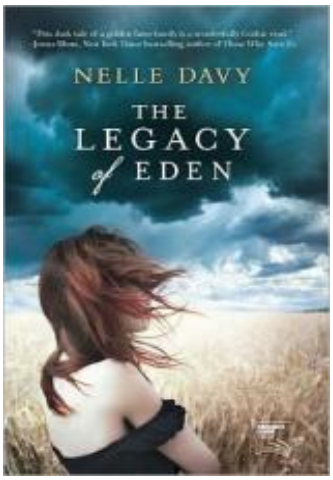
ReadingGroupGuides
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The Legacy of Eden

by Nelle Davy



About the Book

For generations, Aurelia was the crowning glory of more than three thousand acres of Iowa farmland and golden cornfields. The estate was a monument to matriarch Lavinia Hathaway?s dream to elevate the family name --- no matter what relative or stranger she had to destroy in the process. It was a desperation that wrought the downfall of the Hathaways --- and the once-prosperous farm.

Now the last inhabitant of the decaying old home has died --- alone. None of the surviving members of the Hathaway family want anything to do with the farm, the land or the memories.

Especially Meredith Pincetti. Now living in New York City, for seventeen years Lavinia?s youngest grandchild has tried to forget everything about her family and her past. But with the receipt of a pleading letter, Meredith is again thrust into conflict with the legacy that destroyed her family?s once-great name.

Back at Aurelia, Meredith must confront the rise and fall of the Hathaway family...and her own part in their mottled history.

Discussion Guide

1. How much is Lavinia the architect of her family?s downfall? Is she the cause of their destruction, or had they already willingly created the situations that would ultimately lead to their ostracism and exile?

2. What do you make of the role of mothers in the novel? Lavinia, Julia and even Antonia all have devastating impacts on their children. What do you make of their approaches to motherhood and their relationships with their children?

3. Meredith faces a heartrending and difficult journey back to Iowa to confront her family?s past. How much do you

empathize with Meredith?s place in her family?s history? What do you make of the final reveal of her betrayal of Ava? Do you agree with the reasons for why she fled and her need for self preservation or do you find her ultimately as selfish and as cruel as the other members of her family?

4. What do you make of Piper?s relationship with Lavinia? Why do you think Lavinia cries when Piper dies, but doesn?t when she discovers Cal Sr., dead in bed next to her? How much of an adversary is Piper to Lavinia?

5. Is Julia a victim or does she deserve her exile from the farm? Is she the cruel, spoiled, capricious monster Lavinia portrays her to be, or is her character poisoned and influenced by the jealous influences of her stepmother? What effect does her abandonment have on Cal Jr.? And why do you think she never comes back for him?

6. Forgiveness is a running theme through the novel. To what extent, if any, do the characters deserve forgiveness or sympathy for their actions?

7. To what extent are the men passive participants in the novel? Are they merely puppets manipulated and controlled by the female characters in the book or do they willingly and actively participate in the family?s politics?

8. To what extent can it be argued that Aurelia is the central character of the novel? What do you make of the bloodletting ritual of the Hathaways and the notion that the farm was a world in its own right? What do you make of the portrayal of the outside world compared with that of Aurelia?

9. How do you interpret the ending of the novel and the last line ?And I go home?? Do you think this means Meredith has accepted her past or is unable to escape it?

10. What do you make of the relationship between Meredith and her sisters? Do you agree with her assertion that they never really knew each other because of how much they hid from one another? Was their relationship doomed because of the effects of Lavinia?s machinations or were Meredith, Ava and Claudia the cause of the break in their sisterly bond?

Author Bio

Nelle Davy was originally born in St George?s Grenada under the name Janelle (which she always hated and immediately shortened when she went to University). She moved to London when she was nine months old because her grandfather was English and her parents supposedly wanted a better life. She got a scholarship to Sir William Perkins School for girls where she had a wonderful English teacher Mrs. Wells who encouraged her constantly in her love for books. She went to Warwick University to study English with Creative Writing where after swearing she would never marry, she met her future husband. She did a masters in Creative Writing at Trinity College Dublin and then moved back to London in 2007 where she almost immediately began working in publishing. After working at Pan Macmillan she moved to work at a literary agency while also writing and pursuing a career as a novelist on the side.

She is 27 years old, and THE LEGACY OF EDEN is her first novel. She has finished writing a second novel based on the civil rights movement in Louisiana in 1963. She still lives in London with her husband and still works full time in publishing.

Critical Praise

"Combine Daphne DuMaurier with Jane Smiley, and you'll get THE LEGACY OF EDEN. This dark tale of a golden farm family is a wonderfully gothic read."

--- Jenna Blum, bestselling author of THOSE WHO SAVE US and THE STORMCHASERS

?A haunting tale, beautifully written. An impressive debut.?

--- Sarah Winman, author of WHEN GOD WAS A RABBIT

?Utterly gripping, Davy?s effortless story-telling style reels you in from page one, and soon you?ll find yourself absorbed in the shockingly amoral machinations of Lavinia and the monster she creates.

Think THE LONG SONG meets GONE WITH THE WIND, if you?re a fan of juicy, epic family sagas this will be right up your street.?

--- *Red Magazine*

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Publication Date: January 31, 2012
Genres: Fiction
Paperback: 384 pages
Publisher: Mira
ISBN-10: 0778329550
ISBN-13: 9780778329558