



At the Water's Edge by Sara Gruen

About the author:

Sara Gruen is the #1 New York Times and USA Today bestselling author of *Water for Elephants*, *Ape House*, *Riding Lessons*, and *Flying Changes*. Her works have been translated into forty-three languages and have sold more than ten million copies worldwide. She lives in western North Carolina with her husband and three sons, along with their dogs, cats, horses, birds, and the world's fussiest goat.

Source: Publisher's website (<http://penquinrandomhouse.ca/>)

About this book:

In her stunning new novel, Gruen returns to the kind of storytelling she excelled at in *Water for Elephants*: a historical timeframe in an unusual setting with a creature who may or may not be the hero of the story.

After embarrassing themselves at the social event of the year in high society Philadelphia on New Year's Eve of 1942, Maddie and Ellis Hyde are cut off financially by Ellis's father, a former army colonel who is already embarrassed by his son's inability to serve in WWII due to color-blindness. Ellis decides that the only way to regain his father's favor is to succeed in a venture his father attempted and very publicly failed at: he will hunt the famous Loch Ness monster and, when he finds it, he will restore his father's name and return to his father's good graces (and pocketbook). Joined by their friend Hank, a wealthy socialite, the three make their way to Scotland in the midst of war. Each day, the two men go off to hunt the monster, while another monster, Hitler, is devastating Europe. Meanwhile, Maddie undergoes a social awakening: to the harsh realities of life, to

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the beauties of nature, to a connection with forces larger than herself, to female friendship, and, finally, to love.

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Discussion Questions:

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 led 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 Sara Gruen blend mystical elements into the narrative's realism? Did Ellis and Hank find the Loch Ness Monster after all?

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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 that 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?

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- Audiobook (on CD and as digital download)
- eBook

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