



Summary

Naomi Shaw used to believe in magic. Twenty-two years ago, she and her two best friends, Cassidy and Olivia, spent the summer roaming the woods, imagining a world of ceremony and wonder - the Goddess Game. The game became an obsession and a refuge for the three girls. That sanctuary was suddenly shattered when Naomi was attacked. Miraculously, she survived her seventeen stab wounds and lived to identify the man who hurt her. The girls' testimony out away a serial killer, wanted for murdering six women. They were heroes. And they were liars. For decades, the friends have kept a secret that might be worth killing for, hidden in the forest. But now, Olivia wants to tell the whole story. Then she goes missing, and Naomi sets out to find out what really happened in the woods - no matter how dangerous the truth turns out to be.

Discussion Questions

1. Naomi works as a wedding photographer, taking photos of joyful moments. Why do you think she chose this profession? Does she see these weddings as a kind of life she'll never attain, something she aspires to, or something else?
2. Olivia decides that it is time to tell the truth about Persephone, now that keeping Stahl in prison is no longer a consideration. Do you think she planned to tell the truth about what happened to Naomi as well, as Cassidy feared, or would she have continued to keep that part a secret?
3. A theme throughout the book is who owns the story of what happened that day, and who tells it. How have different people claimed the story, and with what goal? Does Naomi ever reclaim her story for herself?
4. Naomi says of the summer of the Goddess Game that the friends were starting to outgrow their games, and created a sense of desperation to hold onto their private world. How do you think this influences the girls' decision to keep Persephone a secret?
5. Naomi despises Oscar, and was victimized by him as a child, yet has repeatedly sought him out. What draws Naomi to Oscar, despite her feelings toward him?
6. Olivia's parents concealed what they believed happened in the woods for years in order to protect their daughter, but helped care for Naomi and continued to let the girls be friends. Why did they make the choices they did, and do you think they made the right choice?

Courtesy of publisher

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Discussion Questions

7. Cassidy is responsible for Naomi's worst trauma, but she also helped Naomi in the intervening years, and Naomi credits Cassidy with her own ability to graduate and survive to adulthood. Why do you think Cassidy took on this role? Do you think she genuinely cared about Naomi, or was it for her own benefit?
8. Naomi's father is a hoarder, but he's left her room untouched. What does this say about how he deals with his emotions and the past? In what ways do you see this mirrored or contrasted in Naomi?
9. Ethan could have proven his father's innocence in Naomi's attack, but kept his silence. How are Ethan's decisions about keeping secrets parallel to Naomi's, or different? And how did his experience lead him to his career in true crime?
10. What drew Naomi, Cass, and Olivia to each other? Do you think the girls would have remained friends if this event hadn't occurred? Was Cass right that it kept them together?
11. Naomi appears to be on the path toward reconciliation with Ethan at the end of the book. Do you think their relationship could—or should—be repaired?
12. At the end of the book, Ethan says that "the final inch" of trust is faith. What do you think he means?

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About the Author

Kate Alice Marshall is the author of young adult and middle grade novels, including *I AM STILL ALIVE*, *RULES FOR VANISHING*, and *THIRTEENS* and adult books *WHAT LIES IN THE WOODS*, and *NO ONE CAN KNOW*.

She lives outside of Seattle with her husband, two dogs named Vonnegut and Octavia, and two kids. They all conspire to keep her on her toes.

Book reviews

Kirkus

October 26, 2022

An edgy adult thriller from a YA and middle-grade author shines an incisive light on the secrets of a small-town community.

At age 11, Naomi Shaw was left for dead in the woods outside her tiny Pacific Northwest hometown of Chester, stabbed 17 times by her would-be killer. With her friends Olivia and Cassidy—who were also in the woods at the time—she provided the damning evidence that put a dangerous serial killer behind bars. Now, 22 years later, that man has died in prison, resurrecting unwanted memories for the three women. Liv, in particular, is completely overwrought, insisting she has more that she wants to share. At the same time, Ethan Schreiber, an eager and persistent true-crime podcaster, is asking lots of questions, and when Naomi engages with him on several ill-advised levels, the scene is set for an explosive outcome, as decades of secrets begin to emerge. Marshall does a terrific job of maintaining a palpable current of tension throughout the book, and her depictions of the intricately tangled relationships inherent in small-town life are excellent. Elevating this novel beyond the plethora of other thrillers is terrific writing, such as in Marshall’s powerful description of a grieving mother sitting in her child’s room after it’s been searched by the police, “running her fingertips over the empty space where [the girl’s] things had been, as if beginning to map the shape of her absence.”

Great writing and boldly drawn characters bring a terrifying tale to all-too-vivid life.

Courtesy of Kirkus Reviews