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Waterbaby: A Novel

By Cris Mazza



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As children, Tam and her older brother were swimming when she suffered her first epileptic seizure. He pulled her from the water and was crowned a hero. Tam was labeled “disabled” and never swam again. And so began 30 years of vigilance, never allowing her body to betray her, never allowing her brother or her family or anyone else to influence her path. Now, in middle age, a lifetime’s worth of control has taken its toll. Exhausted, she heads to Maine where, while working on a genealogy project, she falls under the spell of two dead women: an ancestor, Mary Catherine, who died at 33; the other, the town ghost. Through their cloistered, tragic lives Tam relives her own life over and over — until a distant cousin forces her to see herself in a new light. Tam’s quest to transcend self-imposed limitations is superbly crafted and richly satisfying.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Titled after the Charles Kingsley fairy tale, this dizzying novel opens on epileptic, prematurely retired Tam Marr-Burgess, who is pushing 46, and whose attempt to collude with her landlady in a minor fraud goes very bad. The result is an immediate, spectacular eviction. As Tam lights out from the Chicago suburbs, Mazza (*How to Leave a Country*) sets up several parallel narratives, each of which has echoes of the other: Tam is headed for the family enclave in Maine, where she had her first seizure when swimming at school, was either saved (the official story) or sabotaged (Tam's version) by her elder brother, Gary, and never swam again. On arriving, she rescues an infant from a Laundromat toilet, and then hides the baby and its petulant teen mother at the family lighthouse. She also joins her amateur genealogist sister, Martha, in digging up information on three mysterious figures: a baby saved from the waves by Tam's lighthouse-keeper ancestors, a relative named Mary Catherine, and a local ghost—all of whom may have things to tell them about their own lives. As multiple pasts spin out, Gary comes unglued and tries to make his problems Tam's, much as he did during her eventful college years. There are wry pleasures to be had in Tam's life and adventures, but Mazza puts too many oars in the surf and never gets them all in synch. (*Oct.*)

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Review

A gripping tale of compulsion, obsession, and forgiveness, set so evocatively amidst the fogs and furies of the offseason Maine coast. It's also an intriguing exploration of the ways in which our ancestral pasts echo within our own psyches. -- *Lisa Alther, author of Kinflicks and Kinfolks*

Shipwrecks, doomed lovers, family secrets, sea-babies, toilet-babies, and historical-reenactment sex are but a few of the facets of this deftly kaleidoscopic novel. With *Waterbaby*, Cris Mazza shows us how, through resuscitating our pasts, and rescuing each other, we might just save ourselves. -- *Alex Shakar, author of Savage Girl*

With the wickedly wry observation, 'Family is always best,' Chris Mazza pierces the heart of this big-hearted novel. Mean and funny and, ultimately, loving, *WATERBABY* is the pitch-perfect tale of an all-American family in gothic and comic splendor. This is a delightful and delightfully smart book. -- *Binnie Kirshenbaum, author of An Almost Perfect Moment*

[P]acks a lingering wallop. -- *Kirkus Reviews*

Users Review

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Ray Ortiz:

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Playing with family in a very park, coming to see the marine world or hanging out with pals is thing that usually you have done when you have spare time, then why you don't try factor that really opposite from that. One activity that make you not sensation tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you have been ride on and with addition of knowledge. Even you love Waterbaby: A Novel, you are able to enjoy both. It is excellent combination right, you still want to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh come on its mind hangout fellas. What? Still don't buy it, oh come on its called reading friends.

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