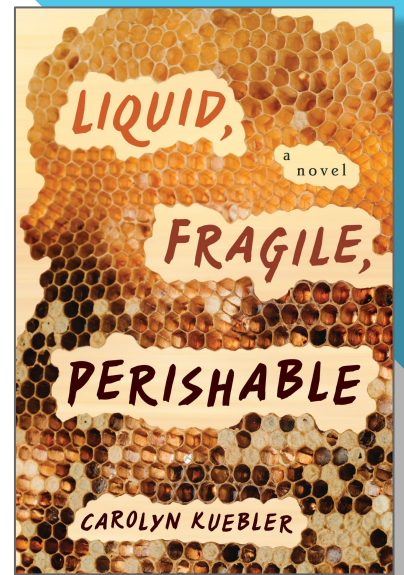


LIQUID, FRAGILE, PERISHABLE

CAROLYN KUEBLER

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“Kuebler’s skillful, minimalist prose carries this small-town story from tranquil beginning to perilous end. An intricate, slow-burning patchwork of a debut novel.”

— **Kirkus, STARRED review**

“Kuebler’s prose is visual, astute, and rich. Family drama, mystery, and subtle foreshadowing carry readers headlong to the conclusion. A novel for readers who relish a sense of place, quirky characters, and intertwined stories.”

— **Booklist**

INTRODUCTION

May has arrived in the tiny hamlet of Glenville, Vermont, bringing with it currents of rejuvenation and rebirth. For three families, though, the year ahead will prove to be a roller coaster of life-changing events, promises, and tragedies.

Liquid, Fragile, Perishable unspools via a chorus of unforgettable voices: an old-school Christian beekeeping family and newly transplanted New Yorkers; a trio of teenage girls and a deeply rooted family of ne’er-do-wells; and one woman who just wants to live alone in the woods. The shifting set of relations among the citizens of this community encompasses teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, poverty—and a cavalcade of thwarted dreams, young love in bloom, and poignant missed connections.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Out of the three teenage girls, the only narrative we get is from Sophie. Why do you think that is? How do you think the story would be impacted if we only heard from Amber or Honey instead?
2. In what ways do we see the substance of honey appear as a motif in the text? How important is it that Dorothy is called Honey?
3. How do we see issues of class appear in the text, specifically in the altercation between Eli and Sarah?
4. What did you make of the time between Willoughby’s disappearance and his discovery? What was revealed during that time from each character’s reactions?
5. How did the structure of the two-three line paragraphs impact the reading experience or reflect the nature of the plot?
6. What role do the seasons play in the story? How important are they as drivers of the plot?

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7. How does climate change, or the threat of it, appear for each of the characters?
8. Jeanne is the perspective we hear from the least, and her chapters always come to us from her job at the post office. What do you think the purpose of her narrative is in the text? Did you find it essential to understanding the town?
9. The river is where Will and Honey begin their relationship, and ultimately end it. The text also begins and ends with Nell at the river. What is the importance of the river in the story as both an actor and a trope?
10. Compare Sophie and Nell's seemingly contrasting desires to be seen and noticed. Why are they different, and to what end do each achieve their goals?
11. How is the tension between science and religion represented? Do you notice any characters falter in their faith to either one?
12. How does the power of marriage, or more broadly union, shift over the span of the book?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carolyn Kuebler was a co-founder of the literary journal *Rain Taxi* and is now the editor of the award-winning *New England Review*. Her stories and essays have been published in *The Common* and *Colorado Review*, among others, and “Wildflower Season,” published in the *Massachusetts Review*, won the 2022 John Burroughs Award for Nature Essays. She lives in Middlebury, Vermont. *Liquid, Fragile, Perishable* is her first novel.

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