

JANE URQUHART

AWAY



FINALIST FOR THE INTERNATIONAL IMPAC DUBLIN LITERARY AWARD
THE LONG-TIME NATIONAL BESTSELLER

INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM FOR

Away

“A dazzling novel ... written by a major novelist at the height of her considerable powers.”

– *Globe and Mail*

“*Away* is a novel of extraordinary depth The people and the periods come vividly to life, at times creating a near cinematic effect.”

– *Saskatoon StarPhoenix*

“Her writing shimmers with lyric sensuality.”

– *Vancouver Sun*

“*Away* celebrates the talismanic power of memory and the possibilities inherent in the lyricism and magic that exist just beyond the edges of reality.”

– *Kirkus Reviews*

“*[Away]* is a treasure ... a passionate and powerful story.”

– *Winnipeg Free Press*

“An elegiac, lushly lyrical, enchanting family saga”

– *Publishers Weekly*

“An extraordinary achievement; highly recommended.”

– *Library Journal*

“Few contemporary writers chart the intimate relationship between inner and outer landscapes with the passion, elegance and evocative power of Urquhart.”

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“*Away* is a ravishing evocation of the lives of those whose souls are irrevocably touched by nature.”

– *The Independent*

“Urquhart’s blending of the spiritual and political sides of the Irish makes an amazing story told in a language that is melodious and laden with complex imagery.”

– *Booklist*

BOOKS BY JANE URQUHART

FICTION

The Whirlpool (1986)

Storm Glass (short stories, 1987)

Changing Heaven (1990)

Away (1993)

The Underpainter (1997)

The Stone Carvers (2001)

A Map of Glass (2005)

Sanctuary Line (2010)

NON-FICTION

L.M. Montgomery (2009)

POETRY

I Am Walking in the Garden of His Imaginary Palace (1981)

False Shuffles (1982)

The Little Flowers of Madame de Montespan (1985)

Some Other Garden (2000)

AS EDITOR

The Penguin Book of Canadian Short Stories (2007)

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v3.1

For my mother, Marian Quinn Carter,
and my father, Walter Carter,
and for the Quinn family
In memory of my Godfather Danny Henry,
my grandmother Fleda Quinn,
and Thomas J. Doherty

The three most short-lived traces: the trace of a bird on a branch, the trace of a fish on a pool, and the trace of a man on a woman.

– an Irish triad

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I
A Fish on a Pool

THE women of this family leaned towards extremes.

All winter they yearned for long, long nights and short precise days; in the summer the sun in the sky for eighteen hours, then a multitude of stars.

They kept their youth – if they survived – well past their childbearing years until, overnight at sixty, they became stiff old ladies. Or conversely, they became stiff old ladies at twenty and lived relentlessly on, unchanged, for six or seven decades.

They inhabited northern latitudes near icy waters. They were plagued by revenants. Men, landscapes, states of mind went away and came back again. Over the years, over the decades. There was always water involved, exaggerated youth or exaggerated age. Afterwards there was absence. That is the way it was for the women of this family. It was part of their destiny.

Esther O'Malley Robertson is the last and the most subdued of the extreme women. She was told a story at twelve that calmed her down and put her in her place. Now, as an old woman, she wants to tell this story to herself and the Great Lake, there being no one to listen. Even had there been an audience of listeners, the wrong questions might have been asked. "How could you possibly know that?" Or, "Do you have proof?" Esther is too mature, has always been too mature, for considerations such as these. The story will take her wherever it wants to go in the next twelve hours, and that is all that matters; this and the knowledge that for one last night she will remain beside the icy, receptive waters of the Great Lake.

She paints a landscape in her mind, a landscape she has never seen. Everything began in 1842, she remembers her grandmother Eileen telling her, on the island of Rathlin which lies off the most northern coast of Ireland. Esther allows rocks, sea, to form in her imagination. There would be a view of a coastline with cliffs. It was the morning that an unusual number of things came in with the tide, causing celebration and consternation among the islanders and permanently fixing the day itself in legends that are recounted around fires at night. "Your great-grandmother's name was Mary," Old Eileen had said to Esther. "She lived with her widowed mother in a cabin three fields from the sea. And it was Mary who was the first to approach the beach that morning."