

## The Honey Thief

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"The Honey Thief" by Elizabeth Grover is reviewed.

Elizabeth Graver. Hyperion, \$22.95 (272p) ISBN 0-7868-6282-3

A mother and daughter trying to overcome trauma, loneliness and an uncertain future are not a new combination in literary fiction. But in her wise and accomplished novel, Graver navigates the crossroads in her characters' lives with compassion and skill, and tells a story that touches the heart without succumbing to sentimentality or easy answers. After 11-year-old Eva Baruch is caught shoplifting for the third time, her desperate widowed mother, Miriam, decides they must move from their apartment in lower Manhattan to a place where they can start new lives. She finds a job as a paralegal in the Finger Lakes region of New York State, and they move to a farmhouse a distance from the nearest town. Miriam seems competent and self-contained, but she has been frightened since the first year of her marriage to Francis DiLeone, and the facts about her husband's fatal heart attack when Eva was six are revealed only gradually through flashbacks. Miriam is Jewish, while Francis was the son of a fanatically Catholic mother who talks to saints; the specter of inherited mental illness haunts Miriam even as she struggles to support herself and Eva and strives to keep her daughter safe and healthy. Meanwhile, a resentful Eva, suddenly transplanted to a place where she has no friends or resources, visits Burl, a shy, middle-aged loner who has quit his career as a Philadelphia lawyer to retreat to his grandparents' farm, where he raises bees. Burl's kindness and patience in teaching Eva the intricacies of bee-keeping and honey gathering help her to quell the panic attacks that presage her kleptomania, an irresistible impulse to acquire talismans against imagined disasters. When events come to crisis, Graver wisely refrains from resolving them in a neat or romantic closure. Her touch is both subtle and honest, grounded in reality but acknowledging the essence of human striving for companionship and happiness. Her ability to create nuanced, fallible characters who doggedly strive to go on with imperfect lives adds emotional resonance to this touching tale. Readers who enjoyed Amy and Isabelle will welcome the similar sensibility they find here. (Aug.)

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