



The Glass Lake

Maeve Binchy

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Kit McMahon lives in the small Irish town of Lough Glass, where everyone knows everyone; children who walk to school together grow up and become sweethearts and marry, people gossip and grumble and dream their lives away. For it is a place where change comes slowly. One day, Kit's mother disappears and the town gossips run wild with stories. The consequences for Helen's husband, her son, but above all for her daughter, Kit, are unimaginable and will leave not one of their lives unchanged.

The Glass Lake Details

Date : Published June 29th 2005 by The Orion Publishing Group Ltd (first published 1994)

ISBN : 9780752876870

Author : Maeve Binchy

Format : Paperback 704 pages

Genre : Fiction, Womens Fiction, Chick Lit, Cultural, Ireland, Romance

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From Reader Review The Glass Lake for online ebook

Amanda says

Kit McMahon is a young girl living in the small village of Lough Glass, where everyone knows each other. She is believed to live a charmed life - has a doting mother and father, a brother she gets on well with, many friends (including the shallow but vivacious Clio Kelly). One night Kit's mother Helen goes out walking and never comes back - after months of searching, a body is found and Kit mourns the mother she has lost. At the same time we start following the story of Lena Gray in London, an up-and-coming businesswoman who loves Louis Gray with an intense and dangerous passion. The lives of Lena and Kit eventually collide with explosive results, leaving Kit considering hard the very nature of love.

Maeve Binchy novels are a gem whenever I need to reignite my passion for reading. They are long and rambling and gentle - incredibly cosy reads that require little true attention and merely pull the reader in for a time to the lives of these smalltown Irish folk. I adore them. That being said, *The Glass Lake* is a curious example - it's probably the Binchy I have read the most, and yet, after this read, I'm wondering exactly why this would be...

The main reason for this is that the central premise - which I gobbled up with delight as a youngster, and found extremely credible - is actually pretty far-fetched. I mean, Binchy sets it up pretty well and it does come as a result of some fairly disastrous decisions that seem almost reasonable, but, on this occasion, I found myself wondering how this central premise could possibly have ACTUALLY happened. I think I am looking at the novel from a) more modern eyes and b) the perspective of someone who has no real experience of Catholic religious beliefs. Possibly others would find the premise easier to swallow.

On top of this, there are some really horrible characters in this novel. Kit herself is fine - she's energetic and decisive and has a strong moral compass. The cast surrounding her are less sympathetic for the reader - we have a love rat, a doormat, a stuck-up so-called best friend *sighs* Just thinking about them makes me both frustrated and angry! I wanted to shake them and tell them to sort their lives out.

There was also an inadvised subplot involving a character called Sister Madeleine, which seemed to sit uneasily alongside the rest of the novel and could have been excised to make this a more streamlined tale.

So why did I read it so compulsively? Literally gulping it down? Because of Maeve Binchy's warmth. Her writing is exquisite in terms of carrying a reader along - beautifully simple and direct prose that wraps me like a warm blanket in front of a roaring fire. I think in all seriousness that, with Binchy's hand on the pen, I would quite happily read a shopping list she'd written! There is just something about her novels that make me smile - reading for the pure sake of enjoyment (which is something that occasionally becomes a little tough as a reviewer).

I would urge people with the desire to read something gentle, but with incisive observations on human nature, to pick up a Maeve Binchy novel. *The Glass Lake* is not her best, but is still a fine example.

Alexandra Ray says

I... have no clue how to start writing this review. This is the story of lives, lives affected by secrets and lies

and choices made by a handful of people. We watch as the consequences of those choices shape the lives of so many people over a span of about ten years. Naturally for a story that has to span that amount of time, it took some time also to get into it. It took at least 100 pages (which isn't much considering how long it is) and a couple hundred more before I absolutely could not put it down.

I thought this was an incredible concept, because it's so real. This is a book about real life - with some dramatization, obviously. This is not a story about horrible events that are tied up in a pretty little bow in the matter of a few days, weeks, months. No, this is about the effects over years, because that's how long choices affect people - years, lifetimes even.

At first I was not fond of the writing style, broken up into sometimes tiny segments of certain povs. Those povs could be main characters or characters only mentioned a few times in the story. But as the book progressed, I came to realize just how essential that was for the purpose that Binchy was trying to accomplish. I realized how brilliant it was, that every single part, no matter how inconsequential each piece seemed at the time, was crucial to the entire story. If you skip those seemingly small bits, you will miss out on the ultimate point of the story and only see it in a shallow, maybe even dull form.

Beyond the theme of choices and consequences, Binchy also explores different types of romances. I stress the word romance, because it is made clear in this book that romance does not mean love. There were only a couple of romance plot lines that are considered true love. Then Binchy also explores the love/relationship between parent and child. She really does span most every type of relationship in this novel - brilliantly. The length was most definitely needed to do that, and while it was imposing and daunting when I opened the book to the first page, as I finished reading the last I knew that if it was any shorter it would not have been as meaningful. Which it was. It left me thinking well into the night. I finished at 1AM this morning and could not get to sleep at least until 3 because I could not stop thinking about all that had happened.

There are some characters that I can gush over. I could gush for days about how much I love Stevie Sullivan, but I shall spare you and wait until I see the person who recommended this book to me to do that. I could gush over how much I want to give Emmet McMahon the biggest hug in the world. I could go on and on about how much I admire Kit McMahon and how she handled her life after making one of the worst mistakes anyone could make - burning a letter of explanation that her mother left to her father after she left him. I admire her adult decisions and how those decisions affected so many people in a good way, which in my eyes was an unconscious atonement for her burning the letter.

An atonement very similar to that of her mother, Lena Gray, who spent her life after leaving her children changing so many people's lives for the better that it was sometimes too easy to overlook the fact that she left her children in the first place. There are times when it is very easy to despise Lena, but it is very easy to love her too. She's a character who placed her heart in the wrong hands, and she paid the ultimate price for it. Her's is truly a tragic tale, and that is because it was her own fault and she knew that.

And on that note, there are quite a few characters who I would like nothing more than to punch them in the face (view spoiler). There are the shallow people, the snooty people, the people who can't see beyond their mirror. There were also the side characters who were lovely and interesting and I wanted nothing but the best for them, (view spoiler). It would be easy to say that every type of person is represented somehow in this book, but of course that is not true as much as it isn't possible.

I think this book will haunt me for years to come. Though half way through I couldn't see myself giving it more than 4 stars, I give it 5 now because of that fact alone - it will haunt me in the best way possible. The end made me yearn to see these characters again. I hope that I'll be able to find it at my local book store and

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Diana says

Susan says

[illegible]

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Hania says

This is the second Binchy book I read after her "Quentins" which turned out to be just perfect..this one is the same, perfect...good enough to make yu read two days straight to finish it..

Gabriella says

Full Disclosure: Maeve Binchy is my absolute favorite writer. I own every single one of her books and have read them multiple times. The Glass Lake is among my top three favorites from her. I can't remember how many times I've read it, but it's one of my go to books when I feel like I need a comfort read. Having said that, there's nothing much I can add, because it wouldn't make justice to the story. The blurb is very vague, but the story is so rich, you just have to read it. If you aren't familiar with Maeve Binchy's writing, you need to experience it. For me, her books are like a warm fuzzy blanket on a cold rainy day.

Marilyn says

Maeve Binchy is a wonderful story teller. This is along complicated family tale. Her characters are so real that you can reach out and touch them. I recommend Maeve Binchy to whomever wants to be lost in a book.

Abbylockhart says

i have read this book more than once,it is probably my favourite.everytime i read it, i feel like i am living in this village, i'm going to school with the kids, i search for helen in the lake. and then i somehow transfer to the big city, and i live next door to lina and lewis. i go to work with them, i write letters to kit, i organize this dance-event. the characters are very "alive", vivid,very colourful, not plain, not shallow. a bit self-centered or obnoxious, maybe...I feel lina as a different woman than helen, as if i am reading about two different women. Not that i agree with what she did, but it is given so nicely and naturally ,that i can relate to her. The only thing that bothered me was the ending. not the plot, because frankly, that was the only way it could be resolved, but the fact that it seemed a bit hasty, as if binchy was trying to wrap it up, to get it over with. after such a wonderful and detailed description through all the rest of the book, the end was very fast and incomplete, i'd say. Nevertheless, a great book.

Ariel says

WOW! ok so I really liked the beginning of this book. it was haunting & mysterious. and then i HATED one

of the main characters. and i couldn't get over what an idiot she was. but i finished it. and it was only ok. and i don't recommend it to anyone! the only thing i liked about this book is that this horrible woman leaves her husband & family to be with another man... and it all falls apart with man #2. basically she gets what she deserves and regrets being an idiot. that was a TINY bit satisfying.

Suzanne says

I read this many years ago, I will endeavour to read it again this year. This was a haunting tale of a woman deeply unhappy and a poor husband left to pick up the pieces for the rest of his family. One of the first Maeve's books I read.

I really do enjoy re-reading these books as it brings back memories from my teenage years and it's nice to rekindle the memories of my first 'grown up' books I tackled. I love revisiting them for this reason, but mostly as I simply adore this author's work!

Ahmad Sharabiani says

The glass Lake, Maeve Binchy

The Glass Lake is a novel by Maeve Binchy. Similar to other Binchy novels, this book is set in a rural Irish village in the 1950s, as well as London. It is notable as the last of Binchy's novels to be set in the 1950s. The story focuses on Kit McMahon and her relationship with her mother with the story spanning about a decade. Binchy explores the roles of women in Irish society, inconstant lovers, and uses an operatic plot to hold a reader's attention.

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Limonessa says

2.5/3 stars

Well, this should at least serve as an admonition to all women on how a MAN should never ever be the fulcrum around which a woman's life rotates, making him the centre of her universe.

The story - my first Maeve Binchy book ever - is set in the 50s and revolves around the lives of various families in the small village of Lough Glass, Ireland, during a span of about 10 years. Among this rather extensive set of characters, stars Helen McMahon alias Lena Gray, a desperate woman whose actions, bad judgement and wrong choices in life reverberate throughout the existence of so many people, and with rather unsettling outcomes.

It is basically a book which deals with the concept of MISTAKE and how your actions may or may not reflect on other people's lives and with which consequences.

This, per se, is a rather interesting theme to be treated in a novel, if not for the fact the the gloomy approach and the disastrous ways in which the characters messed up their lives didn't make this book relaxing or enjoyable at any time. It would be actually pretty safe to say that this book is exhausting, emotionally and physically. First, it is well above 700 pages and the action is so slow at times that I felt like I was trying to slowly make my way through quicksand. You won't fall asleep, I swear, and you won't be bored by long descriptions about the nuances of color of the lake in November or on the types of plants growing around it, but you will feel the progress of narration so slow and uneventful, so much so that, if not for one cardinal point which I will explain below, it would have been enough to make me shut the book at page 50.

Helen/Lena.

She is, without a doubt, the most conflicted character of the book. Throughout the story I couldn't help but despise her for her weaknesses and for what she brought upon herself and her family because of her stupidity but, at the same time, I couldn't help but admire her.

And this is where some things about her actually don't add up. I was baffled by how she seems to be two persons. First we meet a ghost of a woman who once was, then we meet the monster who did what no woman on her right mind would ever do and, then we meet the stakhanovist working woman and eventually the remorseful mother. So, what's it going to be? Who is Lena? How can a woman who seems to be able to organize everybody's lives so perfectly and be the catalyst to their happiness, simultaneously be a wreck and helpless about her own life? How can she live her life almost as vegetable for 12 years and then, because of/thanks to a man, run away and become an *entrepreneur* and go on as if her past never happened? How am I supposed to feel sympathy for a woman who abandoned her children (and let's not forget that even if she makes contact with Kit, she never does with Emmet)? I just can't. I can admire her qualities and her skills for building a career for herself out of nothing, but I cannot justify or forget her horrible actions and selfishness. *As you sow, so you shall reap.* I think Helen/Lena even collected too much for what she did.

And last but not least, the reasons for Lena's love for Louis were extra feeble, if not inexistent. WHY does she love him? Because he's good-looking? Hardly. You can't base your love on appearances, take a look at the celebrities. That is left unanswered.

Amazingly enough, very few of the rest of the characters were likable. Even Kit, Lena's daughter, makes an enormous mistake early in the book which changes everything. And I mean EVERYTHING. Clio, Emmet, Martin, Ivy, Kevin... they all love in the wrong way, forcing love on the one hand, or confusing it with lust on the other. This book is an emotional disaster, slowly developing in front of your eyes.

The only ONE character whom I found remotely likable, Sister Madeleine, makes a mistake, gets taken out of the book in 2 pages, never to return again. We never discover her past, her background. A bit wasted, if you ask me.

Finally, Kit and Stevie. That relationship smells like a week old dead fish. Kit the virtuous manages to reform the village rake? Mh. Sorry, but life taught me that a leopard cannot change its spots. There might be exceptions but I thought it was all very abrupt, there was not enough development of the matter to justify such undying love on both parts.

Ah, did I mention that the story is incredibly predictable?

On to the good parts:

I am still marveling at the writer's ability to write a 700 page book with no descriptions. THIS is the reason why, earlier on, I said you won't fall asleep. This book is 80% dialogue, no tedious long paragraphs about the crickets or whatever. And it totally works. I was there, in Lough Glass, with the characters, taking walks around the lake or on the streets of Dublin, picturing everything. Picturing something the author actually barely describes. So either I have a fervent imagination or there must be some skill on the author's part.

And to conclude, this book gets 2 1/2, barely 3 stars from me because of my involvement in the story. Even though I hated half the characters, thought the plot was predictable and the image of woman portrayed in these pages is so terribly wrong on so many levels, I could not close the book and set it aside. The plot is engaging and once I read the last page, I really felt emotionally drained. That alone must count for something.

Thanks to Maja and Flannery for suggesting this as my first Maeve Binchy book. Now I know you hate me. :D

Rebecca McNutt says

At first I wasn't sure about this book. It seemed a little too trivial, but I stand corrected, because *The Glass Lake* has a lot more to it than meets the eye. Eerie, sometimes humorous, often gripping, this book is definitely a memorable one. :)

Melindam says

Lovely, heartwarming story in the usual Maeve Binchy-style.
Set in the 1950s in London and Ireland, following the lives of a mother and daughter through thick and thin.

Laura says

I first read this book in the early 2000s and haven't been able to stop reading it. I read it in full at least once a year but routinely just go back to read specific chapters all the time. I find I've gotten different things out of the book each time I read it. This title will remain on my shelf for years to come.

Eadie says

Maeve Binchy has written another winner about a family in Lough Glass, Ireland. Binchy's characters are always a strong point of her novels. By the end of the book, you are believing that they are real people. Book is a bit long but the pages are flying fast as you can't get enough of the story. The ending was sad and a surprise to me. I'm looking forward to my next Binchy book. I would recommend her books to those who love to read about Ireland.

Claire says

I LOVED this book. It was so engrossing and enthralling and all those over adjectives that start with e. The main character was so relatable, and I especially enjoyed her tumultuous friendship with Clio - it was so realistic.

But really, I just love how Binchy writes. The way she skips from scene to scene keeps you interested. And, SUCH satisfying ending.

All in all, a book I will revisit time and time again, despite its 700+ page count :)

Amy Hillis says

I love me some Maeve Binchy. When I read her books, I want to be Irish, own a pub, and live in a tiny town. I can hardly read one of her books without developing a fierce hankering for corned beef and cabbage.

In typical Binchy style - we're immediately drawn into the life of a simple family in a largely nondescript - yet still engaging - town. In this book, a mother struggles continuing life in her family and she makes a choice that changes her husband, children, and self forever. A simple choice has dramatic ramifications that no one could have predicted. (Uhhh, that sounds pretty much like the unhelpful little description on the back of every book. Sorry! I don't want to spoil anything.)

If you're looking for a rainy day, light read that will have you contemplating how you would chose to escape your own life...dig in!

Tina says

This is one of my all-time favourite books - I think partly because of how it got me through what could have been an awful travel day. I picked it up as bulk paperback at the Ottawa airport just before Christmas in, I think, 1995. I had never heard of Maeve Binchy, but it was a fat novel and I was pretty sure it was going to be a long day, as I was flying back to visit my family in northern BC, and it was one of those awful Canadian winters. My plane ended up having to detour through Toronto, then once we made it across Canada, we were stranded in Vancouver overnight. As a struggling student, I had no money for a hotel, so I spent the night in the airport café, smoking, eating bags of chips - completely absorbed in this novel. When we finally left Vancouver, we couldn't land in my hometown, but ended up flying into Prince Rupert, and being bussed for 2.5 hours (finally!) to my hometown.

It should have been terrible, but I just luxuriated in this novel. It was a like a day out of time. I reached the final pages just as I reached the outskirts of town, and was astonished to believe that I had hardly noticed all the inconveniences of the trip. I've come back to this novel again and again over the years. I love the interesting but imperfect characters, the story line that splits into two locations (Lough Glass and London) and then meanders together again, and most of all, Helen. I know Kit is the heroine, but Helen is a fascinating character - a rare woman who owns her choices and (I think) in the end, would have done it all over again.
