

Becoming Herself

Maureen Reid

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As its lead character forges her identity against the more restrictive expectations of those around her, Becoming Herself is inspiring.

In Maureen Reid's compelling historical novel *Becoming Herself*, a woman's role in her community and country evolves.

On a ship bound for America from Ireland, Margaret's mother dies, and her father fades into a shadow of the man he used to be. He opts to send his two daughters to an orphanage; they are adopted separately. Margaret struggles to find her identity as an Irish woman in a new country throughout her childhood and married life. She is a woman ahead of her time who endures incredible obstacles to discover her heritage, dreams, and potential.

Conveyed via her personal journal, Margaret's thoughts are perceptive as she explores the various sides of her life's events. She has a keen eye when it comes to capturing the intentions and personalities of others, and her internal and external struggles are well conveyed, complementing conversations between she and her husband.

Letters from Margaret's brother, James, contextualize life in Ireland at the time and make the plot more dynamic, drawing the land of Margaret's youth back in. Women's liberation efforts in America are also addressed.

Entries include markers, such as where Margaret is writing from, that help to track the story. Dates come in later. The story moves in a methodical way to cover every major milestone in Margaret's life, though a gap of ten years also helps to keep it focused and engaging. Margaret's courage and refusal to be restrained by her gender, despite her husband's lack of support and her demanding roles as a mother and wife, are impressive, particularly after she joins the suffrage movement and becomes a key player in advancing the financial well-being of her community.

The book's characters are flawed but determined, and they are compelling in expressing their political beliefs and outlining the directions in which they want their country to go. All feel authentic. Even characters who behave poorly aren't cast as villains; their motivations are always addressed in understandable ways. This extends to Eli, Margaret's husband, who is stubborn and set in his ways, and who regards his wife's roles as clearly defined. Generational consistency factors in to how people react to one another.

Becoming Herself is an inspiring historical novel about the internal and external struggles involved in forging one's identity despite opposition.

EDITH WAIRIMU (May 14, 2019)

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