

Thin Rising Vapors

Seth Rogoff

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In Seth Rogoff's melancholy novel, *Thin Rising Vapors*, a man tries to step out of time in the year-round solitude of a remote Maine summer home.

Monkish, Thoreau-quoting Abel is revealed only after his death by apparent suicide, when his old friend Ezra comes to read through the journals and stories he wrote in seclusion. The book is equal parts a mystery (what drove Abel to the wild, and why did he die as he did?) and a portrait of an enduring friendship between two men who camped together as boys. Abel's shocking death hangs like a low fog throughout the story, present but mysterious, driving the story forward and maintaining suspense.

Because Abel had dropped out of society, Ezra follows suit, leaving his responsibilities behind to immerse himself in Abel's journals, which are full of allusions, descriptions of life in the woods, and accounts of his changing relationships with the two sisters next door. Ezra's narration and Abel's writing reveal their entwined pasts—characterized by idyllic childhood summers, but not without deep losses.

At first, Ezra stays in contact with his family. But then his phone dies, followed by his car battery. Alone, he enters Abel's thoughts like wading through bracken, especially the journal's out-of-order stories-within-the-story. The lake, the country store, the neighbors, hikes, and dirt roads are all keenly observed. There's not a love triangle per se, but rather a four-pointed shape of lust and desire to be understood. Both sisters are compelling, and the romantic aspects of the book defy clichés.

Thin Rising Vapors is a consuming, wistful novel, pleasing in its elements of nature appreciation, friendship, and suspense.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS (September/October 2018)

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