



Woodworm

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A grandmother and her granddaughter are entombed in a house whose walls hunger for murderous vengeance in Layla Martínez's horror novel *Woodworm*.

The women are trapped in their small town due to the curse of the elder's father. They live in the decrepit house he built; it demands sacrifices in the form of their teeth and hair and has flesh-eating tendencies. It's also full of literal angels and demons who guide the women's choices.

The granddaughter takes a nanny gig for the Jarabos, a local wealthy family with whom her family has been feuding for generations. When the Jarabos' little boy goes missing, rumors that the women are witches escalate, putting them in danger. As the granddaughter relays the present-day revenge story with the boy's father at its center, her grandmother divulges the families' callous history—and the mystery of what happened to her own daughter.

Seething with quiet, eerie rage, the women seek vengeance against men who committed wrongdoings against them, including the grandmother's father, who ran a brothel in the house; the Jarabo men, who have used their money and power to manipulate their maids and influence the town's politics; and the Jarabo boy himself, who seems destined to follow in his father's footsteps. The women contend with class strictures and patriarchal cruelties first by submitting to them, jaded by their history, and then by rebelling and obeying the house's bloodthirsty commands. Their alternating voices lilt with hope and grumble with resentment, and they reveal long-held secrets in the suspenseful build toward the gruesome, defiant conclusion.

Generational trauma at the intersection of gender and class directs *Woodworm*, a captivating horror novel.

AIMEE JODOIN (May / June 2024)

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