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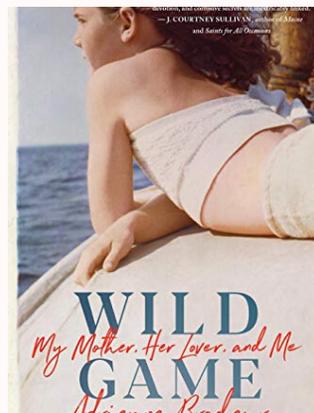
WILD GAME: MY MOTHER,
HER LOVER, AND ME
BY ADRIENNE BRODEUR

REVIEW

by

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I listened to *Wild Game* on Audible, Adrienne Brodeur's riveting memoir about her most unusual relationship with her narcissistic mother. I often listened while driving. Mesmerized by Brodeur's story, I took the wrong exit on the way to a hair appointment (remember hair appointments?) Then I went to hear the author read and talk about the book. You can't do that with social distancing. However, you can hear Brodeur on one of my favorite podcasts, Zibby Owens' *Moms Don't Have Time to Read Books*:

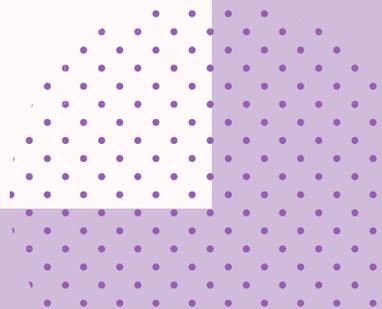
With social distancing and stay-at-home mandates, you can become safely absorbed in *Wild Game* at home. And absorbed you will be, transported to Cape Cod, Nova Scotia, New York and Brodeur's story.

Wild Game begins in the middle of the night. Adrienne Brodeur's mother, Malabar, wakes her up and frantically whispers: "Ben Souther just kissed me."

Ben Souther is the childhood best friend of Malabar's husband, Charles, Brodeur's stepfather. Brodeur is fourteen years old.

From that moment on, for decades to come, the die is cast for Brodeur. Malabar enlists Brodeur to play the lookout, go-between, and general coverup, so she and Ben can conduct their passionate affair. At age fourteen, Brodeur is well-trained for the job. She's monitored Malabar's moods for years.

Malabar knows tragedy and pain herself. Her parents divorced, remarried, and divorced again. When Brodeur was a toddler, Malabar and her mother, Vivian, drunkenly fought over a man in whom they both had a passing interest. Vivian landed Malabar in a "hip-to-toe cast."



In addition, the death of Brodeur's brother, Christopher, haunts the family. The son of Malabar and Adrienne's father, Malabar's previous husband, Christopher choked to death when he was a toddler, before the birth of Adrienne and her brother, Peter.

As the affair continues, not for a moment does Malabar consider how this arrangement impacts her daughter. For example, Brodeur describes the system Brodeur, Malabar, and Ben concoct from which the memoir gets its title.

Malabar, a renowned cookbook author, and Ben, an avid hunter of wild game, announce they are writing a cookbook together. Charles and Lilli, the unwitting spouses, arrive weekends at Malabar's and Charles's Cape Cod home bearing squirrel or rabbit. The couples drink and sample recipes.

After the meals, Malabar, Ben, and the teenage Brodeur take evening strolls, while the frail Charles and Lilli, Ben's wife, stay home. Malabar and Ben slip off to the empty guest cottage for "privacy." Who would suspect with a teen in tow?

When Brodeur is in college, a snooping housekeeper discovers photos of Malabar and Ben and proceeds to blackmail them. Brodeur and Malabar swiftly turn the tables on the housekeeper. The secret is safe.

Brodeur just wants her mother to be happy. If she needs to sacrifice herself, her identity, her sense of right and wrong, then that's what she will do. She will be a good daughter.

Of course, Brodeur pays a huge cost for keeping Malabar and Ben's secrets. In her twenties, Brodeur plunges into a crushing, suicidal depression. She writes: "When you lie to someone you love—and I did love Charles—you lose the only thing that really matters: the possibility of real connection...Over time, I began to lose it with myself too."

She climbs her way out, slowly and painfully. Brodeur ultimately finds her authentic self, and creates a life rich with family, work, and friends.

Wild Game is rich with sensory and visual details. Brodeur's story is tied to the places where she grew up and her life unfolds: Cape Cod, Hawaii, New York City, the Bahamas, San Diego. On the Cape, "The tide was ebbing, and the constantly shape-shifting sandbars inched their way toward the water's surface."

Malabar's cooking--the sounds, aromas, and sights--central to the affair, sizzle off the pages. Malabar prepared "paper-thin slices of ruby-red venison carpaccio under dollops of horseradish crème fraiche."

Daughters of narcissistic mothers will recognize Malabar's profound lack of empathy, the need for admiration, the exploitation of and contempt for others, perhaps all covering a fragile sense of self.

Daughters of narcissistic mothers will also recognize Brodeur's pain and learn from her journey. You won't want to miss a word.

If you would like more information or to seek help, contact Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg at www.drstephaniekriesberg.com or email her at drsk@drstephaniekriesberg.com. Follow her on Twitter at [@drskriesberg](https://twitter.com/drskriesberg).

