



## The Grave Tender

*Eliza Maxwell*

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**A chilling psychological suspense novel, *The Grave Tender* explores the dark boundaries people cross to save loved ones, and the limits of family bonds tested by the deepest of betrayals.**

Endless questions from a shadow-filled East Texas childhood haunt Hadley Dixon. People said her mother, Winnie, was never quite right, but with one single, irreparable act, life as Hadley knew it was shattered. The aftershocks of that moonlit night left her reeling, but the secrets and lies had started long before.

When a widowed and pregnant Hadley returns years later, it's not the safe harbor she expects. The mysteries surrounding a local boy's disappearance remain, and the townspeople still whisper about Hadley's strange and reclusive Uncle Eli—whispers about a monster in their midst.

But Hadley's father and grandmother, the cornerstones of everything safe in her world, avoid her questions. If Hadley stays here, will she be giving her children the family they need, or putting their lives in danger?

The hunt for answers takes a determined Hadley deep into the pine forests, in search of sunlight that will break through the canopy of lies long enough to reveal the truth.

**Revised edition: This edition of *The Grave Tender* includes editorial revisions.**

## The Grave Tender Details

Date : Published April 11th 2017 by Lake Union Publishing (first published January 25th 2015)

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Author : Eliza Maxwell

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## From Reader Review The Grave Tender for online ebook

**Sandra ~ ♥ Cross My Heart ♥ says**

\*Reviewed at Cross My Heart Writings and Reviews

Wow! What a heartbreaker! My tears were falling way before I reached the end. I knew it was going to be a dark read, touching on some sensitive subjects, but I didn't know it would rip my heart out and leave me feeling so raw and exposed. This is my first book by Eliza Maxwell, but I'm now highly motivated to seek out and read more. The strong voice and tone of her writing carried this story and these characters through hell and high water, and her expert descriptive manipulation of setting authenticates the plot. The subject matter is dark, touching on rape, incest, domestic abuse, molestation, lies, betrayal and murder – all of which gives readers a first-hand view at the depravity some characters are/were subjected to . . . events that scar/scarred them for life while sealing their fate. I maneuvered the twists and turns of this story while holding my breath with heart racing much of the time. Every time I thought I had things figured out, another shocking revelation would prove me wrong. The characters are an odd bunch at best – and you can never be sure if you're looking at the real deal or a person hidden by the mask of humanity they wear. At times, I felt like I was in a spook house filled with smoke and mirrors – could I trust who and what I was seeing? Or was it an elaborate illusion – a monster in disguise?

Raw, dark, and gritty, *The Grave Tender* is a disturbing read that I could not put down until I read the final page. I didn't come close to guessing the villain as his/her mask never slipped until the big reveal. I won't say more (you can read the synopsis) because this book needs to be a first-hand reading experience. It isn't sweet. It isn't nice. It isn't for the faint of heart. It features some damaged, broken characters stumbling down a path toward a destiny of ultimate betrayal and devastation – all brought about by the tears of their past. An intense, haunting, beautifully written story that draws attention to some hardcore subjects. A Page Turning Must Read!

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**Sarah Joint says**

Wow. I love this book. And part of me feels a little strange about that, because it deals with some terrible things... but it's so beautifully written. **I found myself going back and rereading some parts just because something was described in such a lovely or poignant way.**

Warning: this book deals with several different forms of abuse. If you're very easily shaken by that, this may not be the book for you. However, it's not overly graphic.

Most of the story comes from Hadley, both from when she was a little girl and as an adult with her own children. A few years ago, she's back in her family home after the loss of her husband with her child, grandmother, and father. It all seems to be very sweet and charming, the epitome of happy small town life... but it's not. Hadley has her own problems, having witnessed her ill mother's suicide many years ago. **You'd think one family tragedy would be enough, but several generations in this family have been surrounded by pain and secrets. Hadley has no idea about most of it... but she'll learn soon.**

This book is best enjoyed by going in relatively blind. I'm being very cautious not to reveal any spoilers. If you can handle some dark subject matter, read it!

*I was given an ARC of this novel from Net Galley and Lake Union Publishing. My review is honest and*

*unbiased.*

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### **Jen says**

This book had me hooked from the first page. I barely could convince myself to put it down in order to sleep—it kept me up an entire night. An incredible plot, chock full of family drama, heartbreak, and disaster. What a story! Twists galore! One or two I saw coming, but most caught me very much by surprise. And the writing is wonderful, resonant with rich metaphor. A solid five stars! I'm eager to read more by this talented author.

Thank you to NetGalley for this ARC in exchange for an honest review.

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### **sue says**

The Grave Digger by Eliza Maxwell

I don't see any other books by this author so I assuming that this is her first book. If it is, WOW I mean WOW. This author has natural talent for weaving a story that kept me turning page after page.

By the time I had got 23% into it, I was texting my book buddy Philomena Callan, I knew she had this book on her list to read soon, so I was urging her to hurry up and read it!

Family secrets, family lies, people who are shielding others from the past, from the truth thinking they are doing the right thing, BUT, lies have a way of coming out into the open sooner or later. This is was exactly happened and as it unraveled, it threw me, it really threw me. The plot was very good, and very well hidden from me, I kinda got a thing or two when it came to someone in the book but the rest.....no way.!!

I read this book at every chance I could get in my day, any time I had a spare minute, out came my kindle.

I would have thought this author had been writing for years the way its so professionally written. I read a lot, as most reviewers/book addicts do, so we soon have an eye for a good book, a well talent and sometimes a rare talent. I put this author in each section, I hope she writes more soon as I am going to stalk her [in a nice way]

I want to thank the blog tour concerned for allowing me to read and review this. LOVED IT

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### **Marla says**

This book deals with some very dark and brutal subjects. Things happen that even as a reader you just want

to turn away and not look. Yet Eliza Maxwell does such a great job with the characters and the story that you can't walk away. You have to know what is going to happen. You want to know what really is going on in the Dixon house and you want to know why does Eli stay in the woods by himself. There are a few things that slapped me in the face, I was not expecting them. There were times I couldn't read fast enough. What a dark book yet so worth my time.

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### **Tom Lewis says**

I'm finding more and more that I love books that keep me thinking about them after I've finished; and this was one of them. Adjectives I would use to describe it are haunting, beautiful, touching, and tragic. The book follows a young widowed mother, who returns to her rural childhood home in search of answers to traumas that had plagued much of her childhood. What she discovers are generations of sins kept secret by her family (and even her friends). The book deals with some really dark topics, but does it in a way that doesn't feel exploitative or simply added for shock value. It's a relatively quick read, with exquisite writing, and it will choke you up.

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### **Melanie says**

*The Grave Tender* was a unique story with fantastic writing and an amazing setting.

After leaving her childhood Texas home, Hadley wasn't sure she would ever return. However when she finds herself widowed and pregnant, Hadley moves herself and her daughter back home to face the tumultuous childhood she fled from. Raised by a loving father and her grandmother, Hadley survived a mother who was never quite right in the head and an uncle the locals whisper is a monster. When faced with unsolved questions about the past, Hadley begins a search for answers that leads her down a path she doesn't know if she can come back from.

*The Grave Tender* jumps between multiple time periods with the bulk of the story taking place in 1989, 2012 and 2016 although there are others. Thankfully the story doesn't jump around too quickly which makes for an easy reading experience. The story follows Hadley along with her family members and some key events that influence their lives and the lives of those around them. The event that sets everything in motion is the disappearance of a local boy that Hadley was friends with. From there everything spirals quickly and there were several key revelations that took me completely by surprise.

It's hard to talk about what happens in this book without spoiling anything so I won't say too much about the plot outside of what is mentioned above. I will say the writing in this book is fantastic and incredibly atmospheric. At times it felt like I was in the middle of a Texas summer as the author describes everything so well. Where this story didn't work for me was the direction the story went. I was expecting more of a thriller type read and that's ultimately not what this book is. I do think others would enjoy this story, just maybe don't go into it expecting a thriller when it's more Southern Gothic fiction.

While *The Grave Tender* ended up being a different book than I was expecting I still ultimately enjoyed it. I would recommend the book if you're in the mood for some darker fiction that delves into some heavy topics.

*\*\*I received a copy of this book from Netgalley and the publisher in exchange for an honest review.\*\**

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## Linda Strong says

4.5 Stars

Does evil run in families? To what limits would you go to protect your children .. to keep the evil out of their lives?

Hadley Dixon had a dysfunctional family ... or was it even worse? Her mother had never been 'right'. Hadley witnessed her mother douse herself with gasoline and set herself on fire. She had lost 4 previous baby boys and somewhere along the line, her mind just snapped.

Hadley knew her father loved her. He showed her with everything he said and did. But he was also human .. and most humans have secrets. His secrets were deep and dark ..and he never wanted them brought out from the shadows.

Her father's brother, Eli, lived a solitary life in the woods. He carries the scars of an abusive father on the outside .. and many more scars on the inside. Because he looked 'different' it seems he was always blamed for things he didn't do ... and most people were afraid of him.

Hadley's grandmother had many years of secrets. When Hadley and her daughter, Kate, move back home after being widowed, will she be giving her child the best she can? Or is she leading her daughter right into a path of danger?

Hadley takes a deep breath and seeks answers .. but are they the answers she really wants to hear?

This a chilling psychological suspense novel about families and the bonds of love and loyalty that are sorely tested.

Story subject is probably more common than any of us know ..or want to know. This is a well written novel with chiseled characters. Some characters might make you cry ..some will elicit a chuckle .. some will make you angry and feel helpless...and some you will empathize with .. and maybe some you will identify with.

I wish to thank the author / Lake Union Publishing / Netgalley for the digital copy. Opinions expressed here are unbiased and entirely my own.

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## Kristine Hall says

For anyone who's read my reviews or rantings, you know that I am all about the book covers. And this one. . . Even without the word "grave" in the title, it's just a little unsettling. Eeeeeeeexcellent. (\*voice of Montgomery Burns\*). I also don't like to read the blurbs and prefer to dive in, so I was happy that within the first few pages of *The Grave Tender*, I already had the cover and the basic story figured out. Except I didn't, really, and as I read further, everything I initially thought about *The Grave Tender* was completely off course. Quickly, the story goes from feeling cozy around the Dixon family to uneasiness that there is something off -- something beyond quirkiness. Talk about functioning within dysfunction. Whoa.

This family has layer after layer of secrets that have been put into a box (some literally), one on top of another, for years. But these secrets haven't collected dust; they've turned moldy and turned toxic in that box, and when main character Hadley Dixon takes off the lid, the unraveling of all she has known as truth

begins. As secrets are revealed, readers will be appalled not just by the events themselves, but by the norms of the times in which those events happened. I felt angry for what the characters endured and how the community must have turned a blind eye to it. Shameful.

Author Eliza Maxwell's writing is descriptive (and maaaaahvelously edited), and with her word choices, she coaxes very specific and intentional feelings out of the readers. The descriptions aren't always pretty, though, and they often grabbed me in the gut with their bluntness. Fortunately, there is balance between the traumatic and the more lyrical writing, and Maxwell makes beautiful use of figurative language without overdoing it. Images stick.

**"It was October. Heat-weary, the residents of east Texas waited for summer to give up and die, but it held on like a leech, sucking the life out of the place, getting fat."**

The story is book-ended with present-time narration, but the chapters between are mostly told in flashbacks and from multiple viewpoints. In hindsight, had I paid closer attention to those multiple perspectives, I likely would not have been as blindsided when the big reveal happened. Maxwell plants more than a few subtle seeds that lead you exactly in the wrong direction, and her characterization is rich with complex, flawed, and real personalities. Be warned, though: much like it is for Hadley, readers only see what the characters want to reveal to them.

When I finished reading *The Grave Tender*, my mind was buzzing. I kept wondering how I hadn't seen what was coming. The twists! The turns! I replayed scenes and spent several days trying to process all that went wrong within one family. I kept thinking of how differently things might have been if only X and if only Y and if only Z had happened. I still think about Hadley and worry for her, just a little.

Eliza Maxwell is a writing force to be reckoned with, and I look forward to reading more novels from her. I highly recommend *The Grave Tender*. (However, I don't recommend that you start reading it as you are brushing your teeth to go to bed and then sit on the bathroom counter for hours until the last page is turned. My back is still complaining about that.)

Thank you to Lone Star Book Blog Tours and the author for providing me a print copy in exchange for my honest opinion -- the only kind I give. This full review and more features on Hall Ways Blog <http://kristinehallways.blogspot.com/...>

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## Chelsea Humphrey says

You may think you have read dark fiction, but unless you've picked up *The Grave Tender* by Eliza Maxwell then you don't know the definition of the words. Descriptions such as disturbing, heavy, melancholy, and sorrowful come to mind when I think of what words to use in painting a picture of what this book was. Why in the world would anyone want to read such a story? Quite simply, the writing was beautiful and intoxicating; as languishing as the majority of the story's content was, the setting wrapped me up in a warm, welcoming hug that made this Georgia peach feel at home. I am a huge sucker for southern gothic fiction, and this was southern gothic fiction done well.

I'm not even sure where to begin discussing this book. A large part of me just wants to keep telling you how hauntingly beautiful it was, but I don't want to over-do it. *My middle name is drama queen; just ask my mom and dad.* However, it was a truly moving read that will not be for the faint of heart. Some of the trigger worthy topics include (but aren't limited to): Rape, Incest, Domestic Abuse (Spousal and Child), Child

Molestation, Murder, etc. That's a whole lot to handle in under 240 pages, and while that may deter some readers (and no one blames you if it does), it was all done tastefully with class, structured more to create a moving novel than factors just added for shock value. Everything flows together, but I did find that I couldn't just binge read this one. It definitely had that compulsive, can't-put-it-down factor, but I had to set it aside for a few hours at times just to keep myself from falling too far down a hole of depression and anxiety.

Honestly, I feel my only minor complaint was that I wanted more! I was really into these characters, and I feel like just an extra 50-75 pages to further develop a few of the relationships and current day storyline would have made this quite possibly my top read of 2017. If you enjoy your literature haunting with a lining of hope, I can't imagine you'll find anything more excellent that's set in Texas than *The Grave Tender*. I may have to move to a new gym as the other patrons are weirded out that I was tearing up on the treadmill (*I'm not crying; YOU'RE crying!*) but it's a small price to pay for being privy to such a touching story. I won't soon forget this book and would love to discuss with others who have read it. I've moved Maxwell up my list of authors who I stalk their books and publishing schedule and you should too! *Yay for friendly stalking!* ?

**\*Many thanks to the publisher for providing my copy via NetGalley; it was a pleasure to provide my honest thoughts here.**

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4.5 STARS rounded to 5 because, just wow! This was an extremely dark, heavy tale full of sadness and despair with a twinge of hope in the finale. My only woe was that I wanted another 50-75 pages! Such an amazing story. Full review to come.

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## **Rachel says**

**Obviously, you clicked this review to learn what *The Grave Tender* is about. However, I urge you to not read it (the review that is). HA! Why? Because, I feel that if you go into this book without learning even a bit of what is going to come of it, it will be 10 times better for you. If you don't care, continue to read the review...but this is your warning before you keep going.**

WOW.

Before I wrote this review, I had to gather myself. Tears were shed..

This book packs a punch. Lots of punches, to the gut.

A dark, suspenseful, psychological novel for sure.

I went into this book without remembering what it was supposed to be about. I must say doing so made it a very enjoyable read. This book definitely won't be for everyone. It deals with murder, abuse, molestation, rape, friendship, secrets and redemption.

When Hadley Dixon was just 10 years old, one of her three childhood friends disappeared without a trace. Few people knew what happened to Charles Abbott that fateful day. Those few people were the people

closest to Hadley, but she didn't know it yet. The people in the town pointed fingers at the monster who lives in the woods. That monster happened to be Hadley's mysterious, quiet, strange Uncle Eli.

They say history has a way of repeating itself..

*A mother's need to protect her child is an ancient, living thing that defies rationality. Like Stonehedge or Machu Picchu.*

Twenty years later Hadley returns to Texas after becoming a single mother and widow. With her return comes some of the most unexpected deep dark secrets that her family and friends kept from her.

Alternating between past and present, we learn the secrets of the Dixon family. We come to find that not all is what we think, just like the main character Hadley.

**I loved** this book. I am not the best at writing reviews, I admit. And, this book is hard to review because it is full of layers that peel back ever so slowly to give you a seriously good story. Below I am adding some of my favorite quotes. Read them however you like, hopefully they'll entice you to read the book.

*Jude wasn't scared of Eli's scars. She'd learn that the scariest things around didn't look like a Halloween mask. They looked like your science teacher or the mailman, or your best friend's dad.*

*"A mockingbird," Eli said. "Borrows his song from what he hears around him. But you ain't no bird." "You ain't no bird." "You're a girl." "You got your own song. You ain't been listening to yourself. You're scared. Scared people gonna see your scars, like me."*

*The world is full of color ladybug, reach out a grab it.*

*Hadley Dixon was living in a house built on crooked beams.*

*I received an ARC from Netgalley and the publishers. Huge thanks!!*

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## **Kendall says**

WOW! This was such a beautiful, addicting, and dark read.

"Hadley Dixon was living in a house built on crooked beams".

Oh my gosh.. honestly I am not even sure where to begin with this review. Eliza Maxwell has become my new favorite author. I am sooo unbelievably impressed with how beautiful Eliza's writing is. This was my first taste of southern gothic fiction and HUNNY I AM A FAN! :)

This novel has many forms of abuse discussed just a heads up BUT it was not over the top with gore and graphic. Eliza describes the haunting story of this family that crosses multiple generations about pain, betrayal, guilt, and sadness.

I would have to say this is a really hard novel to review. There are so many layers to this heart breaking story where I would catch my breath at one point and then another layer would fall. I cannot say this enough of

how amazing the writing is... so intense and dark but it ever so beautifully is expressed across the pages.

One of my favorite quotes I want to share with you

"Charlotte Abbott was just across the road, turning into a ghost in a house filled with color, where the happy sounds of a young family were only distant echoes haunting empty rooms."

READ THIS BOOK! GO ON DO IT!!! :) 5++++++ stars!!!

So excited for Eliza's new novel in November!!! :)

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### **Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says**

I had some difficulties getting into this book. The first time I tried it out did I stop after a while and started to read something else. The second time did I still feel some difficulties, but I had seen that several of my friends had really liked this book so I decided to give it a shot. And, the book is OK. It's a tragic story, especially towards the end of the book. But, here lies the problem as well, the first half of the book doesn't have a big impression on me. The characters fail to come alive and I just feel that I was ill-suited for this book. I wanted to care for the characters, but I felt that they very not well developed enough to really make me feel for them. Still, the story was interesting enough and I did want to know what happened to the missing boy.

It's the last part of the book that makes me start to warm up to the characters, when bit by bit it all started to come out, not only what happened to the missing boy, but the truth about Hadley's family. I just wish that Hadley own life as a grown-up had been more explained, more detailed so that I felt that I've gotten to know her better. Still, there were moments towards the end when I felt deep sadness for her and the others around. Sometimes evil is not where one thinks it will be...

The Grave Tender is a book that for turned out to be better than I thought at the beginning. I can look back at the experience of reading this book thinking that it was worth it and I especially like the title of the book now that I know what it means.

*I want to thank the publisher for providing me with a free copy through NetGalley for an honest review!*

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### **Purple Country Girl (Sandy) says**

I received a copy of The Grave Tender from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

The first half of The Grave Tender is excellent. Hadley Dixon, a young girl living in a small Texas town, is the POV used for this part of the book. It has a Southern Gothic feel with the mad, reclusive woman who rarely leaves her bedroom and the scarred man, Eli (Hadley's uncle), who lives in a small cabin in the woods on the Dixon property. He hardly speaks, preferring to observe the family, especially Hadley, quietly from a distance. Then, there is the barn full of dilapidated carousel horses that Hadley's grandmother, Alva, restores, which is kind of quirky but also kind of creepy. Hadley's mother is distant but her grandmother and father dote on her while her uncle frightens her.

When Hadley is ten, two things happen that will change her life forever. First, one of her friends, Cooper, disappears. After weeks of searching, he is never found, his fate becomes a mystery. Then, following another

miscarriage, her mother commits suicide and, horribly, Hadley is an eyewitness to her mother's death. Hadley withdraws from everyone, including her best friend, Jude, and is pulled out of school so she can be home schooled. She becomes almost as reclusive as her mom until she is old enough to leave town and start a life for herself. Hadley is not seen by her friends again until over a decade later when she returns home widowed and pregnant and with her eleven year old daughter in tow.

Hadley begins to settle in back home and meets up with her old friends, Jude and Sam. Her father is happy to have his daughter and granddaughter home and Hadley starts to feel comfortable except for one thing. Her uncle still lives alone in his cabin and Hadley still fears him, still thinking he's a monster. After seeing him one night late outside the house, she is ready to confront him - and her fears - the next morning. She is stopped by her grandmother and by Jude who have a story to tell her about the Dixon family. What follows is a terrible tale of dark, family secrets that cause Hadley to rethink almost everything she knows about her family. It's a tragic tale that has lasting ramifications on the family to this day.

At this point, more POVS are added, namely Alva and Eli's. For awhile, the story is riveting but, I started to get uncomfortable and just wanted it to end. The subject matter is horrendous, incredibly disturbing and sad. I'm not a skilled enough writer to convey my feelings without unintentionally trivializing the abuse suffered in this book but, at some point, it started to feel like overkill - or written for shock value. That was probably not the intent of the author at all but it becomes oppressive and it affects so many people that I could not stand it for much longer. I was happy when I flipped to the last page.

It's a sad story that explores some dark places that are not something I want to read about in such detail and scope. The book blurb does not really indicate the horrors that are in store for the more sensitive reader. I read for pleasure and, after the first half, my pleasure reading this one started to seep away. It's a shame because the first part is so well-written and enjoyable but it turned out to be too dark for me.

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### **Sarah Swann says**

3.5 stars. Do NOT listen to the audio of this book. It's awful. The narrator is not good and he didn't seem to fit for the story. Other than that, I did enjoy the story overall. I was expecting it to be a thriller, but it was more of a family drama with a lot of dark secrets that come to the surface over time. I was shocked by a certain character and his actions. Just wanted a little more from it.

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