

## ***The God of the Woods, by Liz Moore***

***Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy***

Every now and then, a novel comes along that grabs a reader on its first page and never lets go. *The God of the Woods*, Liz Moore's new page-turner, fits that description. Equal parts family drama and thriller, *The God of the Woods* perfectly captured this reviewer's attention.

*The God of the Woods* is set at Camp Emerson in upstate New York in 1975. Nestled between a dense forest and a tranquil lake, the camp is owned by the wealthy Van Laar family, who have a palatial summer home on its expansive property. Generations of local villagers have worked at the camp or on the Van Laar Preserve.

The story begins on an early August morning. Camp counselor Louise makes an unsettling discovery: One of the campers is missing from her bunk bed. The girl in question is thirteen-year-old Barbara, the unruly daughter of Peter and Alice Van Laar. Louise reports Barbara's absence to Camp Director Tessie Jo Hewitt, known to all as T. J.

T. J., who has lived on the Van Laar Preserve since childhood when her father was the property's groundskeeper, developed an abiding respect for the forest. During camp orientation, she instructs campers how to navigate using a compass or the sun, stressing they should remain calm if lost in the woods. T. J. explains that the word *panic* comes from Pan, the Greek god of the woods, who liked to stir up chaos. "To panic," she tells them, "was to make an enemy of the woods. To stay calm was to be its friend."

When T. J. informs Alice and Peter that Barbara is missing, it is not the first time they have been confronted with the disappearance of a child. Fourteen years prior—before Barbara was born—their eight-year-old son, nicknamed "Bear," inexplicably vanished from the Van Laar Preserve, never to be found. Alice deals with Bear's loss with pills and alcohol, while Peter has multiple affairs. Both parents treat Barbara with disdain, planning to pack her off to a school for rebellious teens after summer camp.

Rookie Investigator Judy Luptack, one of the first troopers on the scene, is told to hold off searching for Barbara until Captain LaRochelle arrives from Albany. Peter Van Laar insists that LaRochelle, the trooper who had handled Bear's case, oversee the new investigation. While Judy interviews witnesses, she senses that the Van Laars presume their wealth entitles them to buy anything, even silence.

As *The God of the Woods* reaches its stunning conclusion, Ms. Moore masterfully ties up her novel's converging subplots. Memorable and addictive, *The God of the Woods* is highly recommended.