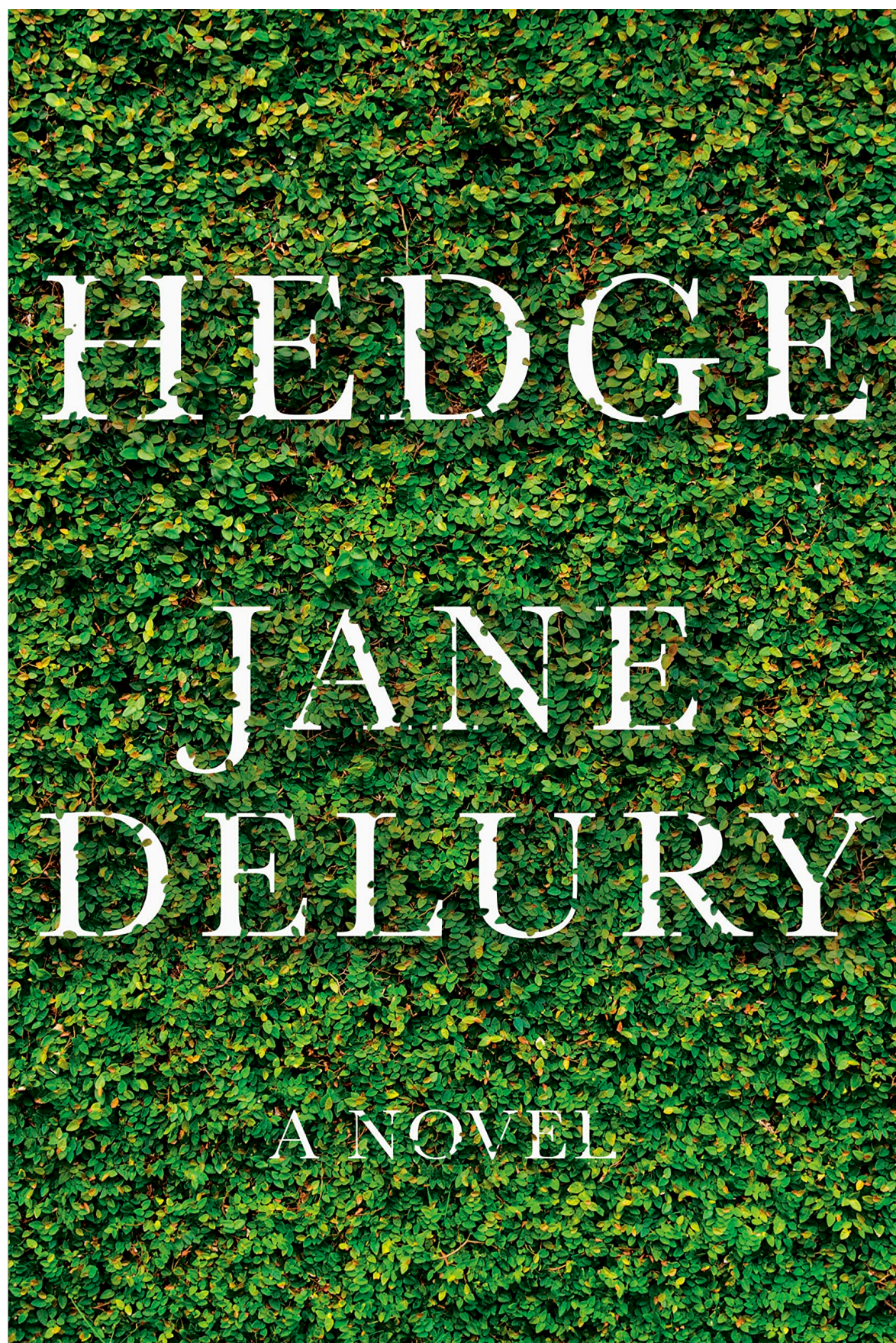


**ENJOY THIS
EXCERPT OF**



1.

"We can meet up late," he said. "Right? To talk. Your girls sleep, don't they?"

"They sleep," she said. "Sort of. But you might not like me as a mother."

"How are you as a mother?"

"Boring. Distracted. Often worried. Sometimes grouchy."

"That sounds exactly like you."

"Does it?" She smiled, glad to have the tension relieved. "Good, then. You won't be surprised."

She was going to ask him inside for a drink, then he said, "Do you want to go for a swim?"

She looked at him blankly. "In the Hudson?"

"In the swimming lake. I've wanted to ask and this might be my last chance." He shrugged. "Plus, you know, we're already wet."

Maud laughed, feeling giddy. "Why not?" she said.

Gabriel headed toward the cottage. "See you in five minutes, boring, grouchy, distracted mother."

"See you in five minutes, Lone Wolf."

They met in bathing suits, towels around their waists, and walked through the woods, flashlights swishing. The rain pattered on the oak leaves, then dwindled.

They moved deeper into a world of velvety shadows and ferny coolness. The lake, pictured in an archival sketch with a gazebo and two bonneted women in a rowboat, was now shrunken by weeds, but the surface was pellucid. Maud slipped off her towel, adjusted her suit, and lowered herself into the water. Wincing at the cold, she wondered if Gabriel noticed her body the way she'd noticed his. His chest, as she'd imagined, was muscled and sculpted but his body wasn't perfect. She liked that he had the soft dip of a slight belly.

"Race you to the other side," he said once he was in the water.

"I thought this was supposed to be a relaxing dip."

"It'll be a relaxing race. And this water is freezing. I need to move." He dove and started to butterfly toward the opposite shore.

"You're cheating," Maud yelled at him, laughing. "I refuse to participate."

"Fine," he called back. "I'll race myself."

She twisted onto her back and floated. Eventually, Gabriel returned and floated too. Together, they looked up at the full moon, blooming in its bed of sky. Everything would change tomorrow, Maud thought, but maybe not too much.