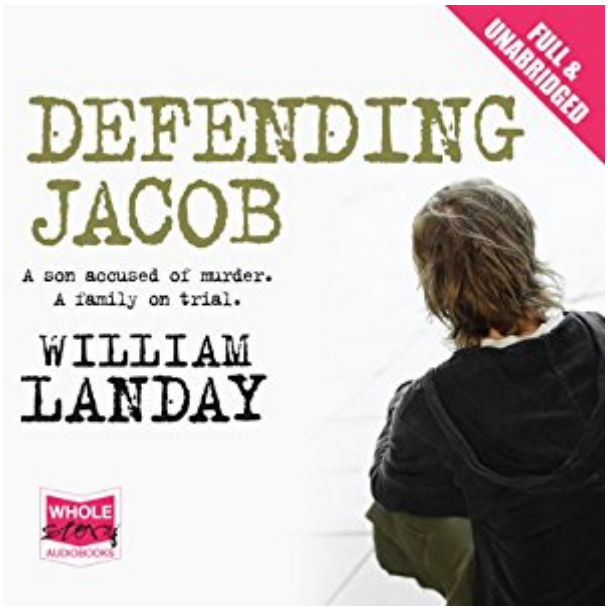
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Defending Jacob



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Synopsis

Andy Barber’s job is to put killers behind bars. So when a boy from his son Jacob’s school is found stabbed to death, Andy is doubly determined to find and prosecute the perpetrator. Until a crucial piece of evidence turns up linking Jacob to the murder. In the face of every parent’s worst nightmare, Andy and his wife Laurie will do anything to defend their child. Because, deep down, they know him better than anyone. Don’t they?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

William Landay has written an excellent but dark literary crime novel about the stabbing death of a 14-year-old boy in an affluent suburb of Boston. Ben Rifkin was found stabbed to death in a park where people jogged and students walked to school through the leafy grounds. Ben was known as a bully at school and one of his victims was the son of the assistant district attorney, Andy Barber. Andy and his wife Laurie and their teenage son, Jacob, had always lived happy lives together as a family unit, with Laurie overseeing the care of her family with much love and diligence. Andy was a bit more relaxed about it all, but he loved Jacob and had dreams for his only child.The life of the Barber family is shattered by bits and pieces when what little evidence found at the crime scene points to Jacob as the killer. Jacob denies that he had anything to do with it, but because of a dark secret that Andy has kept from Laurie that he finally discloses, Laurie begins to doubt her son’s honesty. One of the themes that "Defending Jacob" tackles is the idea of an inherited tendency for violent behavior such as the "murder gene." Nature and nurture play their separate parts, but is

violence and murder in the DNA of Jacob?Andy Barber must take leave of his ADA position while his son’s trial before a grand jury is going on and he assigns himself as one of the defense lawyers. The prosecuting attorney is trying to be the lofty lawyer that he isn’t, and is met with more objections than he can count. Before the end of Jacob’s trial, a twist in the story occurs, but the biggest twist of all is at the end of the book."Defending Jacob" is narrated by the father, Andy Barber, and transcripts of parts of the trial have his voice, also. He tells the story looking on as more suspicions about his son and even evidence turn up, and he watches his wife Laurie become a shell of herself as she was before. Laurie becomes distant, suspicious of Jacob and loses so much weight that she never gains back. She is also angry that Andy refuses to see the flaws in Jacob that she sees. Slowly this once loving and close family is broken down over the course of the story and the ending has a shocking twist.The characters in this book are people who could live next door, and who are worthy of the reader’s care and concern. A lot is learned about them and their own families of origin as the book progresses. Since the author was an assistant district attorney before he starting writing full-time, the legal aspects of the story are compelling and accurate. Mr. Landay knows what he is writing about.Even when things are going better for the Barber family, there is a dark feeling that hovers just above that doesn’t leave when the book is put down. It is intrinsic throughout the story and makes it seem more like reality. In an interview with the author at the back of the book, he says he wanted this story to be one of those "what if" situations, and he met that goal with "Defending Jacob." The interview gives some information and insight into the author’s writing, and there is also a list of questions for a study guide.I found this to be quite a page-turner and not ever dull or slow. The court scenes were especially interesting and informative. The end will hit you like a brick wall.Highly recommended for readers who like legal thrillers and mysteries and also literary fiction.

I found the story compelling. I didn’t think it was "simple" at all, but rather a complex portrait of one man’s psyche. Although the murder and the family’s plight were at the center of the story, for me, the main point of the book was the slow, exquisite revelation of who Andy really was. This is a portrait of a desperate man in an impossible situation. Andy never wavers but bit by bit our trust in him is eroded. This book reminds me of "The Dinner" by Herman Koch only with a faster pace, and easier to read. I don’t understand some of the comments that the characters were not developed when the entire book is a character study. Great read.I did think that some of the trial testimony dragged, since the reader already knew the content of what most of the witnesses were testifying about and I wish there had been more of a wrap up of what happened to the poor cat outside the window one night. Also, we never got to see Laurie’s reaction to learning about certain pieces of

evidence. But these are completely minor points that do not take away from a great story.

There are already nearly 1,500 reviews for this book, but I'll post mine as well because I found this book to be many things, both good and not so good. In the first place, the premise is truly shocking and fascinating. A 14-year-old is accused of murder in the same jurisdiction as his district attorney father. Okay, let the fireworks fly! And they do. In no time, the father is put on leave and he promptly begins to defend his son at all cost, from hiring a great defense attorney to tracking down a suspect on his own. In the mean time, the boy's mother is more suspicious. More fireworks, this time the family drama kind as mother and father battle over what to believe vis a vis their son. Is he a good kid who makes some bad choices? Or, is he a bad kid who inherited a ruptured set of DNA from the father's family that is peppered with murderers? Enter cops, a psychiatrist, and even the grandfather still in prison for murder. These elements the author weaves together quite well as we venture down the path witnessing good and evil through the eyes of a man who proves to be an unreliable narrator. In fact, the book is told in the first person with plenty of courtroom transcripts. Because the reader is forced to bounce back and forth in the timeline without specific knowledge of when some testimony is given in different venues, the shocking ending is cleverly revealed. The trouble is, the reader spends a little too much time with the narrator, getting repetitive, dragging through a courtroom with retelling of various well-known parts of the story. The book could easily be 50 pages shorter without losing any impact. Still, I stuck with it with some satisfaction. In particular, the questions asked are the kind that don't always have answers. And if there are answers they are not the ones we like to face. There is good and evil in this world, and some of it may (or may not) be in the family.

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