ReadingGroupGuides
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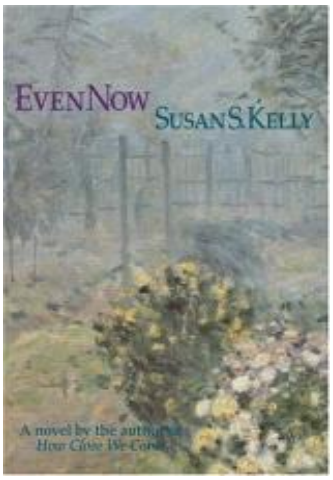
Even Now

by Susan S. Kelly



About the Book

Also Available as an eBook

Susan S. Kelly's award-winning debut novel, *How Close We Come*, told a deeply affecting story of two best friends, and of what happened when their seemingly unbreakable bond was threatened. Here her newest novel reveals a different aspect of women's friendships. In this tale, a close friendship gone wrong years earlier still has the power to make a woman question herself and her life...**Even Now**

When her husband, Hal, accepts a teaching position at a private school in the tiny North Carolina town of Rural Ridge, Hannah Marsh views her family's move as a chance to return to a simpler, sweeter way of living. Contentedly married for seventeen years and the mother of two children, she nevertheless has a nagging sense that something is absent from her life. Then, at a casual neighborhood dinner, Hannah encounters someone she thought she'd never see again: Daintry O'Connor, a ghost from her childhood.

As children, Hannah adored and idolized the more worldly, daring Daintry, even envying Daintry's adoption into a large and lively Irish family. She truly believed that they would be Best Friends Forever. But forever ended abruptly, leaving behind feelings of abandonment, betrayal, anger, and too many unanswered questions. Now, suddenly confronted with the adult Daintry?a successful, stylish investment banker married to an Episcopal priest?Hannah feels the old wounds painfully reopening.

As the two women become a part of the daily life of the mountain village, Hannah struggles to understand why Daintry still exerts an extraordinary hold on her?even as she finds herself dangerously drawn to Daintry's husband, Peter. When Peter makes it clear that he shares the attraction, a chain of events is set in motion that could affect them all.

A novel that explores the elusive mysteries of faith, memory, and the tenuous bonds of love, trust, and friendship, **Even Now**

asks whether a relationship can survive changes-and the changing perspectives of time. Is it possible for two women to rediscover what they have both lost? Or is the true test of friendship knowing when to let go.

Discussion Guide

1. Hannah's sister Ceel maintains that, "Every woman has a Daintry in their lives." What does she mean?? Do you think this statement is true?

2. For the author, Daintry O'Connor represents all the female friendships that have somehow dissolved, harmlessly or deliberately, throughout her life.? Do you have relationships that seem to have no basis for ending?? Why do female friendships fail?? Jealousy?? Lifestyle choices?? Competition?? Too much dependency?

3. Hannah's marriage is essentially happy and stable.? Yet she ponders an extramarital affair, and the reasons for it.? What about this temptation? Does adultery, after all, stem from sheer availibility, the urge for a new experience, feeling attractive in another man's eyes, harmless flirtation that veers into dangerous territory, vindication or revenge for past history?

4. Do you think Ceel realizes Hannah's straying?? Does Hal?

5. What part does spirituality play in *Even Now*?? Are churches indeed, as Daintry says, "sexy places"? Do you know of similar situations with priests and parishioners? Can Daintry be sympathized with?

6. For those who have read How Close We Come, what are the similarities in Pril and Hannah?? Are there similarities in the characters of Daintry and Ruth? Do you agree with Hannah's assertion to Ellen that "girls are awful to each other"?

7. Can Hannah's mother's actions be justified? Should Hannah have confessed to Hal -- or will she -- of her near-adultery? Why is Hannah scornful of Doesy and the type of woman her character represents? Is her disdain justified?

8. Susan Kelly likes to say that she writes about "necessary sadness."? In fact, "a current of sadness" is a phrase she finds a place for in everything she writes. Did you notice it?? What does she mean? Extra Credit: Do you wish Hannah and Peter had managed their fling? (In one version, they did, for months!)

Author Bio

The real me lives in a two-story house with husband, a black lab named Tar, two teenaged sons and a daughter who reads Charlotte's Web, The Little Princess and other books aloud to me with such innocent poignancy that I weep. I tend a flower bed that looks tolerable considering it lies in the hazardous zone beneath the teenagers' basketball goal.

The real me has no studio or office, only a corner nook in my bedroom so small that whenever the door opens it bangs into my chair. On the wall is the requisite bulletin board with the requisite quotes and pictures (Faulkner's Nobel Prize Speech, the last page of The Great Gatsby, two New Yorker cartoons, a Willa Cather quote: There are all those early

memories, one cannot get another set...) The real me is addicted to 44 ounces of Diet Coke daily, a decidedly self-destructive habit given that I have only one kidney due to a horseback riding accident when I was 11.

You wouldn't look twice at the real me in the grocery story. I'd be the one checking out what everybody else is buying, and eavesdropping on conversations (best line overheard in grocery story: "The days of shopping like a lady are over."). I talk a big game about moving somewhere like New Hampshire (the state slogan amuses me - live free or die) or Massachusetts, in hopes John Updike's vocabulary might osmose into me (if osmose is a verb), but actually, you couldn't dynamite the Real Me out of the south. I love every 100 degree day and tobacco leaf and redneck accent in it.

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