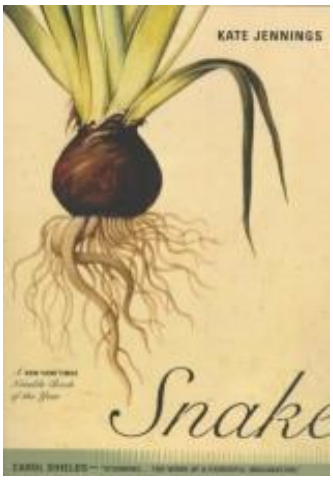
Snake

by Kate Jennings



About the Book

Irene is clever, ambitious, easily seduced, and tempted by everything-everything beyond the confines of her life on a remote Australian farm and her marriage to a man she might once, briefly, have loved. Rex, her quiet, adoring, responsible husband, bears mostly silent witness as Irene wrestles with her duties as wife and mother, tends her garden, and imaginatively resists her fate, and as their marriage unravels-inexorably, bitterly, spectacularly.

Discussion Guide

1. How do Rex and Irene find one another and marry? How does disappointment come to define their marriage? Are either of them in control of their lives or do they just let life happen to them? Does either of them have a sense of personal power?

2. When Irene shakes her head in judgment of Girlie's fear of snakes and says, "Poor, Girlie, such a scaredy-cat," is she being cruel or is she commenting on some larger rule of life that Girlie had better realize if she is to survive? What do the different images of snakes in this novel represent?

3. Irene lines up Girlie and Boy to teach them about the botany of irises and tells them that "unlike people, flowers never disappoint." What does she mean by this? Why does Irene garden?

4. Explore Irene's tempestuous relationship with her children. Do you feel sympathy for her, particularly regarding her frustrations with being a mother?

5. Rex seems like a visitor in his own home. He is "permanently distracted" and is not an active father to his children. What are the defining moments of his relationships with Girlie and Boy?

6. How does religion figure into the lives of the family? Are Rex and Irene spiritual in any way?

7. After Irene leaves, Rex buys pigs and gives them the run of the farm, including her garden. Why? What is happening to him? Does his suicide reveal more about his personality than his life did?

8. Irene leaves Rex for another man for a month. How does this change her vision of her life?

9. How does the Australian landscape play a part in the lives of this family? Does it become a metaphor for the spiritual desolation in which they find themselves?

Author Bio

Kate Jennings, who grew up in Australia, has lived since 1979 in New York City. Her writings have appeared in the New York Times Book Review, Self, and other magazines. Snake is her first novel and the first of her books to be published in the United States.

Critical Praise

Herald " The brief scenes, often seemingly random and catching the absolute rub of the quotidian, possess what feels like a holographic shimmer. . . . Snake is clearly the work of a powerful imagination. American readers will feel themselves fortunate to make the acquaintance of a writer like Kate Jennings. "

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