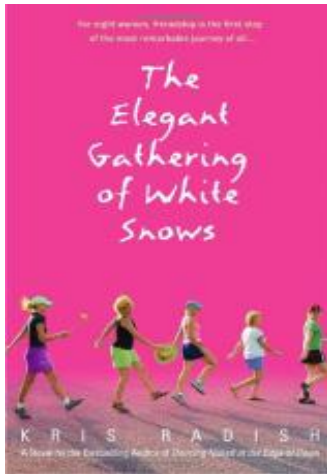

The Elegant Gathering of White Snows: A Novel

by Kris Radish



About the Book

A tribute to the spirit of friendship that sustains us all, **The Elegant Gathering of White Snows** takes readers on an exhilarating odyssey through the lives of eight extraordinary women. Gathering each Thursday night for unbridled fellowship, this group has shared joys and heartaches, hopes and disappointments. But one night they respond to a personal crisis by deciding to go for a walk?with no particular destination in mind. They don't ask permission from family and friends. They don't leave instructions on operating the dishwasher. They don't pack suitcases. They just leave, unburdening themselves of sorrow and anger with every step they take. As they stroll down a rural Wisconsin highway, word spreads of their mysterious journey. Women around the globe become rejuvenated by news of the pilgrimage, whose location is marked only on the invisible map of each woman's life story. Just as the characters in **The Elegant Gathering of White Snows** recall the most powerful episodes of their lives, those who gather to discuss the novel are sure to find a wide range of meaningful responses to consider.

Discussion Guide

1. What is the source of healing among the Elegant Gathering women? Why is it so essential for them to gather without men present? What are some of the distinctions you perceive between all-male gatherings and all-female ones?
2. Why do you suppose the eight women chose to take a walk --- an active, visible pursuit --- rather than go on retreat? Where would you go if you decided to embark on a spontaneous pilgrimage?
3. The primary source of Alice's sorrow is the death of her newborn daughter, who was born with "a hole in her heart." What prevents Alice from fully coping with the subsequent emptiness in her own heart?

4. Does J.J.'s experience represent a shift in attitudes regarding sexual violence against women? Do you think J.J. would have fared better in one of today's high schools?
5. What does Chris's career crisis illustrate about the contradictions experienced by women who joined the ranks of wage earners during the 1970s?
6. Sandy's story illustrates the bliss of love and the bitter pain of loss. Besides introducing her to Lenny, what gifts does this walk bring to Sandy?
7. Gail carries the emotional scars of her father's sudden departure when she was a little girl. When her mother rejects Gail's beloved brother, Gail has to redefine family to fit the fragile bonds left to her. In what way does this situation shape her own future as a woman?
8. Susan, whose shattered glass opens the novel, faces numerous other shattering experiences in the form of a terrible marriage and, ultimately, the decision of whether to terminate her pregnancy. How would you have put the pieces together again had you been in her situation?
9. Susan faces numerous fragile situations, including an unexpected pregnancy. The primary source of Alice's sorrow is the death of her newborn daughter. What do these two perspectives indicate about the individual nature of motherhood and its circumstances?
10. Mary's feelings of obligation keep her from completing the walk with the others, but she plays an important role as their liaison with the outside world. How would you characterize her role? Do you consider it to be uplifting, bittersweet, sad?
11. What universal lessons can be gained from the way Janice confronts her depression? To what do you attribute her survival?
12. Do you believe that behavioral differences between genders are due to nature or nurture? What are the causes of sexism, against men as well as women? Discuss solutions-both realistic ones and long shots-for resolving the kinds of emotional pain brought to light by **The Elegant Gathering of White Snows**.
13. If you had walked with the Elegant Gathering women, what burdens from your life would you have wanted to relinquish?
14. Gail makes a poignant fireside observation: "You know, we are the only ones who have been looking for ourselves." Is this process of self-discovery ultimately a solitary one?
15. In a scene that gives the novel its title, Janice recalls the tea shop owner whose rare brew gave her a life-saving glimpse at beauty. What does this encounter indicate about her path to healing? Discuss some of the unexpected comforts that have shaped the course of your life. Discuss some of the "potions" that comfort you.
16. Chris, Gail, and Mary all demonstrate quests to find fulfilling roles. What is the source of Chris's career crisis? In what ways does Gail redefine family? Is Mary authentically happy in her role as nurturer?
17. Sandy's story illustrates the bliss of love and the bitter pain of loss when a drunk driver takes the life of her soul

mate. Besides introducing her to Lenny, what gifts does this walk bring to Sandy?

18. The novel is sprinkled with news releases about the Women Walkers' activities. Try composing your own news release describing a liberating activity you sometimes imagine undertaking.

19. What new definitions of sexuality and love did you gain from the novel?

20. Many additional characters are introduced through the Women Walker Effect. Which of these stories was most memorable for you? In what way do the media, and storytelling in general, sustain women worldwide?

21. Did you experience the Women Walker Effect while reading the novel? If so, what are some of the new directions you will embark on as a result?

Author Bio

Kris Radish is the author of six books. Her Bantam Dell novels THE ELEGANT GATHERING OF WHITE SNOWS, DANCING NAKED AT THE EDGE OF DAWN and ANNIE FREEMAN'S FABULOUS TRAVELING FUNERAL have been on the bestseller and Book Sense 76 Selection lists. She also writes two weekly nationally syndicated columns.

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