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The Seventh Etching

by Judith K. White



About the Book

A historic family drama based in and near 1640 Amsterdam, the wealthiest city on earth at the time, The Seventh Etching tells the story of two families over a one-year period. Both Griet and Johannes Verhoeven, farmers, in their early 20?s and Jos and Myriam Broekhof, wealthy merchants in their 30?s, face devastating losses that threaten their livelihoods and their marriages.

After a major flood, Griet and Johannes attempt to rebuild two combined family farms ? a unique, promising inheritance that initially brought them together, but now overwhelms them. Myriam secretly sells her husband?s valuable art collection to build a hidden monument to her deceased daughter. Jos suffers despair and defeat as he combs every corner of the city in his obsessive attempt to complete a set of playfully erotic etchings. It is a six-year old Gypsy orphan, Nelleke, who connects the two couples. Sprightly and spirited, Nelleke both delights and exasperates. Might this mysterious child have the power to heal struggling adults and find the permanent home she seeks? Does she, innocently and unknowingly, hold the clue to the missing etching, as Jos suspects?

Discussion Guide

1. Who are the probable father and mother of the baby who appears on Nicolaas?s doorstep in the Prologue? Where is that child ten years later? Describe his relationship to Nelleke. How do you react to Elsbeth Van Randen?s reasons for keeping the children apart?

2. In what ways does the Prologue foreshadow the novel?s events, secrets, and revelations?

3. During Amsterdam?s Golden Age when this story takes place, it was the wealthiest city on earth. What evidence of that wealth do you see in the novel?

4. Were there dangers in extreme wealth? What role did the church attempt to play in curbing its excesses?

5. The wealth was not evenly distributed. What social problems existed and how did they affect the story? Even among the most opulent, child and maternal deaths were common. Why could they not protect themselves against these losses?

6. One reader described Part I as ?good people forced to make difficult decisions.? What does that description refer to? Do you agree? Are there villains in this story?

7. Reactions to Nelleke?s character have ranged from endearing to irritating. Do you believe either or both of these apply? How many adjectives can you come up with to describe her?

8. What explains Jos?s obsession with completing the set of etchings? Do you find his determination compelling? How is his obsession similar and different from modern-day obsessions?

9. Which character do you think undergoes the most change? Discuss the arc of that change. What influences the alteration?

10. There are several secondary stories. Identify them. Do they contribute to/ reinforce/ hinder the flow of the main story?

11. When asked, ?Who is your favorite character?? most readers identify the same character. Do you have a favorite? If so, what is it about that character that appeals to you?

12. Were you surprised by Myriam?s reaction upon viewing the first etchings in the series? By her refusal to view more? What did you think of her insistence on destroying the set?

13. Did you believe the seventh etching would be found? If so, where did you think it might be located?

14. One reader commented: ?As I approached the final chapters, I was afraid the author would leave me up in the air. But, no, she tied up all the loose ends.? Do you agree? If so, are the resolutions convincing? Satisfying?

Author Bio

Judith K. White is the oldest of six children and the mother of three. She also has three granddaughters and has survived countless family dramas. While living in Amsterdam, she became fascinated with the city and its history. Judith is fluent in Spanish and French, and takes great pleasure in using her limited knowledge of Dutch on return visits to The Netherlands. Her careers span educator, entrepreneur and fundraiser, including: Peace Corps volunteer trainer; Founder/Director of Foreign Language for Young Children Inc.; Co-Founder/Co-Director of Global Child, Inc; and non-profit fund-raiser. Her previous publications include *Phrase-a-Day French for Children*; *Phrase-a-Day Spanish for Children*; and *Phrase-a-Day English for Spanish-speaking Children*. Judith lives in Brookline, Massachusetts with her husband, Allen L. White. *The Seventh Etching* is her first novel.

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