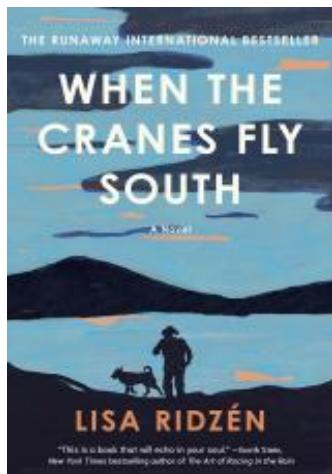


When the Cranes Fly South

written by Lisa Ridzén, translated by Alice Menzies



About the Book

A profoundly moving debut novel that follows an elderly man's attempts to mend his relationship with his son before it's too late: an emotional story of love, friendship, fatherhood, dogs and atonement that is already an international sensation.

Bo is running out of time. Yet time is one of the few things he has left. These days, his quiet existence is broken up only by daily visits from his home care team. Fortunately, he still has his beloved elkhound, Sixten, to keep him company?though now his son, with whom Bo has had a rocky relationship, insists upon taking the dog away, claiming that Bo has grown too old to properly care for him.

The threat of losing Sixten stirs up a whirlwind of emotion, leading Bo to take stock of his life, his relationships, and the imperfect way he's expressed his love over the years.

Discussion Guide

1. The initial inspiration for WHEN THE CRANES FLY SOUTH came from notes the author's late grandfather's caregivers left for her family. Did you find the interspersed fictional notes from Bo's home care team an effective device? What do they add to the novel's perspective?
2. Why do you think the threat of losing Sixten prompts Bo to revisit the important relationships in his life? What does Sixten represent to Bo, and how did the memory of his childhood dog, Buster, shade your understanding of Bo's deep attachment?
3. On page 44, Bo reflects on Hans: ?I'm still angry with him for wanting to take control of my life, but on the other hand I never want him to let go.? How does this capture Bo's feelings about balancing his desire for autonomy with his

need for help? Why does he find it easier to accept help from the caregivers, especially Ingrid, rather than from his own son?

4. Father-son relationships are central to the novel, specifically between Bo and Hans, and Bo's relationship with his own father. On page 89, Bo observes that ?Sometimes it feels like everything speeds up when Hans is here, like fast-forwarding a VHS. Before I've had time to finish one thought, he's moved on.? How much of the difficulty of communication do you think can be chalked up to intergenerational differences versus family dynamics?

5. On page 7, Bo expresses a sudden urge to talk to his wife, Fredrika --- ?not that we were ever people who talked a lot.? What is left unsaid between people is a recurring theme in the novel. Do you think this reflects masculinity norms in Scandinavia --- which the author has studied in her PhD work --- or do you think it's more universal than that? Have you experienced this in your own relationships?

6. As he nears the end of his life, Bo plunges deeper and deeper into memories of the past. On page 66, he tells Fredrika, ?Time and memory merge together in a sludge, and there are days when my first few years with you feel closer than last week.? Yet memory is precisely what his wife has lost --- ?our entire life together,? as Bo puts it later in the novel. Do you think the narrative choice of having Bo address Fredrika directly works to bridge this divide in some way?

7. On page 177, Bo observes of the hay, ?They'll cut it all back soon, bale it up ahead of winter. Once that happens, you can be sure the autumn colors are coming, that the aspen on the edge of the glade will soon turn red.? How does the author use nature and the seasons to foreshadow events in the novel?

8. At Ture's funeral, Bo feels ?offended somehow? to realize that there were parts to his friend that he ?had no idea about.? Do you think we ever show our full selves to others, even our closest friends and loved ones?

9. At the beginning of the novel, Bo explains that he doesn't want things with Hans to ?end up the way they did with my old man.? Yet father and son struggle throughout the course of the narrative to find their way back to each other. Does their reconciliation at the end feel earned to you? Cranes in flight appear in three scenes in the novel, without explicit explanation about their significance to Bo or to the characters. What do you see as the symbolism in the book's title?

10. This is a novel that elicits strong emotions; it's been described by one early reader as a novel that ?breaks your heart and then mends it.? How does the author manage to take a subject that could be seen as sad and transform it into a life-affirming, cathartic reading experience? What other emotions did you experience as you read?

11. Fellow Swedish author Fredrik Backman described WHEN THE CRANES FLY SOUTH as ?one of those ?you'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll want to buy twenty copies and give them to everyone you love? books.? If you were to give this book to someone as a gift, who would it be and why? What message would you want them to take away from the story?

Author Bio

Lisa Ridzén is a doctoral student in sociology, researching masculinity norms in the rural communities of the Swedish far north, where she herself was raised and now lives in a small village outside of Östersund. The idea for her debut

novel, WHEN THE CRANES FLY SOUTH, came from the discovery of notes her grandfather's care team had left the family as he neared the end of his life.

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