Winter Garden

by Kristin Hannah



About the Book

Can a woman ever really know herself if she doesn?t know her mother?

From the author of the smash-hit bestsellers **Firefly Lane** and **True Colors** comes a powerful, heartbreaking novel that illuminates the intricate mother-daughter bond and explores the enduring links between the present and the past

Meredith and Nina Whitson are as different as sisters can be. One stayed at home to raise her children and manage the family apple orchard; the other followed a dream and traveled the world to become a famous photojournalist. But when their beloved father falls ill, Meredith and Nina find themselves together again, standing alongside their cold, disapproving mother, Anya, who even now, offers no comfort to her daughters. As children, the only connection between them was the Russian fairy tale Anya sometimes told the girls at night. On his deathbed, their father extracts a promise from the women in his life: the fairy tale will be told one last time --- and all the way to the end. Thus begins an unexpected journey into the truth of Anya?s life in war-torn Leningrad, more than five decades ago. Alternating between the past and present, Meredith and Nina will finally hear the singular, harrowing story of their mother?s life, and what they learn is a secret so terrible and terrifying that it will shake the very foundation of their family and change who they believe they are.

Discussion Guide

1. This novel explores a complicated and strained relationship between two sisters. Do you think Meredith is justified in being so angry with Nina? In what ways are the sisters different and in what ways are they alike?

2. Meredith and Nina are both reluctant to let the men in their lives help them through a difficult time, yet both are suffering from the grief caused by the death of their father. Do you think this is something they?ve inherited from their mother? In what other ways are they similar to their mother? Do you think it?s impossible to avoid becoming like the

people who raised you?

3. Anya Whitson is color blind and cannot see the colors in her winter garden. Why do you think the author gave the character this particular trait? In what ways is it a metaphor for what Anya has gone through in her life? Do you believe it is a physiological blindness or a psychological one?

4. One of the themes in this book is female solidarity and strength during hard times. Nina witnesses women in Namibia, Africa holding hands and laughing, even though their country has been ravaged by famine and warfare. Their bond impenetrable. Why do you think she?s so interested in this theme? How else does this theme play out throughout the novel? How does understanding her mother?s life inform Nina?s view of her work?

5. Memory is an important theme in Winter Garden. Meredith often regrets --- when looking at old family photos taken without her --- that she was often off organizing or obsessing over details, while everyone else was living in the moment, creating memories. How common is this for women and mothers? What memories keep your family together?

6. As a child in Leningrad, Anya learned that it was dangerous to express emotions. That in doing so she would be putting what was left of her family at risk with the secret police. But now, with Meredith and Nina, her inability to express emotion is driving them apart, destroying the family she has now. How has Anya passed down this legacy to her daughters? How has it harmed their own relationships?

7. Food is an important element in this novel. Obviously, Anya loves to cook. Why doesn?t she teach this to her daughters?

8. Jeff tells Meredith that ?words matter.? What are some examples of this throughout the story? How have words saved and harmed each of these characters? lives? How has silence saved and harmed each of these characters? lives? How do words --- the telling of the fairy tale --- change their individual and collective perceptions of who they are?

9. When Anya, Meredith and Nina watch the man carving the totem pole in Alaska in memory of his deceased son, Meredith realizes that Anya?s fairytale has served the same function as this man?s sculpture. It is a symbol of loss, a way to sublimate the pain of grief, to heal. In what other ways did Anya heal by telling her daughters the fairy tale? In what ways did Meredith and Anya heal?

10. Anya is an unsympathetic character throughout much of the book. How did your perception of her change as the fairy tale unfolded? Did you end up sympathizing with her, or even liking her? Or do you feel that her treatment of her daughters was inexcusable, regardless of the hardships she had faced in her life? How do you think you would have fared in Leningrad under the siege? Was Anya heroic in Leningrad, or a failure?

11. It isn?t until Nina and Meredith discover who their mother is that they are able to discover who they are. What do they find out about themselves? How do you think their perception of their own childhoods will change now that they know the truth behind their mother?s story?

12. Winter Garden teaches us that it is never too late to say ?I love you.? Meredith and Nina waited all of their lives to hear it from their mother. Sasha waited until his death for Anya to return. What has this novel taught us about the bonds of family and the strength of love?

13. How did you feel about the ending?

Author Bio

Kristin Hannah is the award-winning and bestselling author of more than 20 novels, including the international blockbuster, THE NIGHTINGALE, which was named Goodreads Best Historical Fiction novel for 2015 and won the coveted People?s Choice award for best fiction in the same year. Additionally, it was a selection of the Reese Witherspoon Book Club in 2023. It was named a Best Book of the Year by Amazon, iTunes, Buzzfeed, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Paste* and *The Week*. In 2018, THE GREAT ALONE became an instant *New York Times* #1 bestseller and was named the Best Historical Novel of the Year by Goodreads.

THE FOUR WINDS was published in February 2021 and immediately hit #1 on the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today* and Indie bookstores? bestseller lists. Additionally, it was selected as a book club pick by the both "Today" and the Book of the Month club, which named it the best book of 2021.

THE NIGHTINGALE is currently in production at Tri Star, with Dakota and Elle Fanning set to star. Tri Star has also optioned THE GREAT ALONE, and it is in development. FIREFLY LANE, her beloved novel about two best friends, was the #1 Netflix series around the world, in the week it came out. The popular TV show starred Katherine Heigl and Sarah Chalke, and season two concluded the series in April 2023.

A former attorney, Kristin lives in the Pacific Northwest.

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