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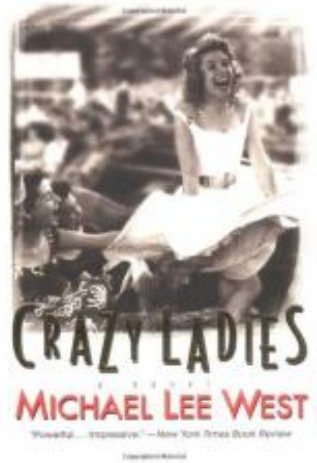
Crazy Ladies

by Michael Lee West



About the Book

Crazy Ladies, Michael Lee West's spirited first novel, explores the trials and tribulations of six Southern women---Miss Gussie, the reigning matriarch, her daughters, Dorothy and Clancy Jane, granddaughters Violet and Bitsy, and her irreplaceable maid and guardian angel, Queenie.

The story begins in 1932, in Crystal Falls, Tennessee, where Miss Gussie is struggling to adjust to life with her difficult baby daughter. When death darkens her doorstep, Miss Gussie pledges her husband to a lifetime of secrecy, a promise that she herself takes to the grave.

Miss Gussie has her hands full with her two daughters. As the girls grow older, the surprises begin. Dorothy, believing that money will heal her childhood wounds, marries the owner of the local five-and-dime and settles next door to her childhood home. Clancy Jane shocks everyone by running off with her high school sweetheart, who spends his time working on oilrigs and girls on the side. Eventually Clancy Jane's free spirit leads her far from home, while Dorothy free falls into obsessive self-absorption and dangerous paranoia.

Meanwhile, Miss Gussie's granddaughters have their own hardships to endure. Each woman, however, is ultimately guided back to the shelter of dear Queenie, where three generations of daughters are once again reunited in Miss Gussie¹s old home.

Interweaving dark calamity with remarkable insight and humor, each voice resounding with Southern cadence, **Crazy Ladies** is a novel full of love and laughter, pain and redemption.

Discussion Guide

1. On the first page, Miss Gussie states, "There is so much good in a garden, if you don't count what happened to Adam

and Eve." How does this statement serve as a foreshadowing of events to come and as a metaphor for the story as a whole? Why does West choose to begin and end the novel in Miss Gussie's garden?

2. What is the significance of Miss Gussie's act of murder in the first chapter? Why would West choose to open the story with this scene?

3. Both Dorothy and Clancy Jane have self-destructive tendencies that lead each to the brink of suicide. Why? What in their shared experience could lead to this behavior?

4. West uses multiple narrators to unfold the story in Crazy Ladies. What advantages are gained by this? How does the perspective of each of the six women affect your experience of the story? Do multiple narrators help to temper your judgments toward a character?

5. Clancy Jane is the most free-spirited character, and her life is filled with experiences that none of the other women ever share or understand. How does her character serve to expand the range and depth of the novel? What could her experiences teach the other women?

6. One of the dominant themes of Crazy Ladies is that of the single mother. How well do Clancy Jane, Dorothy, and Bitsy handle their issues of abandonment and the challenges of raising their children alone. What is West saying about the fortitude of women?

7. By the end of the novel, Queenie has become the most stable and secure characters. Were you surprised by this? Was there any foreshadowing of this in the novel's beginning?

Author Bio

Michael Lee West is the author of six novels, including CRAZY LADIES, MAD GIRLS IN LOVE, AMERICAN PIE and SHE FLEW THE COOP, as well as a food memoir, CONSUMING PASSIONS. She lives with her husband on a farm in Lebanon, Tennessee, with three bratty Yorkshire Terriers, a Chinese crested, assorted donkeys, chickens, sheep, and African Pygmy goats. Her faithful dog Zap was the inspiration of a character in MERMAIDS IN THE BASEMENT.

Critical Praise

" Not since Flannery O'Connor's first book has a debut novel by a young Southerner been so filled with wry humor and humanity, so precisely right in its idioms, and so distinctive in its voices. "

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