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Deep in the Heart

by Sharon Oard Warner



About the Book

In the rich tradition of John Irving's The Cider House Rules and Sue Miller's The Good Mother comes this provocative, emotionally charged debut novel -- an unforgettable story of love and conscience ... and the secrets kept deepest in the heart.

In a bustling Texas city, Hannah Solace and Penny Reed live in separate worlds. Thirty-nine-year-old Hannah works in a crowded public school and retreats to the false calm of her distant marriage. Penny, young and naïve, centers her life around a fledgling business and her church.

But both women are grappling with doubts -- about the men they love or don't, about their families and their pasts -- until a controversy erupts around them. For the first time in her life, Hannah is pregnant -- with a child only her husband wants to have.

At a local clinic on the edge of town, amid the chaos and the fury, both women will come face-to-face: This single stroke of fate will have profound reverberations, forcing each of them to reevaluate everything they have come to believe about love, motherhood, and family.

Discussion Guide

1. Why has Hannah and Carl's marriage deteriorated?

2. What scares Hannah about motherhood?

3. In its review of the novel, *Chicago Tribune Books* said: "The death of her mother when Hannah was 12, and the fact that she then mothered her younger sisters, have shaped her in ways obvious and deeply hidden." What are these ways?

How have they shaped her?

4. Why does Hannah decide to terminate the pregnancy without telling Carl of her decision? What is she trying to accomplish?

5. What makes Erica's and Hannah's relationship work? What is Hannah able to do for Erica that she can't do with her husband or sister?

6. What had Carl hoped would happen if Hannah had a child? Why is this child so important to him?

7. How has Penny's parentage -- her absent mother and unknown father -- affected her feelings on motherhood? Why is she able to do what her grandmother can't -- to see all sides of the abortion issue?

8. Why do you think Delia insists on calling Penny "sister," instead of treating her like a daughter?

9. Is Dr. Bill really in love with Penny, or is he in love with what she represents to him? What does he find attractive about her?

10. In its review of the novel, *The Austin Chronicle* wrote: "It's nearly impossible to present an even and balanced view of both sides of the abortion debate ... Sharon Oard Warner has managed the feat of objectivity." Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Author Bio

Sharon Oard Warner is the author of Learning to Dance and Other Stories, and the editor of the anthology, The Way We Write Now: Short Stories from the AIDS Crisis. Director of the creative writing program at the University of New Mexico and founding director of the Taos Summer Writers' Conference, she lives in Albuquerque with her husband and two sons.

Critical Praise

"At first glance, Deep in the Heart has abortion as its topic, but upon deeper investigation, it unleashes the less sensational, more monumental Pandora's box of motherhood. Sharon Oard Warner's characters defy the simple alternatives of pro-life or pro-choice; rather, their author insists on new, truer labels that apply to us one and all. "

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