ReadingGroupGuides
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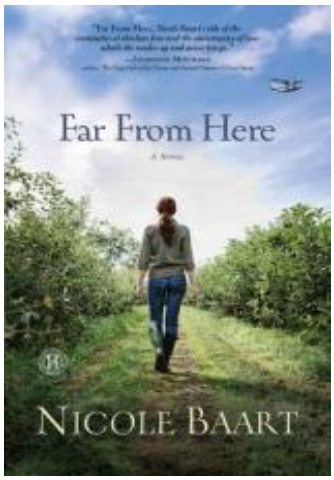
Far From Here

by Nicole Baart



About the Book

Danica has always hated flying. But this doesn?t stop her from falling in love with Etsell Greene, a pilot with dreams of becoming an Alaskan bush pilot. Together the Greenes make their home in Blackhawk, Iowa, where Etsell gives flying lessons while Danica remains on terra firma, running her own beauty salon. When a friend offers Etsell a chance to test-drive his dream, Danica finds herself reluctantly bidding her husband goodbye while he takes off for a trip to Alaska. Only a few days later, Etsell is pronounced missing. While Danica endures nightmares and waits for more news, she turns to her neighbor, Ben --- a single man and pastor who offers gentle guidance and innocent distraction. Ultimately, Danica is forced to search for the truth in her marriage and treks to Alaska to grapple with the unanswerable questions about her husband?s disappearance. But when she learns that Etsell wasn?t flying alone and that a woman is missing too, the bits and pieces of the careful life that she had constructed for them in Iowa take to the wind.

Discussion Guide

1. Why do you think the author chose to include a Prologue from Danica?s POV about the first time Etsell took her flying? How did this opening set the tone for the rest of the novel? Do you think your reading would have been different without it? Why or why not?

2. The author uses an interesting point of view technique, alternating chapters from Danica?s first person POV with those from a more limited third person POV. What effect did this have on your reading experience?

3. Danica feels betrayed and upset when Etsell tells her about his three week trip to Alaska. She accuses him of making an important decision they should?ve made together. He in turn accuses her of making all their decisions. Explain Danica?s reaction. Do you feel she?s justified? How accurate is Etsell?s complaint? Use examples from the novel to support your opinion.

4. On page 48, Benjamin tells Danica, ?Never do what you should do, Dani. Do what you have to do.? What do you think he means by this? Do you agree or disagree?

5. Danica and Etsell may not have had much in common, but they both grew up with untraditional parenting. Compare and contrast the relationship Etsell has with Hazel (his ?surrogate mother?) with the relationship between Danica and Charlene. Did Danica have a ?surrogate mother?? Discuss how she becomes one to other characters in the novel.

6. Danica describes her oldest sister as somewhat detached and cold. Natalie doesn?t come to visit Danica until Etsell has been missing for two months. Yet Danica is ?convinced of her sister?s love even if Natalie couldn?t bring herself to say it and didn?t know how to show it.? Do you think Danica understands her loved ones and forgives them their faults, or does she just have a lifelong history of making excuses for everyone around her? Explain your opinion.

7. Just when Danica begins to find some normalcy in her life, a happy gathering of friends and family playing Canasta at her house is interrupted by yet more tragic news. Who did you suspect was at the door on page 226? Were you surprised at Sam?s news? Why or why not?

8. Just as in real life, the characters in this novel learn that the most important decisions are never easy, and life is never simple. Would you have gone to see Danica if you were Sam, or would you have kept the secret?

9. Danica asks her neighbor Ben --- a pastor --- why in all his visits he?s never mentioned God. ?I have,? he says, ?In lots of different ways.? (p. 298) What do you think he means? Identify and discuss what some of these ?different ways? might be.

10. Danica?s older sister, Natalie, tells Danica, ?We fail each other every day in a million different ways.? (p. 217) Does Danica agree? Do you? Why or why not?

11. When Danica finally tells her whole family about the baby, everyone seems divided on what she should do. Hazel and Char seem to think it would only hurt Danica in the long run to have such a reminder in her life, whereas Kat seems to feel the baby belongs more with Danica than a stranger. Were you surprised that Danica decided to keep Sam and Etsell?s baby? What would you do in her shoes?

12. Danica primarily participates in three activities throughout the novel: hairdressing, gardening, and furniture restoration. Analyze how each of these serves as an outlet of expression for Danica, or as a tenuous thread she uses to pull herself out of her emotional pit.

13. Unlike most widows, Danica is never delivered a body or even true confirmation of Etsell?s death. Identify and discuss some of the ways in which she attempts to move on with her life. What finally marks a true shift for her toward healing? How does she find closure?

14. At one point, Danica compares her situation to that of Tom Hanks? character in the movie Castaway, in which a man stranded on a deserted island survives and returns to civilization several years later to discover that everyone has moved on without him. Imagine what might happen if Etsell were to return to Blackhawk following the Epilogue and share your thoughts with your book club.

Enhance Your Book Club

1. Though he adores his wife, Etsell?s first love is his airplane. Take in a local air show or, better yet, seek out a local airport that provides flying lessons to get a real taste of Etsell?s dream.

2. Sam?s unexpected visit interrupts a game of canasta between Danica, her sisters, their mother, Hazel, and Ben. Try learning to play this popular card game from the 1940s with members of your book club. You can start by checking out www.canasta.net for basic rules, or by trying your hand at an online canasta game at www.games.com/game/canasta/.

3. Danica and Etsell often hike to the river and enjoy lazing around, their feet in the water. The river is also a place of solace for Danica after Etsell disappears. Bring a little of their world to life by holding your next book club meeting beside a local river or lake. Bring a picnic and make an afternoon of it to get the full effect a calm body of water can have on the psyche.

4. In the novel, Kat decides to mark Etsell?s passing from their lives in a very physical way, asking Danica to lop off her ponytail and give her a short new hairstyle. Many women mark major life changes by dramatically coloring or cutting their hair. If you?re feeling brave, why not experience the difference such a change can make in your life by visiting your favorite beautician and trying a totally new look?

Author Bio

Nicole Baart is the author of several novels, including WHERE HE LEFT ME and EVERYTHING WE DIDN'T SAY. The cofounder of a nonprofit and mother of five, she lives in Iowa with her family.

Critical Praise

?FAR FROM HERE, Nicole Baart's tale of the certainties of absolute fear and the uncertainty of love whirls the reader up and never lets go.?

--- Jacquelyn Mitchard, *New York Times* bestselling author, THE DEEP END OF THE OCEAN, and SECOND NATURE: A Love Story

?Nicole Baart is a writer of immense strength. Her lush, beautiful prose, her finely drawn characters, and especially her quirky women, all made FAR FROM HERE a book I couldn?t put down.?

--- Sandra Dallas, *New York Times* bestselling author of PRAYERS FOR SALE and THE BRIDE'S HOUSE

?FAR FROM HERE was a rare journey to a place that left me healed and renewed by the end of this beautiful, moving novel. A tribute to love in all its forms --- between a man and a wife, between sisters, and among mothers and daughters --- my heart ached while I read Far From Here, but it ached more when I was done and there were no more pages to turn.?

--- Nicolle Wallace, *New York Times* bestselling author of EIGHTEEN ACRES

?Nicole Baart is a huge talent who has both a big voice and something meaningful to say with it. FAR FROM HERE is a gorgeous book about resilient people living in a broken world, finding ways to restore hope and even beauty in the pieces.?

--- Joshilyn Jackson, author of GODS IN ALABAMA and A GROWN UP KIND OF PRETTY

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