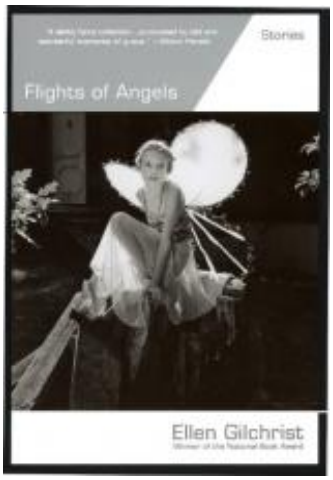
Flights of Angels

by Ellen Gilchrist



About the Book

The opening story in *Flights of Angels* sets the theme for this new collection: the intricate and inexorable relationships between power, love, and loss. A Mississippi patriarch lies dying as his large family gathers around him. Once rich and powerful, he is now reduced to dependency on the very sons who ruined his financial empire and on government programs he has always despised. His granddaughter, the story's narrator, her marriage falling apart, starts an affair with the attending black hospice worker, ironically fulfilling the old man's prejudices.

In the ensuing stories, parents and children, siblings, and lovers tread the treacherous paths of love. The reader is treated to tales from familiar Gilchrist characters-Rhoda, and Traceleen and Crystal--and is introduced to a gallery of sparklingly eccentric new ones. Caught in the snares the heart spins, they all learn the cost and pain of love, while reveling in its joy and hilarity.

The final story asserts the universal need to extend one's love beyond family and friends and to make one's mark upon the world--to improve it. A group of young men and women sets out to expose the dangers of a nearby abandoned nuclear reactor. Their adventures in righteous enthusiasm teach them more about themselves than about fission.

As always, Gilchrist's insights are imbued equally with humor and sorrow. In her world, where we encounter divorce, avarice, and death, we also find hope and laughter and the redemption of the human heart.

Discussion Guide

1. Compared to her earlier works, how has Gilchrist's approach to race developed and changed? Does this development parallel what has changed in American society over the past two decades?

2. While Gilchrist has stated over and over in various interviews that she is only a story teller, various moral themes are

persistent in her work. Examining this collection of stories, what does she seem to indicate is the cost of love? Who owes what to whom, emotionally? And how much? Can emotional debts ever be paid?

3. Examine how Gilchrist uses science--particularly physics and astrophysics--in her stories. Is her use of science in any way comparable to how 19th century writers used religion?

Author Bio

Ellen Gilchrist, winner of the National Book Award for VICTORY OVER JAPAN, is the author of more than 20 books, including novels, short stories, poetry and a memoir. She lives in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Critical Praise

"Every story is a gem. "

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