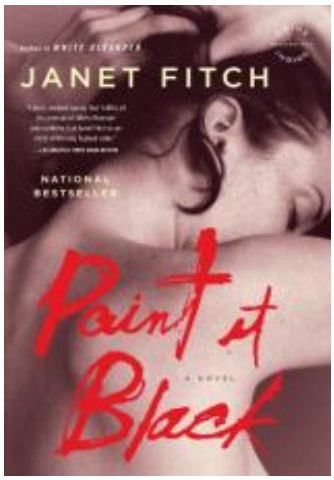
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Paint It Black: A Novel

by Janet Fitch



About the Book

Josie Tyrell, art model and denizen of LA's rock scene, finds a chance at real love with art student Michael Faraday. A Harvard dropout and son of a renowned pianist, Michael introduces Josie to his spiritual quest and a world of sophistication she had never dreamed existed. But when she is called to identify her lover's dead body, Josie's bright dreams all turn to black.

As Josie struggles to understand Michael's death and hold onto the true world he shared with her, she finds herself both repelled by and attracted to his pianist mother, Meredith, who holds Josie responsible for her son's torment. Soon, the two women find themselves drawn into a twisted relationship that reflects equal parts distrust and blind need.

Discussion Guide

1. Janet Fitch has said that one of the central questions of **Paint It Black** is: "What happens to a dream when the dreamer is gone?" What do you think the author meant by this? Do you think the question is ultimately answered in the novel?

2. Although Michael and Josie come from very different backgrounds, their attraction to each other is almost immediate. What does Michael see in Josie, and what does she see in him? If it were not for Michael's depression, do you think their relationship would have endured? Or were they bound to go their separate ways eventually?

3. In their grief over Michael's death, both Josie and Meredith experience a range of other emotions: guilt, anger, and selfdestructive impulses. Do you think grief over a suicide is different from other kinds of grief? If so, how, and why?

4. At one point in the novel Josie ponders the reason for Meredith's despising her: "Josie 's crime?loving her son, loving him, but not enough to save him" (page 90). To what extent does Josie blame herself for not being able to prevent Michael's death? Is she responsible? Should love be enough for one person to save another? Under what circumstances

might it not be? Are there experiences that one must live through alone?

5. "[Josie] had always believed that knowledge helped you do things, but Michael's knowing just took away his courage, his freedom" (page 67). In what way does Michael's education in art and culture hamper him in his own artistic development? How do Michael, Meredith, and Josie individually deal with the conflict between perfectionism and giving rein to creative instinct? Is this challenge different for a performing artist and a creative artist? Do you think there is any solution to this dilemma?

6. Michael introduces Josie to what he calls "the true world." What is the true world? What is its significance for Michael and for Josie? Does she still believe in its existence after Michael is gone?

7. Josie finds out that a number of details Michael told her about himself?for example, his inability to drive, his lack of prowess at sports?were untrue. Why is she so upset by these revelations? How do they make her reevaluate their relationship? Does anyone truly reveal his or her entire self to another person, no matter how close?

8. Despite their animosity toward each other, Meredith and Josie keep seeking each other out. What is it that draws them together? How do their feelings about each other change over time?or do they? What do you think would happen if Josie took Meredith up on her offer toward the end of the book? What is tempting to Josie about this proposal? What is frightening about it?

9. Why does Josie feel so compelled to go to Twentynine Palms? How does what she learns there change her perspective on Michael's death? On their relationship?

10. What do you think lies in store for Josie as the novel closes? What role might the young Austrian girl, Wilma, play in her life?

Author Bio

Janet Fitch?s first novel, WHITE OLEANDER, a #1 bestseller and Oprah?s Book Club selection, has been translated into 28 languages and was made into a feature film. Her second novel, PAINT IT BLACK, hit bestseller lists across the country and has also been made into a film. Her third novel, THE REVOLUTION OF MARINA M., begins an epic journey through the Russian Revolution, which concludes with CHIMES OF A LOST CATHEDRAL. She lives with her husband in Los Angeles.

Critical Praise

"Fitch wonderfully captures the abrasive appeal of punk music, the bohemian, sometimes squalid lifestyle, the performers, the drugs, the alienation. This is crackling fresh stuff you don't read every day."

Paint It Black: A Novel

by Janet Fitch

Publication Date: October 3, 2007
Paperback: 448 pages
Publisher: Back Bay Books
ISBN-10: 0316067148
ISBN-13: 9780316067140