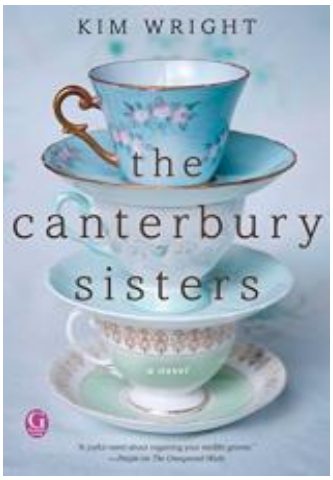
The Canterbury Sisters

by Kim Wright



About the Book

Che Milan?s life is falling apart. Not only has her longtime lover abruptly dumped her, but her eccentric, demanding mother has recently died. When an urn of ashes arrives, along with a note reminding Che of a half-forgotten promise to take her mother to Canterbury, Che finds herself reluctantly undertaking a pilgrimage.

Within days she joins a group of women who are walking the sixty miles from London to the shrine of Becket in Canterbury Cathedral, reputed to be the site of miracles. In the best Chaucer tradition, the women swap stories as they walk, each vying to see who can best describe true love. Che, who is a perfectionist and workaholic, loses her cell phone at the first stop and is forced to slow down and really notice the world around her, perhaps for the first time in years.

Through her adventures along the trail, Che finds herself opening up to new possibilities in life and discovers that the miracles of Canterbury can take surprising forms.

Discussion Guide

1. In the opening pages, Che loses her mother, Diana, and describes herself as an orphan: ?I?ve always been an only child, and now I?m an orphan as well, and the time has pretty much passed for having children of my own. Not that I ever particularly wanted such a thing. The bumper sticker on my Fiat reads, I?M NOT CHILDLESS, I?M CHILD-FREE, but still, to find myself utterly alone in the world, at least in terms of blood relations, has hit me harder than I would have guessed? (pg. 6). What does the loss of her mother represent to Che? As the story progresses, how does Che reconcile with her loss?

2. When Che first sees the Broads Abroad, she remains on her side of the pub, observing from a distance rather than approaching the group. What about this trip makes her reluctant to sit down with the women at first? How does a stranger in the pub ultimately convince her to go on the journey? Describe her initial reactions to the women and how

her opinions change over time.

3. THE CANTERBURY TALES include pilgrims who are men, whereas the Broads Abroad is a group made only of women. Discuss how this affects the sort of stories that are told during Che?s pilgrim- age versus the one Chaucer would have experienced in the Mid- dle Ages.

4. Before the women officially begin their journey, each person briefly mentions her marital status. Che blurts out, ?I was married once, but so long ago that it?s like it hardly happened? (pg. 48). Describe the role of secrecy, lies, and ?personal myths? in the novel. Whose secrets are the most surprising?

5. Jean?s tale is a good example of how self-blame permeates the women?s lives in THE CANTERBURY SISTERS. Discuss how other characters blame themselves (or others) for events that have occurred. Are they able to liberate themselves from this self- blame? Why or why not?

6. In chapter five, Che checks her email after a day without her cell phone. After seeing more than a hundred unread emails she thinks, ?Would it be such a crime to be unreachable, to hold my silence for just this once?? (pg. 77) Consider what this statement means in relation to her recent breakup with Ned, the loss of her mother, and her overall experience on the pilgrimage.

7. Because of the reality television show she stars on, Angelique?s entire relationship is the most exposed and seemingly the most brutally honest. Why does she choose to illustrate her relationship through the myth of Psyche and Eros?

8. In chapter six, Che reveals how one of her mother?s lovers ruined Cinderella for her as a young girl. What is it about this memory at this point in the book that causes Che to react so strongly and to finally cry? What is it about Valerie?s presence that causes her to flee?

9. After Claire?s tale, Tess says, ?We aren?t sharing these stories to entertain each other? (pg. 131). What is the purpose of the tales on this journey? Discuss what the storytelling represents in this novel.

10. Valerie chooses to tell the tale of Sir Gawain and the Loathly Lady instead of the story of her own life. The tale has an important message: above all, women wish for the chance to make their own decisions. Were you surprised to learn Valerie?s secret at the end of the novel? Do you think the chance to make decisions is what women truly want most in life?

11. In chapter eleven, Silvia reveals that her seemingly perfect marriage was devoid of love and that ultimately, both she and her husband find true love once they are no longer following The Plan. What does your plan look like? What do you think about Silvia?s decision to start a marriage and a family with a path already set forth?

12. On page 223, Claire asks Che, ?What did she teach you? Your mother, I mean. Girls always learn something from their mothers, even when they try not to.? What did Diana teach Che? Discuss with your fellow book club members what you?ve each learned from your own mothers.

13. The accident comes as a big shock in chapter fifteen. How does this change the dynamics of the group? Describe how each woman reacts to the accident.

14. One of the major themes in THE CANTERBURY SISTERS is the importance of company. Discuss how sisterhood --- or the lack thereof --- in Che?s life plays a role in her participation in the trip. Do the other women lack sisterhood? Consider the relationships between Becca and Jean, Claire and Silvia, Che and Diana. Do you think the group comes together by the novel?s end? Why or why not?

15. On page 290, the priest asks, ?Why do people pilgrimage?? Share your initial reaction with your book group. What would you hope to gain from a similar experience?

Enhance Your Book Club

1. Read some of Chaucer?s THE CANTERBURY TALES with your book group. Do you see any characters from THE CANTERBURY TALES echoed in THE CANTERBURY SISTERS? Are there any particular scenes that appear in both books? Consider the influence of Chaucer?s themes on THE CANTERBURY SISTERS.

2. Read Kim Wright?s other two novels, THE UNEXPECTED WALTZ and LOVE IN MID AIR. Do you notice similar themes, characters, or plot points? Discuss these similarities and differences with your book group.

3. Take a trip to a historic site or scenic hiking trail in your area --- and leave the phones at home! Invite your fellow book group members to tell the tales of their own romances or love stories that have touched them throughout their lives. Or have a ?walk and talk? book club meeting and get exercise and insight all at once.

4. For your next book club pick, select a memoir or biography about someone who travels on a trail or specific path, such as WILD by Cheryl Strayed or TRACKS by Robyn Davidson. Do you see similarities between these books? Why or why not?

Author Bio

Kim Wright is the author of LOVE IN MID AIR and THE UNEXPECTED WALTZ. She has been writing about travel, food, and wine for more than 20 years for many magazines including *Wine Spectator, Self, Travel & Leisure* and *Vogue*. She has twice won the Lowell Thomas Award for travel writing, and she is the food and wine editor for *Charlotte Taste*. THE CANTERBURY SISTERS is her third novel. Kim lives in Charlotte, NC.

Critical Praise

?One woman's mid-life crisis turns into a hilarious and touching adventure in Kim Wright's latest heartwarming tale. A book for anyone who needs reminding that sometimes the journey to find answers is more important than the

destination.?

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