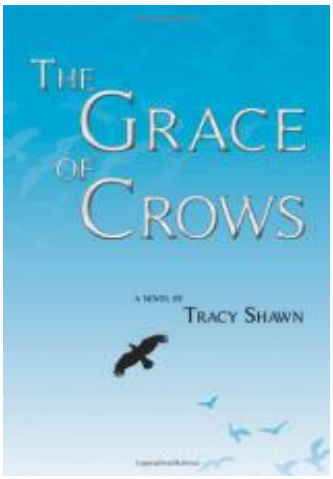
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The Grace of Crows

by Tracy Shawn



About the Book

THE GRACE OF CROWS is the story of Saylor Crawmore, a woman tormented by anxiety. Saylor tries every cure from self-help books and therapy to medication. Nothing has worked. Desperate for an answer, she must also navigate the ongoing rip current between the troubled generations of her family. Her aging mother?s narcissism, her teenage children?s compulsions, and even her husband?s need to pretend everything is okay compound her debilitating fears.

Saylor discovers her childhood friend Billy, homeless and ignored since his teens, and her world begins to shift. This encounter sparks Saylor?s journey to gain insight into her strange fears and helps her to forge the power to overcome them. Armed with her new awareness, Saylor summons the courage to help her family.

Discussion Guide

1. Empathy is a theme throughout the narrative of THE GRACE OF CROWS --- not just empathy toward family, but also empathy toward strangers and even oneself. Discuss the significance of empathy in THE GRACE OF CROWS using specific examples.

2. Saylor?s main motivation is clear: She desperately wants to banish her anxiety. What motivates Brian, Brooke, Devin, and Erika? How do their different motivations conflict or align with Saylor?s?

3. How does the author?s use of setting enhance your understanding of the characters? What do you learn from the descriptions of interior spaces and outdoor surroundings?

4.The relationship between Saylor and her mother Erika is one of the most complex in the novel. Although Erika is judgmental and combative with her daughter, Saylor is able to see the fragility behind her mother?s narcissism. Discuss ways you have dealt with difficult loved ones --- and have learned to see past their contentious exteriors.

5. Even though Billy only appears twice in the novel, Saylor?s conviction to connect with him again is an ongoing quest throughout the story. Discuss how this affected both the plot and you as the reader.

6. In chapter two, Saylor thinks: ?Everyone dies in the end, and in billions of years, the sun will explode and melt the earth.? Saylor is aware that these thoughts are morbid, but they calm her by putting her fears in perspective. When you have faced emotional turmoil, what thoughts have helped you carry on?

7. Discuss Saylor?s epiphany about the ?grace of crows,? what it means, and how she applies it to her life. In what ways do you experience Saylor?s understanding about the ?grace of crows? in your own life?

8. Besides the crows, what other animal symbols can you identify and what aspects of emotional health or personal growth might they signify?

9. In the beginning of the novel, Saylor is aware that she suffers from anxiety. She knows her fears are irrational, yet she?s unable to control them. Discuss how her struggles compare to your own emotional challenges.

10. Saylor?s first encounter with her long-lost friend Billy sparks her journey toward self-awareness and healing. Later, her breakfast with a stranger spurs her on toward emotional health. Discuss ways in which someone from your past --- or even the kindness of a stranger --- has helped you in some profound way.

11. Discuss the beginning and end of THE GRACE OF CROWS. Why does it start the way it does? Did it end as you had expected? What kind of future do you envision for each character?

12. How did the novel expand your awareness? Did reading it help you understand a family member or friend better? Describe any personal insights that THE GRACE OF CROWS may have sparked.

Author Bio

Tracy Shawn lives and writes on the Central Coast of California. Her educational background includes a master?s degree in clinical psychology. She?s worn many work hats (including waitress, floral designer, receptionist, vocational counselor, and core counselor at a psychiatric center for schizophrenic adults). Tracy enjoys incorporating her education and eclectic work history to heighten character development in her short stories and novels. Her writing has appeared in literary journals as well as print and online newspapers and magazines.

Critical Praise

"A stunning debut novel."

? Grady Harp, Hall of Fame Reviewer, Top 50 Reviewer

"This is a simple, beautiful story, and if you suffer from anxiety, love someone who does, or just like to be inspired by the human spirit, I suggest you pick up a copy soon."

? Sarah Widdup for Say What? Savannah Mae Book Reviews

"THE GRACE OF CROWS is a painful but valuable story about how a struggling woman learns the importance of forgiving and helping others and, more importantly, letting them do the same for her."

? Foreword Reviews

"This is one of those rare novels that elicit every emotion you have available through this author's amazing writing skills."

? Book Referees

"Let me start with saying one word that describes this book...Beautiful."

? Hardback Book Hotties

"Shawn's narrative is intriguing, as turns and twists in the plot reveal generational secrets and events that were pushed out of sight and mind, but still impact the present. It is written with a sophisticated understanding of psychological dynamics and personalities."

? Kerry Methner, PhD, CASA magazine

"I feel Shawn is a very empathetic person who has captured her emotions well and laid them out in a story that we all can learn from."

? Autumn Blues Reviews

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