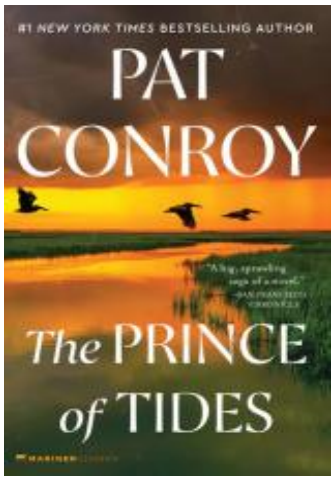
The Prince of Tides

by Pat Conroy



About the Book

A modern American classic and a family saga that spans decades, this is the story of the volatile Tom Wingo, his brilliant but troubled twin sister, Savannah, and the complex and damaging family legacy they share.

Moving between the sparkling glamour of New York City and the vanishing beauty of the South Carolina low country, THE PRINCE OF TIDES is Pat Conroy?s masterwork.

Discussion Guide

1. Tom Wingo goes to New York City in the wake of his twin sister Savannah?s attempted suicide. He agrees to work with Dr. Susan Lowenstein, Savannah?s psychiatrist, in an effort to help her with her treatment. Tom thinks ?the best I could do for my sister would be to tell my own story as honestly as I could?. I had been present at almost every significant occasion of Savannah?s life. My voice would sound a pure noise of witness and I would raise it in a cleansing song.? How can this help Dr. Lowenstein treat Savannah?

2. Tom originally started talking to Dr. Lowenstein to help Savannah. How does it ultimately help him?

3. Tom?s trouble with women started young: ?I have tried to understand women, and this obsession has left me both enraged and ridiculous. The gulf is too vast and oceanic and treacherous?. Since I failed to know my mother, I was denied the gift of knowing the other women who would cross my path.? Is this a true statement or an excuse? Tom tells Dr. Lowenstein that he?s a feminist. Is this accurate?

4. How does the circumstances of their birth foreshadow Tom and Savannah?s chaotic lives? After his turbulent upbringing, Tom reckons, ?If your parents disapprove of you and are cunning with their disapproval, there will never come a new dawn when you can become convinced of your own value. There is no fixing a damaged childhood. The

best you can hope for is to make the sucker float.? Do you agree with Tom?s cynical view? How did he ?make [his] sucker float??

5. Tom reveals that his mother made him an unwilling confidant when he was young: ?She had imprisoned me with the bitterness and honesty of her testimony: by taking me into her confidence, she made me an unwilling co-conspirator in her undeclared war against Luke and Savannah.? Why would Lila choose to pit her children against each other?

6. Savannah seems to both understand and pity her mom: ?Mom has to have what she can?t get. That?s the only thing that?s ever meant anything to her.? What does Savannah mean? How did Lila?s attempts to gain entry into the exclusive Colleton Club humanize her?

7. In their childhood, Luke, Tom and Savannah love spotting the elusive white porpoise, Carolina Snow. Is the porpoise a symbol for something? Were you surprised that Henry Wingo tipped off the captain to the porpoise?s whereabouts?

8. What is the significance of Savannah?s children?s story, ?The Southern Way,? written under the pseudonym R. Halpern. Why do you think Savannah wanted to break ties with her family and create a new life under the name of her deceased friend, Renata Halpern?

9. After the horrific events of that rainy summer night when they were teens, why do you think Tom?s mother refused to call the sheriff and report what happened to her and her children? Why did she not want Tom discussing it with Dr. Lowenstein, even if it might help Savannah?

10. Do you think Lila took care of dying Isabel Newbury with the intention of marrying her husband after she died? Were you surprised to learn that Lila married Reese Newbury, the father of Tom?s school bully?

11. After plans were announced for the Colleton River Project, Luke becomes an army of one in the fight against it: ?In conservative circles in the state, Luke was considered a murderer and a crackpot. But there were some men and women, admittedly few, who looked upon him as the ultimate environmentalist.? If Luke?s convictions had become so extreme, why then does Tom envy him?

12. Tom says that ?in families, there are no crimes beyond forgiveness.? Do you agree? Could you see an ending where Tom and Dr. Lowenstein end up together?

13. Have you seen the 1991 film adaptation of THE PRINCE OF TIDES starring Nick Nolte and Barbra Streisand? If this were to be remade today, who would you cast as the main characters?

Author Bio

Pat Conroy (1945?2016) was the author of THE BOO, THE WATER IS WIDE, THE GREAT SANTINI, THE LORDS OF DISCIPLINE, THE PRINCE OF TIDES, BEACH MUSIC, THE PAT CONROY COOKBOOK: Recipes of My Life, MY LOSING SEASON, SOUTH OF BROAD, MY READING LIFE and THE DEATH OF SANTINI.

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