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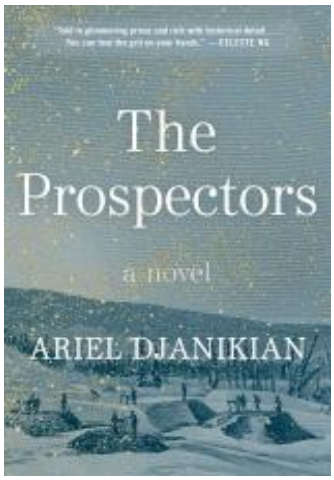
The Prospectors

by Ariel Djanikian



About the Book

A sweeping rags-to-riches story of survival and greed across American history following a family transformed by the Klondike Gold Rush.

The middle daughter of struggling California fruit farmers, Alice Bush is accustomed to feeling inferior and destitute. But when her elder sister?s husband strikes a vein of gold in the Yukon Territory, Alice finally seizes control of her destiny by joining a wave of white settlers making the dangerous trek to the Klondike.

What follows is an awakening of ambition for the quietly opportunistic Alice, who, by luck and circumstance, becomes tightly intertwined in her sister and brother-in-law?s newfound fortune, as well as the beginning of a generations-long family quest for wealth that unfolds against the icy Canadian wilderness and the booming oilfields of California.

One hundred years later, in 2015, Alice?s great-great-granddaughter, Anna, must grapple with moral conflict and questions of justice as she travels to the Klondike to bequeath her would-be inheritance to the First Nations peoples who paid the price for its creation.

Bringing the Klondike and turn-of-the-century California to vivid life, Ariel Djanikian weaves an ambitious narrative of claiming the American Dream and its rippling effects across generations. Sweeping and awe-inspiring, THE PROSPECTORS is an unforgettable story of family loyalties that interrogates the often-overlooked hostilities and inequities born during the Gold Rush era.

Discussion Guide

1. In 1898, nearly 100,000 people set off for the Klondike in hope of striking gold. Why do you think so many people were willing to risk their lives for the slim chance of instant wealth? Is this mentality reflected in modern history? If so,

where?

2. What moments of sibling rivalry and loyalty stand out for you in this novel? For instance, among the Bush sisters, the Berry brothers, or between Jane and Jim?

3. Anna and Owen believe that inheriting money obtained from the gold rush is morally complicated. Considering the events of the novel, do you think they made the right choice in traveling to Dawson City?

4. What role does Ethel?s sickness play in the trek to the Yukon? How does her health shape her own life and the fortunes of her family?

5. Alice thinks, ?Clarence and Ethel would not understand that they had wronged anyone: because they judged themselves by what was in their hearts? (p. 121). To what degree are Clarence and Ethel responsible for the harms caused by the gold rush, and how does that complicate their good intentions toward Jane and Jim?

6. Alice, Clarence and Jane each survive periods of extreme poverty in their youth. How do their past struggles influence their adulthoods as they strive for wealth and respectability? Do any of them exemplify or subvert the classic rags-to-riches story?

7. While Clarence presents himself as a lovable adventurer to reporters, Alice is able to ?mine? the true events of Clarence?s past during their conversations in the Palace Hotel. Why do you think he shares his secrets with her? How does their power dynamic evolve throughout their time in the Klondike, San Francisco and, finally, Los Angeles?

8. Compulsory boarding schools for First Nations people were just coming into existence during the time of this novel. How was Jane driven by fear in appealing to Clarence for help after Jim?s death? Did the Berrys make a mistake in agreeing to take custodianship of Jane?s son?

9. This novel includes two journeys from California to the Klondike, one in 1898 and one in 2015. Do Peter, Anna, Winnie and Leanne resemble their respective ancestors? What other themes connect these two timelines? How does the 19th-century world of gold rushes and oil discoveries still influence the present?

10. The historical sections of this novel draw upon the author?s own family history, especially the journey of the Bushes and Berrys to the Klondike. Have you considered researching your ancestors? stories? If so, what would you be most interested in discovering?

Author Bio

Ariel Djanikian holds an MFA in fiction from the University of Michigan and is the author THE OFFICE OF MERCY and THE PROSPECTORS. Her work has been published in *Tin House, The Paris Review, The Rumpus, The Millions* and elsewhere. She has received a Fulbright and a Hopwood, among other awards. She teaches at Georgetown

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