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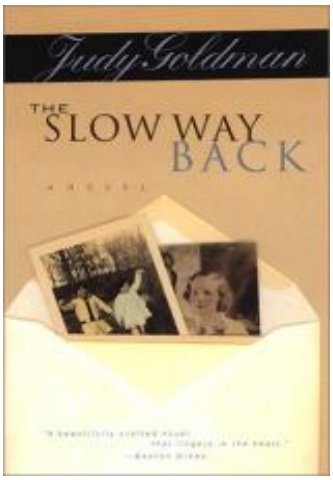
The Slow Way Back

by Judy Goldman



About the Book

Finding her mother's wedding dress, ten-year-old Thea was sure she had discovered a treasure -- trying the gown on, she easily envisioned the beautiful bride her mother must have been. But when her mother discovered her with the dress, the sight unleashed a shattering rage -- the sting of her slap across Thea's face lasted a lifetime. Her mother's irrational anger, coupled with Thea's already strong feelings of disconnection toward her father and only sister Mickey, caused Thea to feel like an outsider in her own family. Married to a non-Jewish man, unable to have children and her parents now dead, Thea acquires eight letters by her grandmother to her grandmother's sister written in Yiddish in the l930s -- just before and after Thea's parents wedding. The cache of letters promises to answer some of Thea's life-long questions, but Mickey urges her not to have the letters translated. Trusting her own instincts, Thea has the letters deciphered and indeed begins to unravel the secrets of her own family. In the end, Thea faces some grave prospects in her life, as well as the multitude of questions raised by these letters -- questions about marriage, sisters, and what it means to belong.

Discussion Guide

1. What does the title mean to you? What meaning, or meanings, does the title have for Thea?

2. Which of the two sisters did you most identify with -- Thea or Mickey? Why?

3. In what ways were Thea and Mickey dependent on each other?

4. How would you compare the relationship between Thea and Mickey with the relationship between Mollie and Florence? With the relationship between Bella and Celia?

5. Why did Aunt Florence refuse to reveal the details from the past to Thea? Was her behavior a result of loyalty to her sister, Mollie, or betrayal?

6. How was Thea's childhood (growing up Jewish in Rock Hill, South Carolina) similar to yours? How was it different?

7. How do Bella's experiences in her adopted new country compare with stories you've heard about members of your own family who emigrated to the United States?

8. What significance does the yearning to belong have in the story?

9. Were you surprised that Thea had no desire to try to locate her real father?

10. How do you believe Thea's newfound knowledge will change her life?

Author Bio

Judy Goldman is the author of two award-winning poetry collections and two novels, EARLY LEAVING and THE SLOW WAY BACK, which was a finalist for SIBA?s Novel of the Year and winner of the Sir Walter Raleigh Fiction Award and the Mary Ruffin Poole Award for First Fiction. Her memoir, LOSING MY SISTER, was a finalist for both SIBA?s Memoir of the Year and *ForeWord Review*?s Memoir of the Year. Her work has appeared in *Real Simple*, *The Washington Post* and in many literary journals. She teaches writing workshops throughout the Southeast, and serves on the permanent faculty of Table Rock Writers Workshop. Born and raised in Rock Hill, South Carolina, Goldman has lived in Charlotte, North Carolina, for many years. She and her husband have two children and four grandchildren.

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