ReadingGroupGuides
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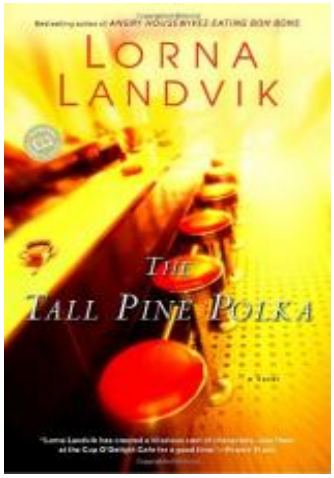
The Tall Pine Polka

by Lorna Landvik



About the Book

In the small town of Tall Pine, Minnesota, at the Cup O?Delight Cafe, the townsfolk gather for what they call the Tall Pine Polka, an event in which heavenly coffee, good food, and that feeling of being alive among friends inspires both body and soul to dance. There?s the cafe owner, the robust and beautiful Lee O?Leary, who escaped to the northwoods from an abusive husband; Miss Penk and Frau Katt, the town?s only lesbian couple (?Well, we?re za only ones who admit it.?); Pete, proprietor of the Shoe Shack, who spends nights crafting beautiful shoes to present to Lee, along with his declarations of love; Mary, whose bad poetry can clear out the cafe in seconds flat; and, most important of all, Lee?s best friend, Fenny Ness, a smart and sassy twenty-two-year-old going on eighty.

When Hollywood rolls into Tall Pine to shoot a movie, and a handsome musician known as Big Bill appears on the scene, Lee and Fenny find their friendship put to the test, as events push their hearts in unexplored directions?where endings can turn into new beginnings. . . .

Discussion Guide

1. Does Tall Pine, Minnesota seem like a place you would like to live, or just visit? Which option would you choose and why?

2. How does Lee end up in Tall Pine from a penthouse apartment on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago? Why does she stay?

3. Slim is plagued by survivor's guilt, among other things, as a result of his war experiences. Discuss the damage he has sustained and how the healing process works for him.

4. Do you think Big Bill leads Lee on in the beginning, since he is aware that she loves him in a very different way than he loves her?

5. Why do Fenny and Big Bill hide their relationship from Lee for so long? What do you think of Frau Katte's decision to tell Lee herself?

6. How do Fenny and Lee overcome their differences? Do you think you could do the same?

7. "She hums when she's at the grill, Bill--did you notice?" says Pete as he is listing off what he loves about Lee. Discuss the things--big and small--that draw us to other people.

8. Do you think Pete would have given Lee the shoes and declared his love, had he not been interrupted by the appearance of her gun-toting ex-husband? Do you think he enjoyed the dream more than the reality of love?

9. Discuss the reasons why so many characters in this novel have a difficult time expressing their love. Why is it sometimes so hard to break through and say, "I love you"?

10. Why is Mae Little Feather opposed to Big Bill and Fenny getting married? Do you think her objections are totally unfounded? Why does she change her mind?

11. "Movie stars are regular people," says Slim. "People just get a kick out of believing they're not." Discuss the culture of celebrity in American society and how it can distort and damage lives.

12. Did the entertainment and media characters in this novel, such as Boyd Burch, Lorenz Ferre, Marcy Mincus, and Gerry Dale, remind you of any real-life figures? If so, who?

13. Fenny is a very reluctant celebrity. How do you think you would handle being thrust into the spotlight as Fenny is?

14. What do you think prompted the ornery director Malcolm Edgely's transformation on the day he died? Would it have lasted if he had not been struck down by a heart attack?

15. How do Fenny and Big Bill's fears--hers of traveling and his of driving--affect their lives? How do they overcome them? Have you ever suffered from such debilitating anxieties?

16. The denizens of Tall Pine and the visitors from Hollywood view each other with mutual distrust and suspicion in the beginning. How do their opinions of each other, once clouded by stereotypes and ignorance, change (or not) over the course of the novel?

17. Who is your favorite character? Why?

18. Why did your group select this novel?

19. How does this work compare with other works your group has read? What will you be reading next?

20. Do you think your reading group offers a kind of selfmade community like that found at Lee's cafe? How was your

group formed? Why do you think it has stayed together?

21. What do you think is the secret ingredient in a cup of O'Delight coffee?

Author Bio

Lorna Landvik is the author of 12 novels, including the bestselling PATTY JANE'S HOUSE OF CURL, ANGRY HOUSEWIVES EATING BON BONS, OH MY STARS and the recently published LAST CIRCLE OF LOVE.

Landvik's checkered (but legal) past includes working as a chambermaid in Bavaria, winning a trip to Tahiti as a contestant on "The $25,000 Pyramid" (MacGyver was her partner), temping at the Playboy Mansion (it was strictly a clerical position), and walking across the country as a member of The Great Peace March.

She has acted in many theatrical productions, including a half dozen shows she conveniently wrote for herself. Her all-improvised show, PARTY IN THE REC ROOM, is a local legend, due in no small part to the margaritas she mixes up onstage.

She has one husband and two daughters and lives in the beautiful blue and green state of Minnesota.

Critical Praise

?Forget about Lake Wobegone. Hands down the small town of choice is Tall Pine.?

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