

The Daughter's Walk

A NOVEL



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READERS GUIDE

1. Clara says she doesn't want to go on this trip her mother has arranged to walk from Spokane to New York City. Why do you think she didn't simply say she wouldn't go? Why do you think she agreed?
2. Why did Helga want to make the walk to New York? Were her stated reasons her real reasons?
3. Marcel Proust writes, "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in seeing with new eyes." At what point did Clara begin to see her mother with new eyes? When did she see herself differently?
4. Clara is critical of her mother's poor planning, her side trips, and her trust in the sponsors. Yet later on, she accepts money from the very people who were part of the disastrous outcome of the journey. What allowed Clara to accept their assistance? Do you think the money was "dirty money"? Should Clara have given it back?
5. Did Clara get sent into exile, or did she exile herself by her choices?
6. Can one make gains, "occupy," and expand gifts and talents financially or emotionally without some risk? Did Clara find a way to invest in her life without risk? Why did she resist Franklin's attempts to court her? Did she see life as Louise said she did, as though she "didn't deserve a full plate"? Why or why not?

7. What was Clara seeking when she went to Manistee, Michigan? Did she find it? How did the conversation with John Doré affect her understanding of family, if at all?
8. Ida is portrayed as an angry woman, and yet her mother tells Clara she is grateful to her children, including Ida, despite their insistence that she never speak about the walk to New York. In later life, Ida and Clara live together. What do you know about Ida and Clara that makes this end possible? Is it realistic? What had to change for Ida to accept Clara back into her definition of *family*?
9. Why is it so difficult at times to hear the Voice telling us, *This is the way, walk in it?* Did Clara listen to that voice through the years? When didn't she? And what were the consequences?
10. Acts of living contain risk, and risking for family can bring both great joy and great sorrow. How did Clara deal with her times of overt family rejection such as Ida's and her stepfather's rebuffs? How did her mother deal with it? Did the two women follow similar paths, or were their journeys very different from each other? In what ways?
11. Franklin tells Clara that *family* means "servant." Do you agree with this statement? Who was Clara's family? With biological families often spread around the country, how do you define *family* today?
12. What did Clara eventually regain by reconciling with her family of origin?
13. What are your thoughts about the silencing Ole imposed on Helga? Do you agree with Clara that we are asked to "tell the stories" and that they each belong to us?

14. Are there stories within your family that have been silenced?
Do you see ways in which the silencing has harmed or strengthened the people involved?
15. What prevents you from writing your story down?