



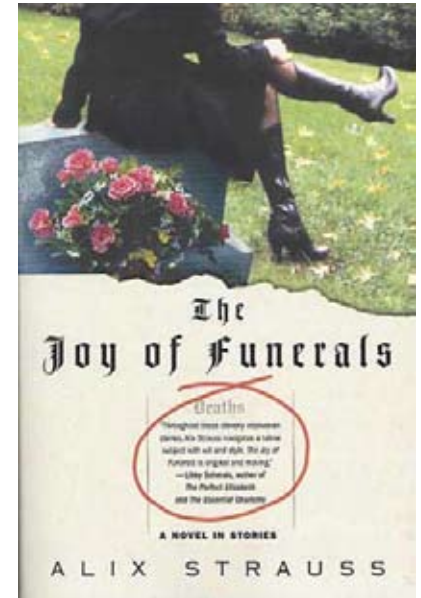
Reading Group Gold

The Joy of Funerals

by Alix Strauss

Introduction to *The Joy of Funerals*

Begun as a Lives column in the *New York Times Magazine*, *The Joy of Funerals* is a riveting look into the disturbing lives of nine young women, each willing to take drastic measures and demonstrate extreme behavior to fill the voids created by longing and loneliness. The first eight face death differently, from Leslie, who grieves for her dead husband by having random sex with mourners she finds at a cemetery, to the unnamed woman who can't stop believing that her recently deceased date was perhaps the perfect man. The ninth woman, Nina, ties them all together by attending these funerals in her search to bond with others. Throughout this dazzling collection, Strauss, with her mordant humor reminiscent of "Six Feet Under," and penetrating voice, explores how our most basic need for connection shapes and defines us.



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Reading Group Guide Questions

1. Which story did you find most intriguing and why?
2. Which character did you connect with most and why?
3. Did you feel Strauss was successful at interweaving the stories?
4. In each of the stories, what do you feel Strauss's characters are looking for, and do any of them achieve their goals?
5. At the end of "Swimming Without Annette," do you think Karen has murdered an innocent man or her lover's killer? Why?
6. At the end of "Still Life," do you feel Natalie jumps or falls? Why?
7. How do you feel about Nina's funeral-attending habit?
8. Why do you think Strauss's characters are so lonely?
9. Do you feel funerals are a celebration of someone's life or a mourning of their loss? Explain.



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10. What role do dreams play in the book?
11. How does the family change as Daddy deteriorates?
12. How have the funerals you have attended been similar or different from those described in the book?

About the Author

Alix Strauss is a lifestyle trend writer whose articles have appeared in *The New York Times* and many other periodicals. This is her first novel. She lives in New York City