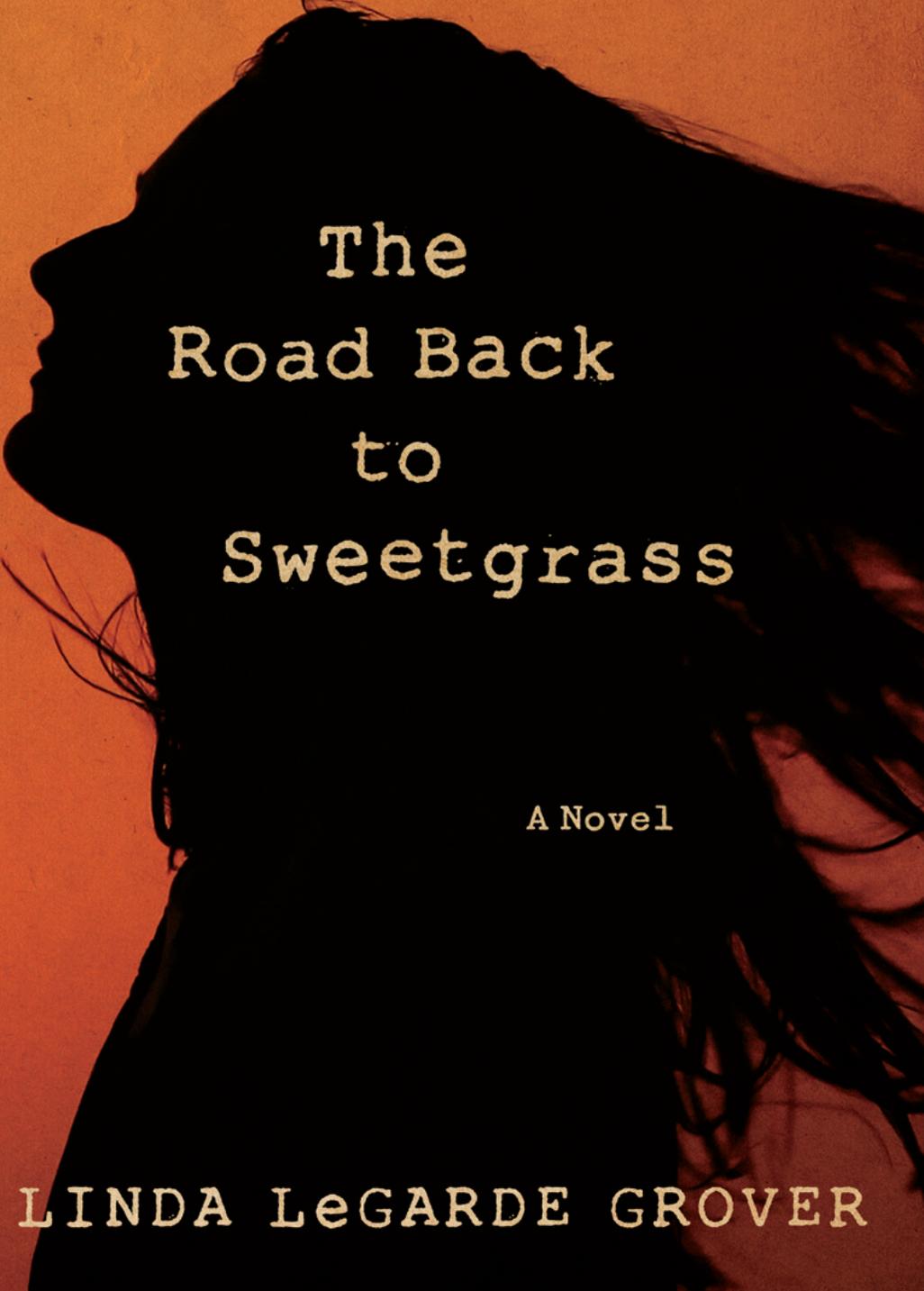


"This is a novel not to be missed." —*Indian Country Today*

The cover features a dark silhouette of a woman's head and shoulders, facing left. The background is a textured, warm orange color. The title is printed in a white, typewriter-style font over the silhouette.

The  
Road Back  
to  
Sweetgrass

A Novel

LINDA LeGARDE GROVER

## A BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

for *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* by Linda LeGarde Grover



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Linda LeGarde Grover is a member of the Bois Forte band of Ojibwe and associate professor of American Indian studies at the University of Minnesota Duluth. She has received the Native Writers Circle of the Americas First Book Award, the Flannery O'Connor Award and the Janet Heiding-er Kafka Prize, whose previous recipients include Ann Patchett, Anne Tyler, and Toni Morrison.

### PRAISE FOR *THE ROAD BACK TO SWEETGRASS*

“With the grace of a dancer lifted by spirit and grounded in the well-worn earth beneath her feet, Linda LeGarde Grover tells a circular tale of life on and off the Reservation. Generous, ironic, and often gut-wrenching, *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* is at its large heart a book about the power of home and the inexorable connections between land, people, and stories.”

—DANIELLE SOSIN, author of *The Long-Shining Waters*

“History, humanity and humor—these things always impress me when I read Linda LeGarde Grover’s fiction. In this deeply moving and healing book, we are drawn into a communally told story that shows generations violently separated yet held together by the cord of place and culture and by many, many acts of love.”

—HEID E. ERDRICH, author of *Original Local*

“Through the character of Margie Robineau, Linda LeGarde Grover has created an Ojibwe every-woman who not only births a daughter Crystal, but also revitalizes the small township of Sweetgrass by making family with her would be father-in-law. Grover’s novel tackles genealogy and kinship, Indian allotment and traditions, and ultimately love. A gorgeous read, an extraordinary novel!”

—LEANNE HOWE, author of *Shell Shaker*

“Beautiful awareness of the hearts of three American Indian women, their culture, and their environment. Accurately portrays contemporary American Indian life right up to the present, punctuated by sadness and hopefulness throughout.”

—CBS MINNESOTA

“*The Road Back to Sweetgrass* is most notable for its writing and its closely observed and beautifully expressed perspective on contemporary American Indian life. This is a novel not to be missed.”

—INDIAN COUNTRY TODAY

“The events that define these characters and their world, the births and deaths and binding loves, unfold with gentle pathos and wry humor, the cadences of minute detail and the sweep of history a matter of quiet confidence and unshowy grace for this gifted storyteller.”

—MINNEAPOLIS–ST. PAUL STAR TRIBUNE

“At heart this is the story of the women’s longing for home, with traditions of pow-wows, fancy dancing and wild ricing, and of coming of age when the Anishinaabe struggled to preserve their culture in a changing world.”

—ST. PAUL PIONEER PRESS

“The overall theme of longing and belonging affects us all, and in this story Linda brings us into the grand circle.”

—LAKE SUPERIOR MAGAZINE

“Engaging and character-driven.” —MINNPOST

“If one element stands out, it is the gentle tone of the book that pervades even the darkest passages.”

—DULUTH BUDGETEER NEWS

“Sly and humor-filled, ironic and poignant.” —CLOQUET RIVER PRESS

“Grover’s truth-telling mourns, heals, haunts and also celebrates survival.”

—WINONA DAILY NEWS

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Set in northern Minnesota, *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* follows Dale Ann, Theresa, and Margie, a trio of American Indian women, from the 1970s to the present, observing their coming of age and the intersection of their lives as they navigate love, economic hardship, loss, and changing family dynamics on the fictional Mozhay Point reservation. As young women, all three leave their homes. Margie and Theresa go to Duluth for college and work; there Theresa gets to know a handsome Indian boy, Michael Washington, who invites her home to the Sweetgrass land allotment to meet his father, Zho Wash, who lives in the original allotment cabin. When Margie accompanies her, complicated relationships are set into motion, and tensions over “real Indianness” emerge.

Dale Ann, Margie, and Theresa find themselves pulled back again and again to the Sweetgrass allotment, a silent but ever-present entity in the book; sweetgrass itself is a plant in the Ojibwe ceremonial odissimaa bag, which also contains a newborn baby’s umbilical cord. In a powerful final chapter, Zho Wash tells the story of the first days of the allotment, when the Wazhushkag, or Muskrat, family became transformed into the Washingtons by the pen of a federal Indian agent. This sense of place and home is both tangible and spiritual, and Linda LeGarde Grover skillfully connects it with the experience of Native women who came of age during the days of the federal termination policy and the struggle for tribal self-determination.

*The Road Back to Sweetgrass* is a novel that moves between past and present, the Native and the non-Native, history and myth, and tradition and survival, as the people of Mozhay Point endure traumatic historical events and federal Indian policies while looking ahead to future generations and the continuation of the Anishinaabe people.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways do you think that the lives of Margie, Dale Ann, and Theresa as young women were similar to those of non-Indian young women of that generation and age?  
In what ways were they different?
2. Margie and Dale Ann reluctantly began journeys, Margie's to Sweetgrass and Dale Anne's away from Sweetgrass, that would eventually intertwine their lives. What experiences or relationships might have contributed to the eventual bond between Margie and Dale Ann?
3. Characters in *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* are often motivated by their feelings of love, sometimes wisely and sometimes not so prudently. Can you think of occasions when the love of one character for another resulted in unexpected consequences and directions?
4. Dale Ann's father once asked her mother, Grace, "How come you are so hard on these girls, anyway?" What might have worried and motivated Grace in the raising of her daughters? In what ways might affected her relationship with Dale Ann?
5. How did Jack Minogeezhik become a business entrepreneur, and in what ways did his work affect life for the people of Mozhay Point?
6. When Dag Bjornborg, who had been adopted by a white family when he was a baby, traveled to Mozhay Point to take part in the wild rice harvest he experienced what might be called a cultural/communication disconnect. What do you think are some of the reasons for his trip to Mozhay? What challenges did he encounter, and how did he attempt to meet them?
7. Who do you think was Crystal's father?
8. Crystal Jo Washington has connections, through both lineage and relationship, to many characters in the novel. Can you think of examples of ways in which obligations and (perhaps) pressures affect her interactions with other characters? Do you think that those obligations could feel overwhelming at times? Would that excuse what might be seen as bad behavior?

9. Heid Erdrich writes in her blurb on the book's jacket about "generations violently separated yet held together by the cord of place and by many, many acts of love." What do you think are some reasons the Sweetgrass, the LaForce family's allotment, was important to both the LaForce and Muskrat/Washington families?

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## MORE INFO:

[www.upress.umn.edu](http://www.upress.umn.edu)

