

TEXAS EVER AFTER

FAIREST *of* HEART

KAREN
WITEMEYER



BOOK CLUB GUIDE



LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR



Dear Book Group Coordinator,

I'm so excited to share my newest book with you. *Fairest of Heart* is a Western reimagining of the classic fairy tale *Snow White*. Ever since I was a child, I've adored fairy tales. What little girl doesn't want to believe that love has the power to overcome any obstacle?

In *Fairest of Heart*, I had so much fun playing with the iconic elements of *Snow White*. A beautiful, mistreated girl forced to escape a conniving villainess with an unhealthy fondness for mirrors. A noble Texas Ranger determined to uphold the law no matter where his heart leads. A gaggle of seven geriatric drovers at the Diamond D Ranch who offer shelter to a young woman abandoned in the woods. Within this tale you will encounter themes of finding a place to belong, the beauty of a pure heart, the power of working together, and our need to surrender control to a God who sees more clearly than we ever could.

I've put together activities and bonus content for your group to enjoy. There is a word scramble that members can work on individually or in teams as an icebreaker. I've also included a cut scene that readers might enjoy along with suggested discussion questions to assist you in leading group conversations. I would also be honored to speak to your book club should you desire that type of interaction. Please fill out the "Author Teleconference Request" form on the Open Book website to make those arrangements:

<https://www.bethanyhouseopenbook.com/author-teleconference-request>





Thank you for all the time and effort you put into making your book club safe for readers to not only explore books but pieces of themselves as well. May the Lord bless your efforts as you continue to touch lives through the power of story.

Grace and peace,

Karen Witemeyer

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FAIREST OF HEART

WORD SCRAMBLE



Can you discover the mystery phrase that describes Titus Kingsley, the hero in *Fairest of Heart*?

Unscramble each word below (nouns and adjectives) to discover which letter goes in each circle. Once all words are unscrambled correctly, the circled letters will spell the mystery phrase from top to bottom.

All words pertain to Titus and Penelope's story.

1. STOCRE _____○

2. PESDEXO ○_____

3. TSECARS _____○

4. FLABHUS _____○

5. CERMONA _____○

6. PYMGUR ○_____

7. WLEJES _____○

8. RIORMR _____○

Mystery Phrase = ○○ ○○○○○○



FAIREST OF HEART WORD SCRAMBLE

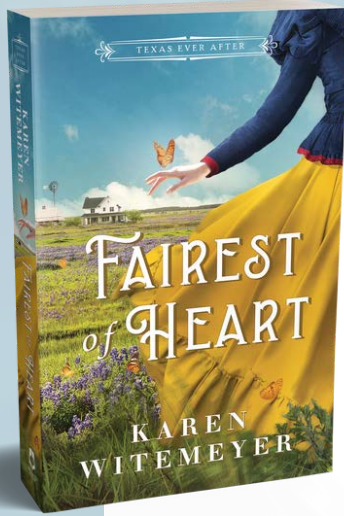


ANSWER KEY

1. CORSET
2. EXPOSED
3. ACTRESS
4. BASHFUL
5. ROMANCE
6. GRUMPY
7. JEWELS
8. MIRROR

Mystery Phrase = TX RANGER





EXCLUSIVE: CUT SCENE

BY KAREN WITEMEYER © 2022

In the climactic scene where Penelope lies in bed at the brink of death, I originally wrote a scene in her POV, depicting her choice between staying with Titus or going on to be with her Lord. During rewrites, we decided to cut this scene, fearing it might be too over-the-top, but there is a part of me that still wants to imagine what a near death experience might entail.

Titus's gaze never left her as he stood and stretched his aching muscles. He was afraid to let his attention lapse. Afraid she might slip away if he wasn't there to anchor her. It was irrational, but he cleaved to the idea, wanting to believe that he could help her heal. That he could breathe with her. Expand her lungs by expanding his. To awaken her mind through conversation.

Perhaps it was time to try that again.

"Give her a reason to stay," Doc had said.

Titus had plenty of reasons for her to stay. Reasons that were all about him. What *he* wanted. The future he wanted to share with her. The grief he wanted to avoid. Selfish. Every one.

What did Penelope want?

Where had the warmth gone? She'd been floating in an invisible river. Untethered. Lost. Then someone had taken her hand and tugged her to shore.

A voice had murmured in her ear. Urging her to stay. A voice she recognized. A voice she loved. She'd tried to answer him. To promise she'd stay with him forever, but a strange lethargy paralyzed her. Made her eyelids too heavy to open and her lips too weak to speak.

She slipped away from the shore.



Had he left? Given up on her?

Titus! Her heart called to him. To the voice she recognized. The touch she longed to feel again. *Where are you?*

The current swirled, setting her adrift once again. Her mind meandered, losing focus.

The faint strains of a song tickled her ear. A joyous song. A song of love. Of welcome. A celebration of the Lamb. She'd never heard anything so glorious. Even from a distance, the rich harmony caused her soul to swell. What would it be like to hear that chorus at full strength? To feel the majesty of the music reverberate through her spirit? To add her voice to the throng?

Forgetting why she had wanted to fight the current, she surrendered to its pull. Little by little, the song grew louder. Her heartbeat took on its tempo. Her inward being deciphered the melody and hummed the refrain.

Then someone clasped her hand, tugging against the current. The song faded. Her heart stuttered, losing the rhythm.

No! She wanted to hear the song. To *be* the song.

Fear not. I am with you.

The tender whisper wrapped around her faltering heart like a velvet ribbon, soothing her. Imbuing her soul with peace.

Whether you stay or go, I am with you. Always. Even unto the end of the world.

The current stilled beneath her, turning placid like a mountain lake in summer. Giving her the freedom to choose.

Faint strains of angelic music called to her from one side, while the warmth of human touch and the broken voice of a man in anguish called from the other.

"I don't want you to go."

Titus.

"I want the chance to court you, to marry you, and make a life with you. A life with children and an abundance of grandpas to spoil them. I want my own steadfast Penelope to come home to after every Ranger mission. I want to live in the sunshine of your joy and love. To surround myself with your sweetness and care for you all my days."

Her heart picked up a new rhythm. A little rough and imperfect, but one that carried a thrilling beat.

Warmth engulfed her hand, yet no pull accompanied it. She floated freely between two shores.



“What do *you* want, Penelope?” His voice softened and cracked a little around the edges. “What’s best for *you*? This world has treated you poorly. Beaten you down. Tried to kill you. Perhaps you’re weary of the battle and ready for rest. I wouldn’t blame you. As much as I want to promise that life will be better if you stay, I can’t. Evil abounds here. I’d do my best to protect and provide for you, but even that’s not guaranteed. An outlaw’s bullet could strike me down and leave you abandoned again.”

A needle jabbed her heart. The water beneath her grew choppy. The song from the distant shore beckoned with the dulcet chords of everlasting joy. No pain. No worries. No sorrow.

No Titus.

Something moist splashed onto her hand.

“You don’t have to stay for us, Penelope. Not if you want to go. We want you to be happy. At peace. Doc and the others . . . me . . . we’ll be all right.”

The music’s call intensified, and she started to float toward it. The warmth surrounding her hand began to cool. His voice faded.

Then something touched her lips. Gentle. Reverent. Heart-stoppingly poignant. “I love you, Penelope.”

The declaration was whisper soft, but it shot through her like a crack of thunder.

This was what she wanted. What her heart longed for. Titus’s love.

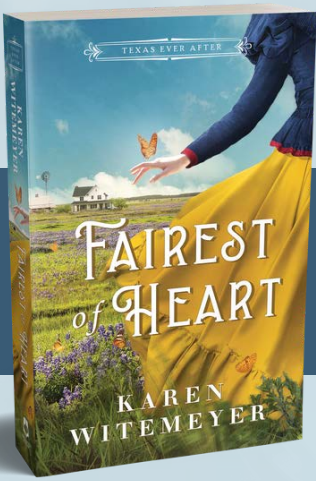
Yes, she longed for heaven, too. For the perfection of being in the presence of the Lord, singing his praises, basking in a joy untarnished by sin. But heaven dwelled within her, too. Christ’s presence with her always.

No more floating. She turned to swim with all her might toward the man she loved. But the lethargy entombing her body held her prisoner. She battled through the silken web encasing her. Scraping. Crawling. Fighting through the darkness.

A weight pressed down on her, sapping her strength. Doubts crept in to taunt her. Reinforcing her frailty. Magnifying her weariness. Stealing her hope.

No! She’d not lose heart. She’d not lose Titus. She’d hold on for all she was worth.

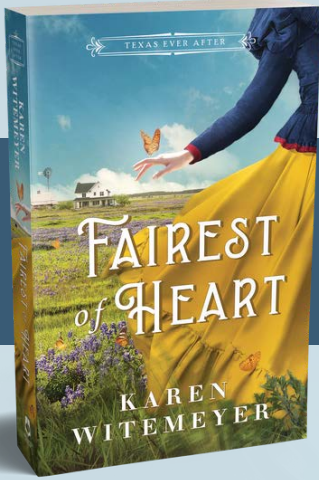




DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the beginning of the story, Penelope Snow accepts a job that takes her far from home. What kind of emotions do you think she was feeling? Have you ever left everything familiar in order to pursue your education or a job opportunity? What effect did the change have on you?
2. Titus Kingsley has learned not to trust beautiful women. Do you think he was right to be cautious based on his experience, or should he have been more open-minded? Have you ever had a wrong first impression of someone because past experiences that colored your perception?
3. Narcissa LaBelle is determined to carve out a secure future for herself. The goal, in itself, is admirable, so how do her motives and actions twist it into something villainous?
4. *Fairest of Heart* was inspired by the fairy tale *Snow White*. What were some of your favorite nods to the classic tale found in this version?





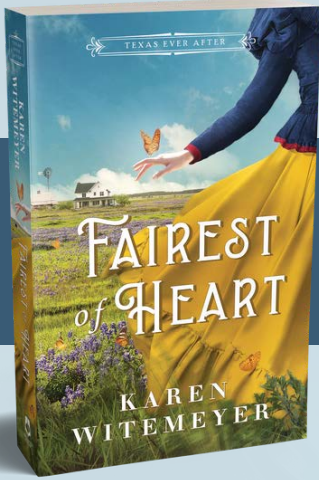
5. Which of the seven drovers at the Diamond D was your favorite?

6. Which of the seven drovers at the Diamond D do you have the most in common with?

7. Narcissa hid her stolen jewels in the boning channel of her corset. If you were traveling across the country and had to hide something of value among your luggage and belongings, where would you hide it?

8. Doc Kingsley isolated himself from his family after he failed to save the life of his grandson. Why do you think he did that? When you are hurting, do you tend to withdraw from family or lean into them for support and comfort?





9. Titus had to learn to submit to God's wisdom instead of relying solely on his own. How difficult is that to do in real life?

10. Narcissa took advantage of Cecil Hunt's feelings for her to manipulate him into doing her dirty work. Do you feel sympathy for Cecil? Why or why not?

11. With her history of abandonment, Penelope craves belonging, yet when it is offered, she struggles to accept it as a gift and tries to earn her place in the family. How does this reflect God's grace and the way we sometimes act as if we need to earn our redemption?

12. Titus and the men at the Diamond D adopt Lucky, the coonhound. Have you ever adopted a pet? Tell us a little about your experience.



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