

Angry Housewives Eating Bon Bons Study Guide

Angry Housewives Eating Bon Bons by Lorna Landvik

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Plot Summary

Angry Housewives Eating Bon Bons is a novel of friendship and secrets. The novel follows five friends over the course of thirty years, through the trials and tribulations of marriage, motherhood, and everyday life. Together these women guide each other through the darkness to find the light of love and friendship at the end of the road. *Angry Housewives* is a delightful view of the world women occupy that even the male reader will find fascinating.

Freesia Court is a middle class neighborhood in the middle of the frozen winter landscape of Minnesota. Faith, who grew up in the south, is left alone in this desolate place without a soul to turn to. So when Faith is invited to join a spontaneous snowball fight with a group of neighborhood women, she finds herself embracing behavior she never would have engaged in before. When the women become too cold to play any longer, Faith invites them to her house because she is reluctant for the night to end. A casual conversation about books leads to the idea of a book club.

The first few meetings of the book club are polite and intelligent affairs. However, as the women get to know one another and begin to share pieces of themselves, it becomes more relaxed, a time the women soon come to enjoy. Faith feels a part of something special for the first time in her life. However, Faith has a deep, dark secret that threatens to ruin her newfound friendships. Faith is not the only one with a secret. Merit too is hiding something. Merit's husband beats her on a regular basis, though he is careful not to mark her face so his cruelty remains hidden. Kari, too has a secret. Kari's beautiful adopted daughter is really her great niece. This secret weighs heavy on Kari, making it impossible for her to enjoy family gatherings.

Slip, an activist, struggles through the years with the burden of her beliefs. Slip wants to change the world, but finds she cannot even help her own brother. Slip's brother enlisted in the military and was sent to Vietnam where he was wounded. Slip's brother comes home a broken man, in spirit as much as in his physical being. Slip watches the deterioration of her brother and feels helpless to do anything for him, finally learning there are some things she cannot control.

This lesson is underscored for Slip when she learns Faith has been lying to her for their entire friendship. Faith finally confesses to her friends her father was not a doctor, her mother not a pampered housewife. Faith tells the truth, that her mother was an alcoholic who died in a car crash Faith feels she caused. Although this confession frees Faith, Slip is left feeling as though she cannot trust anyone around her, especially the people she once thought she could count on for everything. It is Slip's son who teaches her that her life has been perfect thus far and she should try to put herself in Faith's shoes in order to see it from her point of view. Slip is able to do this and finally forgives her good friend.

Soon all the secrets of the *Angry Housewives* have come out. Merit leaves her husband with the help of the housewives and finds true love with another. Kari tells her daughter

about her birth mother and nearly loses her daughter, but is soon rewarded with forgiveness and understanding. Everything has come full circle for the Angry Housewives. This is the golden time in their lives, the time when they should be able to sit back and enjoy the fruits of their labors. However, Slip learns she has cancer shortly after her daughter publishes her first novel. Slip will not let go, however, will not go quietly into the night and the housewives stand beside her, fighting for her.

Prologue: September 1998, Faith

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Five women are sitting around a hospital room. One is knitting, one is sleeping, and the others are either reading or daydreaming. Someone mentions miniskirts and before long they are reminiscing about their past. When a nurse comes in to check the patient she mistakes the ladies for sisters despite their obvious physical differences. The women find this very funny. They are members of a book club, they explain to the nurse.

Prologue: September 1998, Faith Analysis

The reader is introduced to the main characters of the novel in this chapter. The reader learns one likes to knit, another once enjoyed wearing miniskirts, and another is suffering from cancer. The author does not reveal which woman is suffering the illness. However, the author spends a great deal of the prologue showing the rapport between these women, clearly going back many years. In fact, these women get along so well a nurse mistakes them for sisters despite their physical differences.

The prologue is written in the first person narrative of Faith. Faith begins by saying she knows what it is like to have your life saved and ends it by saying she has survived through the years with the help of these ladies, her fellow members of a book club. These statements clearly set the mood for the novel as well as opening the main theme of the novel, friendship.

Part One: 1968-1970, The Members

Part One: 1968-1970, The Members Summary

Faith has just moved to Minnesota from Texas because her husband has taken a job based there. Faith's husband, Wade, is a pilot, which means Faith is often left alone with her twin babies, Beau and Bonnie. Wade is getting ready to leave again and Faith is not happy about it because she has no friends and she is worried about being alone in the snowstorm brewing outside. Across the street, Audrey is lying in bed, listening to her children argue, wondering why her husband thinks she should lose weight. Another neighbor, Merit Iverson, is asking her husband if smoking will hurt her unborn baby. Dr. Iverson assures his wife smoking is harmless. Merit continues to worry anyway, not only concerned with her baby's health, but also hoping it will be a boy to please her husband and his family.

Slip is trying to talk her husband into babysitting so she can go to a lecture by a nuclear power proponent. Slip is a vocal activist who can often be seen pushing a stroller on a picket line. Kari Nelson, one of Slip's closest friends on the block, is sewing a jacket for her niece. Kari is extremely close to her nieces and nephews because she and her husband were never able to have children. Kari and her husband, Bjorn, tried to have children, but suffered several miscarriages. Kari and Bjorn also tried to adopt, but their first attempt ended when the mother was able to prove she signed the papers under duress. Just as Kari felt she was ready to try again, Bjorn died in his sleep at the young age of forty-five. Now Kari spends a great deal of her time spoiling her nieces and nephews, as well as the neighborhood children.

Faith has a difficult time dealing with the babies because they are acting especially precocious this day, as if they know their mother is upset. When Faith finally puts the babies to bed, she settles on the couch to read a book only moments before the power goes out. At first Faith imagines someone is attempting to break into the house and has cut the power to give himself an advantage. However, when Faith looks out the window, she sees the power is out all over the block. As Faith watches the street, she sees a group of what she believes are teenagers come out of their houses and begin throwing snowballs. When one of the snowballs hits her window, Faith grabs her jacket and runs out to yell at them.

Once outside, Faith finds the teenagers are really her fellow housewives. They invite Faith to have a snowball fight with them. Faith agrees and finds herself having more fun than she has had in a long time. When everyone is tired and cold, Faith invites them back to her house. The women sit around the living room and discuss everything from snow to books. When they discover they all have a fondness for books, it is suggested they begin a book club. Everyone agrees immediately.

Faith writes a letter to her mother who passed away several years before. Faith tells her mother about the friends she has just made. Faith's mother was someone she was



ashamed of. As Faith grew up, she was shuttled from her mother's to her grandmother's. Faith watched her mother drink and sleep with many men and grew up to imitate this behavior until a school counselor convinced her she could be so much more. Faith fought to get into college and when she did, she fabricated a new past for herself in order to create a new life for herself, one that would not require embarrassing explanations.

Part One: 1968-1970, The Members Analysis

The members of the Freesia Court book club are introduced in this chapter. Faith is a southern transplant to this snowy landscape who is often left alone while her husband flies all over the country. Faith is unhappy with her situation. Faith's husband suggests a few friends might help, but Faith is not the type to go looking for friendship. However, Faith does find a few friends when she goes outside to yell at teenagers having a snowball fight and discovers they are really her fellow housewives. She is invited to join them. Faith has such a good time she invites everyone into her home where the book club is born. Later, the reader learns that although Faith tells her new friends her father was a doctor, her mother a pampered housewife, the truth is much darker. Faith's mother was an alcoholic who often neglected her daughter. Faith fabricates a new history when she goes to college and continues to use this story, believing the truth will only cause people to look down on her.

The other ladies are introduced. Audrey is a laid back, sexual woman who is annoyed with her husband for wanting her to look like Twiggy. Slip is an opinionated activist who is not ashamed to share her views on the problems existing in society. Merit is a demure young woman who allows her husband to make all her major decisions for her. Merit is pregnant with her first child and desperately hopeful it will be a boy. Kari is a widow who once hoped to have children, but now is facing a childless future after many disappointments and the death of her husband.

This is an eclectic collection of women that seem to be too different to get along. However, the reader already knows they will form a bond time cannot break, so anticipates seeing how this bond is formed over the next few chapters. There are also several plot lines suggested in this chapter as well, giving the reader a road map to the development of the plot in the following chapters.



Part One: 1968-1970, June 1968, Merit, and July 1968, Slip

Part One: 1968-1970, June 1968, Merit, and July 1968, Slip Summary

Eric, Merit's husband, does not want her to join a book club. When Merit argues with him about it, Eric slaps her. Merit is stunned, but has known for some time that her perfect husband has a dark side. Merit met Eric after leaving her hometown, against the wishes of her parents, and while she was attending business school in Minneapolis. Eric was so nice to her, so devoted, that she imagined their marriage would be idyllic. However, about six months after the wedding, Eric began belittling Merit, calling her names and causing her to feel inadequate. To avoid these events, Merit began devoting her days to making Eric's life easier. However, no matter how hard Merit tries to please Eric, his dark moods continue. The argument over the book club is the first time Eric has hit Merit. The shock of his actions causes Eric to relent and allow Merit to join the club.

Merit hosts the second meeting of the book club. Merit is nervous because she is not a very good cook and is concerned she might embarrass herself by serving a raw cake or burned cookies. During the meeting, Merit begins having contractions. The ladies drive her to the hospital where Merit is told she is suffering Braxton Hicks contractions, or false labor.

Slip is miserable from the heat, and upset over the recent assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy. Slip should be baking something for the book club meeting she is hosting that night, but decides she would rather spend some time with her daughter. Slip takes some lemonade, the book she is supposed to have finished already for the club meeting, and joins her daughter in the tree house in the backyard. While Slip and Flannery are reading their books, Faith comes over and invites Flan to join her brothers and Faith's twins where they are playing in the sprinklers at Faith's house. Faith then climbs into the tree house and joins Slip. Faith looks around the neighborhood from her high vantage point and discovers Audrey is sunbathing topless next door.

Audrey sees Slip and Faith peeking at her and decides to join them. While they are in the tree house, another neighbor comes over. Slip does not like this lady because she is the neighborhood good-doer, always making sure everyone knows how hard she works to raise money for good causes. Slip, Faith, and Audrey try to hide, but Audrey throws an acorn at her. The woman assumes it is Flan and threatens to tell on her. Slip is outraged by this and throws more acorns at her. The woman sees Slip and calls out to her. Audrey tells her they thought she was a teenager trying to see them sunbathing topless. Then Audrey flashes the woman. Faith finds this funny and decides to flash her as well. Before long, all three women are flashing her.

Faith writes a letter to her mother recalling a time when a Baptist minister tried to get her grandmother to take her to church. Faith also talks about an attempt to help Merit pick out colors to paint her walls and the milestones her children are reaching. Faith ends the letter with an apology not completely explained by the letter.

Part One: 1968-1970, June 1968, Merit, and July 1968, Slip Analysis

Merit's husband hits her. Merit is the meekest of the group of book club members, which makes this situation even more tragic. Merit has only been hit once, but a cycle of cruelty has already begun with verbal abuse, suggesting to the reader Eric's promises to never hit her again are most likely unreliable. If a man will hit his pregnant wife, there is not much that will stop him from continuing to abuse her. However, Merit remains a devoted wife, spending her days trying to please her husband in order to avoid these events.

Slip is unhappy with the world in the wake of the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy. These events only underscore Slip's feeling that the world is moving in a dark direction as far as human relations are concerned. Slip decides to hide out in the tree house in her backyard, but is quickly joined by Faith and Audrey. While they are hiding, a local woman comes over. This woman is general disliked and Audrey begins throwing acorns at her. Somehow this leads to Audrey, Slip, and Faith flashing their breasts at her. This behavior, while immature, shows the playful side of these woman and their loyalty to each other as they do this to support each other.

Faith writes another letter to her mother. Faith talks about her past, a single fond memory, and talks about her life. Faith shares her passion for interior decorating and her attempts to help Merit, but Merit refuses because Eric wants his walls white. Faith also talks about her babies, as any mother is wont to do. Faith ends the letter with an apology. This apology seems odd to the reader because the reader cannot see anything in the letter Faith might need to apologize for, suggesting there is a deeper reason for this apology that will be revealed later as the plot continues to develop.

Part One: 1968-1970, August 1968, Kari, and September 1968, Audrey

Part One: 1968-1970, August 1968, Kari, and September 1968, Audrey Summary

Merit has her baby. Despite her husband's great desire to have a son, the child is a girl. Not only this, but Merit decides to nurse her daughter even though her husband is against this. Eric hits Merit again during this argument, but Merit sticks to her guns and is happy. Now Audrey and Slip are both pregnant. Kari too is expecting a child, but not in the conventional way. Kari gets a call from her niece telling her a baby has become available for adoption and she should fly to San Francisco immediately.

When Kari arrives in San Francisco she learns the baby available for adoption is her niece's. Mary Jo gets pregnant after a one-night stand and now the baby has arrived, she does not want the child. Mary Jo wants Kari to take the baby, but only if she promises to never tell her family the truth about the baby's origins. Kari does not like this stipulation, afraid she cannot lie to her brother and his wife. However, when Kari sees the baby she cannot refuse. Kari adopts Mary Jo's daughter and names her Julia.

Audrey is having a more difficult time with this pregnancy than she had with her other two. Audrey and her husband are not as intimate as she is used to and this is causing tension between them. Tension has always existed due to the fact Audrey's family is extremely rich and her father is a senior partner in the law firm where Audrey's husband works. The tension has increased during this pregnancy. These things combined with the uncomfortable wool dress Audrey is wearing, cause her to be in a terrible mood. Audrey is sitting in a church with the other book club members, watching as Kari's daughter is baptized. The baby is adorable, which make the reactions Kari has gotten from strangers due to the fact Julia is biracial even more outrageous. Audrey thinks about Kari's struggles and begins to wonder if there is a God, and how can He punish such a kind woman with such rude behavior.

Part One: 1968-1970, August 1968, Kari, and September 1968, Audrey Analysis

As suggested in the previous chapter, the abuse Merit suffers at the hands of her husband continues. Merit, while appearing meek, is a strong woman and she proves this over and over when she stands up for the things she deeply wants, such as breastfeeding her baby. However, these small victories are overshadowed by Eric's increasing cruelty. It does not help Merit that her baby is a girl, not the boy Eric so desperately wanted. The reader is curious if the sex of the baby will affect the way her father interacts with her as she grows.

Kari has wanted a baby for many years. Kari tried to get pregnant and tried to adopt, but these things ended in disappointment over and over again. Now, being a widow, Kari accepts that motherhood is not in the cards for her. However, a phone call from her niece opens the door once more. Kari rushes to San Francisco in order to see this child Mary Jo has promised her, only to learn it comes with strings attached. Kari's head tells her not to accept the deal, but when she sees the baby, Kari's heart changes her mind. The reader can see trouble brewing for Kari in the fact she has been asked to keep such a huge secret, but also sees the happiness this child brings Kari.

Audrey is unhappy in her pregnancy and questioning her belief in God in the aftermath of cruelty perpetrated against Kari simply because her child is of mixed race. Audrey's husband is not being incredibly helpful in this time of turmoil, wrapped up in his own issues regarding Audrey's rich and powerful family. This situation suggests trouble in Audrey's marriage and predicts a future struggle for Audrey with her faith in God and perhaps religion as well.

Part One: 1968-1970, October 1968, Faith, November 1968, Slip, and December 1968, Merit

Part One: 1968-1970, October 1968, Faith, November 1968, Slip, and December 1968, Merit Summary

Faith is beginning to see differences in the behaviors of her children. Although twins, Bonnie seems much more independent than Beau. Wade's mother, Patsy, assures Faith this is normal behavior and Beau will become more like his sister as he gets older. Faith is happy to have Patsy around since she does not have her own mother to share these things with. However, when Faith takes Patsy to a local bakery and they run into Kari and Julia, Faith is offended when Patsy uses an old derogatory phrase to refer to Julia's mixed race. Part of Faith's annoyance, however, is due to the fact she forgot it is her night to host book club and she had the chance to cancel but Patsy overruled her.

During the meeting, the ladies question Patsy about some of the stories Faith has told them. When they ask about a moment during her wedding reception when Faith's father helped care for an injured guest, Faith believes she is caught in her lies. However, Patsy covers for Faith by telling a whopping story of her own. When Faith asks later why she did this, Patsy says that Faith makes Wade happy, so it does not matter where she came from or who her parents are. However, Patsy does encourage Faith to tell someone the truth to unburden herself. Faith politely declines.

Shortly before Thanksgiving Slip learns her brother Fred has enlisted in the military with hopes of going to Vietnam. Slip is outraged by this and scared for her brother, but is forced to accept there is nothing she can do. At book club a few days later, the ladies discuss their favorite teachers. Merit tells the story of her junior high music teacher who tried to rape her when she came to say goodbye before he left for another teaching job. Merit has never told anyone this story and is still holding on to the shame it burdened her with.

Merit attends Kari's annual Christmas party with Eric. Merit is wearing some political buttons her secret Santa from the book club gave her, enjoying the controversy this act of rebellion is causing. During the party the men gather in one part of the living room and begin discussing the book club. Eric suggests it is simply a group of angry housewives sitting around talking about love stories and eating bon bons. Slip hears this and thinks it is the perfect name for their club. Angry Housewives Eating Bon Bons. Everyone agrees.

Faith writes her mother another letter, discussing the New Year and how few fond memories she has of her childhood holidays. Faith remembers the times her mother promised to take her somewhere and let her down and the fantasies she made up of



her father. Faith also thinks about her own children and tells her mother how hard she is trying to be a good mother to them, to be everything her imaginary mother and father were for her. Once again, Faith ends the letter with an apology.

Part One: 1968-1970, October 1968, Faith, November 1968, Slip, and December 1968, Merit Analysis

Faith is caught in a lie, but instead of forcing her out of the closet, her mother-in-law covers for her and even tells a lie of her own. Faith is blown away by this act of kindness because her mother never did anything so kind and selfless for her before. Faith embraces this woman as the mother figure she never had, grateful for her presence. However, Faith turns down her offer to tell the truth about her childhood, fearing the truth will make Patsy see her differently. Faith is very afraid the friends and loved ones she has gathered around herself would not want her in their lives if they knew the truth. So she hides it away more desperately than before, while at the same time writing letters to her mother apologizing for this behavior and for something Faith still has not revealed to the reader.

Slip's brother has enlisted in the military with the hope of going to Vietnam. Slip is outraged, frightened, and desperate to stop him but has to realize she cannot do this. The reader sees Slip's fear and realizes the outcome for her brother cannot be good and is curious to see how this will affect Slip later in the novel. At the same time, Merit is once again showing her strength as well as her trust in her new friends. Merit admits to her book club friends an incident that took place many years before that left her ashamed. Merit's admission touches on the theme of friendship as it is only a strong friendship that could help Merit feel confident to share this information after so much time. Later, Merit wears political buttons to Kari's Christmas party. The political buttons invite a great amount of discussion and make Merit feel intelligent. However the reader must suspect Eric is less than happy about Merit's choice to wear the buttons. Finally, a snide comment Eric makes about the book club leads to a name being chosen. This is ironic since Eric's comment was meant to make fun of them, but the ladies find the name empowering.



Part One: 1968-1970, April 1969, Kari, and November 1969, Merit

Part One: 1968-1970, April 1969, Kari, and November 1969, Merit Summary

As Kari prepares for the book club meeting, she remembers the night she brought Julia home from San Francisco. Kari hid the baby in her luggage when she got out of the taxi and then told Slip she was not feeling well so she would not come over. Kari and Julia spent the night hunting out old baby equipment Kari put in the attic when her last attempt at adopting failed. The next morning, Kari called the other Angry Housewives and invited them over for coffee. Then Kari took them to her bedroom and introduced them to Julia. Though surprised, each of the housewives was very supportive of Kari's decision to adopt. However, Kari has not had an easy time of it each time she visits her brother. Kari wants to tell her brother Julia is his granddaughter, but does not want to break the vow she made to Mary Jo. When Mary Jo calls the house when Kari is visiting her brother, she is terribly afraid Mary Jo will ask for Julia back. However, Mary Jo does not.

Last year, after Kari's Christmas party, Eric beat Merit savagely for wearing the political buttons on her dress all night. Merit is scared, especially now she is pregnant again. However, she cannot make herself leave Eric because she is afraid of being unable to care for her children and because her father, a preacher, taught her a woman's place is at her husband's side. So Merit quietly rebels against Eric. Eric likes Merit to wear her hair in a French roll. Merit hides things in her hair like notes, used cotton swabs, and the baby's teething biscuits. Eric never knows, but Merit feels empowered by these little rebellions.

At the book club meeting the women discuss the devil and whether or not they would sell their souls to the devil for their children—the book they are discussing is Dr. Faustus. Faith relates the discussion to her mother in a letter, expressing her surprise that Kari said she would not sell her soul for Julia. Faith wonders if her mother would have done this for her, but already knows the answer. Again Faith ends the letter with an apology.

Part One: 1968-1970, April 1969, Kari, and November 1969, Merit Analysis

Kari remembers the day she showed her friends her new baby and how it felt to have this new addition to her small family. Kari is extremely happy to finally be a mother. However, Kari is saddened she cannot tell her brother Julia is his granddaughter. Kari is also terrified Mary Jo will one day wake up and realize she wants her daughter back.

Mary Jo shows no inclination for this idea, but Kari remains frightened after the bad experience she had in the past, suggesting to the reader Kari will remain frightened as the plot continues to develop.

Merit is suffering terrible abuse from Eric and it seems to be escalating. Merit feels stuck in the situation however because she is not capable of caring for her children alone and feels it is her spiritual duty to remain at her husband's side. Therefore Merit rebels against Eric by hiding messages and other objects in her hair. This rebellion might seem strange to the reader, but it is a mental exercise that helps keep Merit sane in the face of abuse. This rebellion also explores the theme of secrets, not only because Merit is keeping her rebellion secret from Eric, but because she is also hiding the abuse, keeping a secret from her friends that will someday overwhelm her.

Faith writes another letter to her mother discussing the sacrifices mothers are willing to make for their children. Faith realizes in the course of writing this letter that she is willing to make sacrifices for Bonnie and Beau her own mother never would have made. Faith even suspects she might be willing to make a sacrifice Kari would not make, which surprises her. Again Faith ends the letter with an apology, again underscoring her secrets, the lies she tells and the one story she has yet to tell.

Part Two: The Seventies, May 1970, Slip, June 1970, Audrey, and October 1973, Merit

Part Two: The Seventies, May 1970, Slip, June 1970, Audrey, and October 1973, Merit Summary

In the aftermath of Kent State, Slip joins a protest at a local Norwegian festival. While there Slip runs into Faith who is in the company of a woman who does not agree with Slip's politics. However, Slip does not take offense at Faith for her choice of friends. At home, Slip learns her brother has been injured in Vietnam but he is okay and is coming home. A month later, Audrey is preparing for the book club meeting when she becomes convinced her husband is having an affair. Things have been tense for Audrey and Paul since she became pregnant with their third child and have continued to be tense since his birth. However, Audrey cannot focus on this thought at the moment. The book the club will discuss tonight is about sex and Audrey has decided to provide some marijuana to help the ladies relax for the discussion. The party turns into a giggle fest.

Later, when the meeting is over, Audrey sees an image in her mind of her baby choking. Audrey rushes upstairs and sure enough finds the baby choking on the crib sheet which has become tangled around his neck. Audrey rescues the baby and then finds herself forced to explain to Faith how she happened to know the baby was choking. Faith listens to Audrey describe her mild psychic abilities, how she once had a conversation with her dead grandfather and was able to foretell a fire that would place Paul's sister in danger, and wants to know if she can see the past as well. Audrey assures her she cannot, but Faith seems disturbed by Audrey's power just the same.

A month later, Faith writes a letter to her mother discussing her children's accomplishments and the book the club discussed that month, *Love Story*. Faith explains the heroine's refusal to apologize to her husband after a fight by saying love means never having to say you are sorry. This time Faith does not end the letter with an apology.

One day, out of the blue, Merit's father calls to apologize for being a tough father. Merit accepts the apology with tears and offers to allow her father to baptize the baby she is now carrying, hoping it will finally be the boy Eric so desperately wants. However, Merit's father dies of a heart attack the next day, much to Eric's relief since he had no intention of allowing Merit to have the baby baptized by her father. Merit decides to have her haircut, despite Eric's wish it remain long. Merit wants to modernize her look. Everyone loves the new style except Eric, who beats Merit for going against his wishes. A few days later, at a book club meeting, Merit goes into labor with her third child. Merit ignores the contractions at first because she believes it is false labor again. However, it proves to be the real thing and Merit gives birth in the recliner. It is a third girl.

Part Two: The Seventies, May 1970, Slip, June 1970, Audrey, and October 1973, Merit Analysis

Slip learns her brother has been injured in Vietnam, but he is coming home. Slip is relieved since so many brothers do not make it home. However, the reader who knows about the emotional state of such vets knows Slip's brother is in for a hard time when he comes home, suggesting a direction for the plot. Audrey is convinced her husband is having an affair, but she has no proof, only intuition. This introduces Audrey's unique gift to see things before anyone else does, such as the gift in a wrapped box or her baby choking on his crib sheet. Faith is fearful Audrey can also see the past, but does not explain this fear to the reader or to Audrey. However, the reader might suspect this has something to do with the secrets Faith is keeping, touching on the theme of secrets.

Faith writes to her mother and for the first time refuses to apologize because of a line from a novel her book club has discussed. This tells the reader that despite everything, Faith loves her mother. Several years later, Merit decides to get her hair cut, even though she knows it will invite Eric's wrath. Again, Merit shows her strength of character, despite hiding the fact her husband beats her. Merit is also pregnant again, hoping for a boy after having two girls. However, when Merit gives birth in the living room, it proves to be another girl.

Part Two: The Seventies, March 1974, Faith, July 1975, Slip, and September 1976, Kari

Part Two: The Seventies, March 1974, Faith, July 1975, Slip, and September 1976, Kari Summary

Faith's children are now school age. The differences between Bonnie and Beau have continued and Faith is growing more concerned about Beau. Beau likes to play with dolls and he is being teased in school. Wade makes comments about Beau that cause Faith distress. Faith decides to start working with Beau, to try to rid him of the feminine features that cause him so much trouble. The following summer, Slip's brother comes to stay with her. Fred is emotionally disturbed by his experiences in Vietnam and this causes him to be difficult to live with. Fred was staying with his parents, but now at Slip's house he spends a great deal of his time either sleeping or drinking.

It is Slip's turn to host the book club. Fred makes a rare appearance in the family room and accepts an invitation to stay for the book discussion. The women are curious about Fred and begin to ask him questions about the war. Fred tells them a horrific story about an event that left a young girl raped and murdered. The women are disgusted and appalled by this story, but at the same time they feel sorrow for the things Fred had to endure while serving his country. Slip is hurt the most, realizing that even after all her protesting and fighting for human rights, she never really understood the cruelty that exists in the world.

The neighborhood has begun throwing an annual circus in order to allow the children to plan and give a show for their parents and to give Slip an outlet for her acrobatic talents. Julia is the ringmaster this day and Kari watches, thinking these are the best days of her life. The circus is a huge success. Afterward, the men camp out in the backyard with the kids while the ladies gather at Kari's for drinks. While sitting on Kari's front porch, the ladies see Eric yank Merit back into their house. The Angry Housewives rush over to Merit's house, all except Faith who disappears down the street, assumedly to get the husbands. However, Faith returns to Merit's a few moments later with a gun. Faith insists Eric let Merit go, which he does reluctantly. Later, Merit admits Eric has been beating her most of her marriage. However, Merit refuses to allow her friends to call the police, afraid of how Eric will treat her afterward.

Faith writes a letter to her mother telling her about Merit's rescue and Wade's anger with her for taking the gun. Wade tells Faith the gun was not loaded and Eric might have seriously injured her if he had figured that out. Faith is annoyed with Wade's anger, but touched by his obvious love for her. Once again, Faith ends the letter with an apology.

Part Two: The Seventies, March 1974, Faith, July 1975, Slip, and September 1976, Kari Analysis

Faith is concerned by the femininity with which her child presents himself, so she begins to teach him how to behave in a more masculine way without actually telling the child this is what she is trying to achieve. Faith believes love and patience will help her son get along better at school. The following summer, Slip hosts her brother in her home only to come face to face with the realities of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome before it has a name. Slip is horrified when her brother tells an outrageous story of depravity about the war, realizing for the first time how bad war is and what it has done to her brother's emotional stability.

Kari thinks she is experiencing the best time of her life as she watches her child play ringmaster in the neighborhood circus. Later, however, Kari discovers secrets are kept on this block. Kari and the other housewives save Merit from Eric only to learn Merit has been hiding Eric's beatings for years. The women take her into their embrace, however, determined not to judge her, but to help her. Not only does this explore the theme of secrets, but it also illustrates the theme of friendship as it proves what great friends Merit has found in the Angry Housewives.

Faith writes another letter to her mother talking about Wade's deep love for her. Faith is amazed by Wade's love and is convinced he would not love her quite as much if he knew the truth about her parents and her childhood. The reader might not agree with Faith's assumptions, however, but still waits to find out for sure since Faith continues to keep her secret.



Part Two: The Seventies, August 1977, Audrey, October 1977, Merit, November 1977, Kari, and December 1977, Slip

Part Two: The Seventies, August 1977, Audrey, October 1977, Merit, November 1977, Kari, and December 1977, Slip Summary

Audrey, who is now divorced, is spending her birthday alone because the boys are with their father and his new wife. Audrey is so depressed she decides to go to the movies. Audrey runs into her neighbors, Grant and Stuart, and decides to have a few drinks with them. The men see Audrey is upset so they take her for a drive. Audrey breaks down and tells them about an argument she had with Slip that has left her desperate to make up. This fight was about Flannery telling stories about Audrey's oldest son, Dave. When Slip approached Audrey to talk to her about the stories, the argument became personal and both said things they should not have. Now they will not speak to each other and Audrey has stopped attending book club meetings to avoid Slip.

Merit is also divorced now. Eric has continued to be cruel to her and he ignores his children when they are with him. Merit gets a visit from Eric's sister who tells her about the abuse their father perpetrated not only on their mother but on Eric as well. Merit does not think this excuses Eric's behavior but it does make sense out of it. In the meantime, Faith writes a letter to her mother talking about how her daughter is doing a school project on her family history. Instead of taking the opportunity to tell the truth, Faith lies to her daughter, making up a family history that does not exist.

Kari is hosting the book club. The ladies discuss ways Audrey and Slip might make amends in order to repair the rift that has affected the club. Audrey cannot think of anything however. Faith suggests a snowball fight, but Slip is asleep when they arrive at her house to invite her out. Later Audrey sneaks into Slip's yard in the dark and builds a snowman meant to be a gesture of peace. When Slip leaves the house to go for her morning run the next morning she finds the snowman and the note Audrey has attached to it. Slip is ready to make up as well and stops by Audrey's on the way home to offer her apologies.

Part Two: The Seventies, August 1977, Audrey, October 1977, Merit, November 1977, Kari, and December 1977, Slip Analysis

It is inevitable in every friendship that, every once in a while, tension will cause trouble. Audrey and Slip prove this rule true when they get into an argument over their children. Audrey is having a hard time due to her divorce, even though it has been amicable. Audrey is lonely and is having trouble with her oldest son, who is acting out. This stress is compounded when Slip comes to her about some rumors Flannery is telling her about Dave. They argue, saying things they both regret, and it causes a rift in their friendship so large it threatens to destroy the Angry Housewives. Instead of allowing this to happen, the ladies get together and urge Audrey to apologize. Audrey does in a unique way and wins Slip back.

Merit is also divorced now, free of Eric. Merit learns Eric was abused himself as a child and this gives her insight into his behavior but does not change her opinion of him or make her wish she could try again. Instead, Merit is relieved to be free of Eric, despite the financial burden this places on her because she knows he would eventually have injured the girls in one way or another. Faith, at the same time, is lying to her daughter about her childhood. Faith is still afraid of how people will judge her when they learn the truth, so she continues to lie even though the lies are beginning to weigh on her.



Part Three: The Eighties, February 1980, Audrey, December 1982, Kari, and September 1983, Merit

Part Three: The Eighties, February 1980, Audrey, December 1982, Kari, and September 1983, Merit Summary

Faith writes a letter to her mother announcing she has gotten an interior decorating degree. Wade takes her out to dinner and Faith tells him a story about her childhood that leaves him angry with her mother. Faith does not like this, feeling as though it is only okay for her to be angry with her mother. When they return home, Faith finds Beau crying in his room. Faith does not know what to do with this and finds herself turning her back on her own child.

Audrey invites all the Angry Housewives to her family's beach house in California to celebrate twelve years of the book club. The weekend gets off to a rocky start because Kari is grieving for her dog that died the week before of old age. The dog had been given to Kari shortly after her husband's death as a puppy and had been a great source of comfort to her for many years. Later, the ladies decide to have their book club meeting at a local bar that turns out to be a biker bar. While there, the ladies dance with several of the local bikers and even get a picture with one of them in the parking lot afterward.

Kari receives an invitation to Mary Jo's wedding and her first inclination is to refuse to attend. However, Kari decides she cannot hide from Mary Jo for the rest of Julia's life. At the wedding reception, Kari is having a great time until the groom makes a comment that makes Kari feel as though Mary Jo has told their secret to her husband. Mary Jo assures Kari she has not done this and again swears she has no intention of ever making a claim on Julia. Kari is somewhat reassured, but still worries she will one day lose Julia.

Merit has taken a job working in an office in a clerical position. Merit hates her job, but finds solace in her lunch breaks when she can escape to the library and play the piano. One day while Merit is playing, a man sits outside listening and applauds her when she emerges. Merit tells this man she is not interested in dating, so he should leave her alone. However, the man continues to show up at the library every time Merit is there to play. Eventually Merit takes pity on the man and agrees to have coffee with him. This one date leads to a weekly meeting Merit insists remain platonic.



Part Three: The Eighties, February 1980, Audrey, December 1982, Kari, and September 1983, Merit Analysis

Faith writes a letter to her mother to tell her she has gotten her interior decorating degree. Faith continues by telling her mother how Wade got angry at her mother when Faith told him a memory of her childhood. Faith is offended by this because she feels only she has the right to be angry with her mother. Faith's reaction is strange since it seems she has very little anger toward her mother for her negligence when Faith was young. However, the reader can see Faith's attitude has changed somewhat over the years and she is not as clearly apologetic as she once was.

Audrey invites all the Angry Housewives to California to celebrate their twelfth anniversary. The trip is exciting despite Kari's grief over her dog, and ends with the housewives having their picture taken with tough bikers. Later Kari is invited to her niece's wedding and finds herself filled with fear that now Mary Jo will want her daughter back. When it seems Mary Jo has shared the secret with her new husband, Kari is terrified but gets Mary Jo's assurance that she will never take Julia from her. Kari seems home free now, especially since Julia is not interested in learning the truth of her birth, but secrets have a way of getting out and the reader anticipates this will happen in this case.

Merit is working now to help supplement her income. Merit is unhappy in her work but finds solace in playing the piano. Merit meets a persistent man while playing the library piano. Merit is not interested in starting a relationship, but this man is so persistent she cannot resist joining him for coffee. The man is kind and gentle, an unattractive man who seems to be completely selfless when it comes to Merit. Merit slowly comes to trust this man, but the relationship remains plutonic at this point. The reader might suspect this will change, however, since the man has been so persistent from the beginning.

Part Three: The Eighties, June 1986, Slip, August 1986, Merit, and December 1986, Slip

Part Three: The Eighties, June 1986, Slip, August 1986, Merit, and December 1986, Slip Summary

Fred has cleaned up, getting help through an AA group populated by other Vietnam Vets. Now Fred works counseling vets like himself. Fred calls Slip and tells her he is going on a peace march from L.A. to Washington D.C. Slip decides to join Fred for a small stretch when he reaches Iowa. Slip watches Fred confront a vet who is offended by their peaceful protest and turn the situation into an impromptu counseling series. Slip is content to see her brother has finally made his way out of the darkness his experiences in Vietnam trapped him in. The following month, Faith writes a letter to her mother describing the stress her lies has begun to place on her, leaving her moody and frightened every day.

Merit has allowed Mr. Paradise, her new friend, talk her into taking a job playing the piano in a piano bar. The Angry Housewives all come out for Merit's first night to support her. The night is a success. Also successful is Merit's budding romance with Mr. Paradise. Mr. Paradise has been more of a father to Merit's three daughters than Eric ever was and he is gentler with Merit than any other man. Merit is quickly falling deeply in love. The following month, Faith writes a letter to her mother telling her how Patsy has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Again Faith signs the letter with an apology.

For Kari's annual Christmas party she allows Reni, Merit's oldest daughter, and Julia to take over the cooking duties. The girls do a wonderful job. At the party, Faith is angry and short-tempered. At first everyone thinks it is because Beau chose not to come home from college for the holidays. However, Wade pulls Slip aside and tells her Faith has been this way for months and he is becoming concerned. Wade wonders if Faith is going through menopause, but Slip thinks it might be too soon. While they are talking, Faith arrives and angrily pulls Wade away to listen to the kids sing Christmas Carols.

Part Three: The Eighties, June 1986, Slip, August 1986, Merit, and December 1986, Slip Analysis

Fred has come out of the darkness with the help of other vets and now he helps these same vets. Slip is proud of her brother and grateful to have him back. At the same time, Faith seems to be falling into an angry depression. Faith is becoming overwhelmed by all the lies she has told about her past and it is making her moody and unpleasant.

Everyone is worried about her, especially Wade, but no one knows what to do for her. A full disclosure seems to be the only answer but the reader is still waiting to see if Faith will allow this to take place.

Merit is falling in love with her persistent fan. Mr. Paradise, though less than good looking, proves to be gentle and caring, a better father to Merit's daughters than Eric ever was. The reader sees the happiness Merit has found and hopes marriage is on the horizon for this strong woman. At the same time, Kari is learning how to let go. Kari allows her daughter and her friend to make the food for her annual Christmas party, something she never would have done in the past. Kari is growing older and coming to trust the people around her in a way she never has before. Perhaps this signals for the reader a change in Kari that will allow her to stop living in fear of losing her daughter.



Part Three: The Eighties, January 1987, Audrey, and February 1987, Slip

Part Three: The Eighties, January 1987, Audrey, and February 1987, Slip Summary

Audrey senses Faith needs her so she flies to New Orleans where Faith has gone to visit Beau. Audrey invites herself to dinner and learns Beau is planning to introduce his mother to Shelby, whom his mother assumes is his girlfriend. However, Beau has not told his mother he is gay and Shelby is a man. Audrey figures this out and offers support. When Beau does tell Faith, she immediately leaves the restaurant and returns to the hotel. Audrey goes to counsel her and the whole group ends up at a diner to discuss the issue. Faith listens to Beau tell her how he hated living a lie and she relates to his story in a way no one else understands.

The next morning, Faith and Audrey go for a ride because Audrey wants to see the sights. Faith ends up directing Audrey to her hometown in Mississippi. Faith leads Audrey around and shows her the house where she lived and the bar where she claims to have killed her mother. In a letter to her mother, Faith tells how she confessed to dragging her mother out of a bar, watching her get into a car drunk, and driving away with her. Faith tells how she said some cruel things to her mother and caused an accident that killed her mother and left Faith with a hip injury. With Audrey's help, Faith then calls Beau and tells him which leads to the entire family coming out to Mississippi to learn the truth. Bonnie and Wade are both shocked and angry. Back home the Angry Housewives learn the story as well. Slip takes it the hardest of all, feeling betrayed. However, a conversation with one of her sons makes Slip see she has had a charmed life and she should try harder to put herself in Faith's shoes.

Part Three: The Eighties, January 1987, Audrey, and February 1987, Slip Analysis

Faith learns Beau is gay, something Audrey and a few others have suspected since the boy was a child. Faith takes it hard, thinking she did something wrong. However, during the course of finding out how Beau feels hiding his orientation, Faith relates to his story of having to live with a lie. Almost unconsciously, Faith decides it is time to tell her story. Faith has been hinting at her story for almost the entire novel in her letters to her mother, building anticipation she finally resolves for the reader. It is almost a relief to know the truth.

Not everyone takes it well. Slip is angry with Faith until her son points out Slip has led a charmed life and she should take a step back and see things from Faith's point of view. Wade too is not happy with Faith, but the reader feels confident he will eventually come

around because they clearly have a strong marriage. Bonnie also feels betrayed and it may take a while for her to come around, but Faith feels relieved to have this entire story out in the open. The theme of secrets has finally been illustrated and satisfied, ending this plot line in a way that leaves the reader feeling somewhat satisfied.

Part Four: The Nineties, June 1991, Merit, November 1993, Audrey, May 1995, Kari, and August 1995, Grant

Part Four: The Nineties, June 1991, Merit, November 1993, Audrey, May 1995, Kari, and August 1995, Grant Summary

Merit discovers she is pregnant despite the fact Mr. Paradise told her he was unable to have children. Mr. Paradise is thrilled and immediately proposes. The wedding is a simple affair at the courthouse. Merit and Mr. Paradise settle into a comfortable marriage. Merit's daughters are thrilled with the situation too because Mr. Paradise has always been a good father to them and this makes it official. The baby turns out to be another girl, which is exactly what Mr. Paradise was hoping for. A few years later when Reni, Merit's oldest, is graduating college, Eric shows up for the ceremony. Merit runs into Eric in the hallway and they have a few words. Eric makes a derogatory comment about Merit's baby and Merit hits him, finally refusing to take his abuse a moment longer.

The weekend Audrey helped Faith confront her past, she had an epiphany she believes was a conversation with God. Audrey decides she wants to be a minister. When Audrey tells Grant he finds the whole thing insane, but encourages her to go through with it anyway. During her training, Audrey learns that Grant's on again, off again lover Stuart has the virus that causes AIDS. Stuart blames Grant for his condition even though he is not positive, but Grant stays by Stuart's side anyway. As a sort of consolation prize, Audrey arranges for Grant to join the Angry Housewives Eating Bon Bons. Grant discovered he was gay after college, when he met a flamboyantly gay man who ran a theater group. Before this, Grant was his father's idea of the perfect man, a professional, straight-laced person. Afterward, when Grant told his father, he took it hard, refusing to acknowledge Grant after finding out. The housewives have become the family Grant lost when he came out to his parents.

When Kari's brother dies, Mary Jo and Julia both come home for the funeral. After the funeral reception, Kari sits in the church basement with both Mary Jo and Julia, reminiscing about her childhood. Suddenly Kari realizes she is no longer afraid to have these two women in the same room together, no longer afraid of losing Julia. Kari decides this might be the right time to tell Julia the truth. Kari gives Julia the option and Julia agrees to hear the truth. However, the truth proves overwhelming and Julia runs out of the church.

Faith writes a letter to her mother telling her how Wade confessed his undying love for her after a trip to visit his mother. Patsy is in a nursing home now. Patsy does not even



remember her own husband. Faith finds this very sad, but has found peace in her own life after telling everyone the truth. Faith is so happy Wade and Bonnie have both forgiven her. Faith signs the letter but no longer apologizes.

Part Four: The Nineties, June 1991, Merit, November 1993, Audrey, May 1995, Kari, and August 1995, Grant Analysis

Merit has found happiness finally with her new husband and child. Merit runs into Eric and finds herself turning the tables on him, slapping him for a rude comment he makes against her daughter. Merit feels really good about this and promises herself to tell the housewives, knowing they will support her. Another story line comes full circle and finds a satisfactory end for the reader. At the same time, Audrey, the woman who claimed she did not believe in God, has, in an ironic twist, decided to become a minister.

Grant and Audrey have become good friends. Grant is going through a hard time and while he supports Audrey's career decision, he is going through a hard time. Grant's on again off again lover has AIDS. Stuart is not kind to Grant, but Grant stands by him anyway, traveling to be at his side when he dies. Grant is a kind person at heart, and loyal to a fault. When Grant is accepted into the AHEB group, he is thrilled because these women have become his family. Grant has no other family because his father disowns him upon learning about his sexual orientation.

Kari's brother dies and she decides this is the perfect time to tell Julia the truth about her birth mother. At first it seems Julia is open to the information, but then she runs out of the church. The reader can see Julia is hurt and angry, leaving the reader wondering how this will affect her relationship with Kari, touching on the theme of motherhood. At the same time, Faith's life has taken a turn for the better. Faith feels free now the truth has come out and she has gained the forgiveness of both her husband and daughter. Life could not be better for Faith, but the reader suspects there are still surprises in store for her.



Part Four: The Nineties, January 1996, Slip; October 1996, Kari; May 1997, Merit, and August 1997, Audrey

Part Four: The Nineties, January 1996, Slip; October 1996, Kari; May 1997, Merit, and August 1997, Audrey Summary

A few days after Kari tells Julia about Mary Jo, Slip learns she has Hodgekin's disease. Slip is treated with chemotherapy and it seems the cancer has gone into remission. However, things are not going smoothly for Kari. Julia has refused to speak to her for more than a year until one night she calls out of the blue and apologizes. Julia is engaged and has decided she needs her mother in her life. Flannery, Slip's daughter, has written a novel she is attempting to have published. Slip and her husband read the novel together and discover it to be incredible. Shortly after it finds a publisher, Slip gives the Angry Housewives a copy.

Audrey has become a youth minister at her church and is charged with counseling teens. One of Audrey's teens is a young girl who has found herself pregnant at fifteen. Audrey is brusque with her at first because the girl has an attitude and because Audrey has just learned her ex-husband has died. However, Audrey manages to break through the girl's attitude and they manage to help each other. In a letter to her mother, Faith confesses Beau has found out she has a sister. Faith's father died and left a letter for her. Beau discovered a message on an Internet site for children searching for their parents and contacted the woman who then forwarded the letter. However, the woman has only just learned of Faith's existence and refuses to meet her.

Part Four: The Nineties, January 1996, Slip; October 1996, Kari; May 1997, Merit, and August 1997, Audrey Analysis

Slip has cancer, which makes the reader think she is the cancer victim in the prologue. However, Slip's cancer goes into remission making the reader wonder if one of the other housewives will contract the disease as well. Kari makes amends with her daughter and discovers Julia is about to be married. Flannery writes a novel and is about to have it published. The children of the housewives are making successful lives for themselves, touching on the theme of motherhood and stressing what a wonderful job these mothers have done for their children.



Audrey is finding a fulfilling life in her counseling, even on days when she cannot concentrate on the matter at hand. Audrey finds if she reaches out to these children she is trying to help, they just might return the favor. Faith discovers she has a sister and that her father did love her once upon a time. Faith is thrilled with this news, but disappointed her sister will not see her. The sister did not know Faith existed until her father was dying, exploring once more the theme of secrets. However, Faith believes she will one day want to be a part of Faith's life.

Part Four: The Nineties, January 1998, Grant, and Epilogue, September 1998, Faith

Part Four: The Nineties, January 1998, Grant, and Epilogue, September 1998, Faith Summary

Audrey invites Grant to move in with her since it does not make sense for two people to occupy two large houses when they could easily share. Grant agrees. They host the next book club meeting together. A discussion takes place to celebrate the upcoming thirtieth anniversary of the club. Merit suggests they reread some of the books they have read in the past. When the night is over, Slip tells Audrey and Grant her cancer has returned.

Slip gives a good fight, but it seems obvious to most of the housewives that her disease is getting the better of her. Slip refuses to let go, but she does make a few suggestions on who should replace her in the book club should the worst happen. The housewives spend many evenings in Slip's hospital room. Faith is putting together a scrapbook of the club and this leads to many discussions of the past. The discussion gives them all strength to face what is happening to Slip.

Part Four: The Nineties, January 1998, Grant, and Epilogue, September 1998, Faith Analysis

Audrey and Grant move in together since they are both alone and content in each other's company. The book club reaches its thirtieth year and finds all the women content in their lives. Slip is ill again, but she intends to fight the cancer until the very end. The women, and Grant, of the Angry Housewives intend to fight with her. They share their memories of the past with each other and Slip, thereby sharing their strength with Slip.

Slip has always been the strongest of the group, so it is ironic she is the one fighting for her life. However, if anyone can survive this, Slip seems to be the one. Faith sees this and she is content to stay by Slip's side and do what she can to help her fight. It seems, despite the unsatisfactory end to the novel, that all the stories have come to an end and the ending gives the reader a sense that this club is immortal and will survive for many more years to come.

Characters

Faith Reynolds Owens

Faith was raised in the south and finds her relocation to Minnesota shocking. Faith knows little about snow and becomes deeply afraid when the power goes out during a snow storm. Faith is alone a majority of the time because her husband is a pilot, so when she makes friends with the neighborhood women, she embraces them like a lifeline. Faith wants nothing more than to be a part of the normal, middle class life, she sees her new friends living. However, Faith has a secret she is afraid has the power to end the perfect life she is living.

Faith was raised by her grandmother the majority of her childhood because her mother was an alcoholic who often left her alone for days at a time to drink and spend time with her many boyfriends. Growing up in this atmosphere, Faith began to behave much the same as her mother, drinking and sleeping with any available boy. However, when Faith nearly drowns, she decides she wants something more. Faith brings up her grades and manages to get a scholarship to college. At college, Faith decides she has a second chance to create a perfect life, so she lies to all her friends about her parents. Faith even lies to Wade, the man who will soon be her husband.

Once Faith meets the Angry Housewives, she has been living a lie so long she no longer knows how to tell the truth. However, these lies weigh heavily on her and Faith begins to suffer under the burden. When Faith's son tells her he is gay and talks about the pressure he felt living a lie, Faith realizes it is time to tell the truth. Faith takes Audrey to her hometown and tells her how an argument in the car led to a tragic car accident that killed her mother and left her with a permanent limp. Audrey accepts the truth and forgives Faith, something everyone in Faith's life is eventually capable of doing, relieving her of her burden.

Marjorie 'Slip' McMahon

Slip is a strong, opinionated woman who has strong feelings about the injustices of the world. Slip often participates in protest marches in the sixties and seventies, and becomes an organizer of the Habitat for Humanity project in the nineties. Slip is a small woman who has more personality in her small body than most. Slip is a mother to three children, one of whom is a young lady who will later become a writer. Slip has strong marriage, one of only two successful marriages that will survive the course of the novel.

Slip has a brother, Fred, who decides to enlist during the Vietnam War. Slip begs him to remain in college and not go to war, but Fred feels it is his duty especially since several of his friends have been drafted. Fred goes to war and comes home injured. Fred's physical injury is not debilitating, but his mental state is. Fred has post traumatic stress syndrome before anyone knows what it is. Fred comes to stay with Slip for a time and

she finds him so disturbed she does not know how to handle him. When Fred comes to an Angry Housewives meeting and tells a horrific story about his experience in Vietnam, Slip is horrified and frightened. Fred eventually moves on, finding help through the support of other vets. Fred becomes a counselor, helping others like himself, inspiring Slip with his strength and determination.

Slip becomes ill late in the novel. Slip goes through chemotherapy for Hodgkin's Disease and eventually goes into remission. However, shortly after her daughter's novel is published, Slip has a relapse. Slip's cancer has moved into her hip and her back. Slip is most likely going to die, but she refuses to give up, insisting she is going to live another twenty years. The Angry Housewives support her, a part of them believing she will survive.

Kari Nelson

Kari is a widow, the oldest of the Angry Housewives. Kari desperately wants to have children, but thinks she never will after her husband dies. However, Kari gets a call from her niece telling her a child is available. Kari rushes out to San Francisco only to learn the child is her niece's own daughter. Kari is hesitant when she learns the truth and the fact her niece does not want anyone in the family to know the truth. However, the first time Kari sees the baby, she knows it is meant to be. Kari takes the baby home to raise, but lives in fear her niece will change her mind or tell the family about the lie she asked Kari to live. Kari has difficulty at first with the reaction of strangers to her daughter's biracial appearance, but eventually learns how to deal with this unfortunate interference in her happiness.

Audrey Forrest

Audrey is the outgoing, loud spoken one of the group. Audrey is happily married when the book begins, but soon learns her husband is a serial philanderer. Audrey's divorce is amicable, but her children have a difficult time with the change. Audrey's oldest becomes a juvenile delinquent, constantly getting into trouble. Audrey struggles with this behavior until her son goes to live with her ex-husband and his new wife. The new wife seems to bring a calming atmosphere to Audrey's troubled son and makes the situation better.

Audrey has a sixth sense in which she knows certain things in the moment they happen without any prior knowledge. Audrey senses her husband is having an affair, knows her son is choking without hearing a sound, and knows the moment her son is in a near fatal car crash. Audrey's friends support her gift, but this does not stop them from teasing her about it. Faith is convinced Audrey can also see the past and this will cause her to know about the lies Faith has been telling for many years. Therefore it is not a surprise when Audrey is in Faith's company when Faith finally reveals the truth about her past. It is also this same weekend when Audrey feels called to the church and

decides to become a minister. Later, Audrey will become a youth minister, counseling troubled teens.

Merit Mayes Iverson Paradise

Merit is the youngest of the housewives and perhaps one of the most innocent. Merit does not have a college degree like her friends and at first appears to be less than intelligent. However, Merit proves to be as intelligent, if not more, than her fellow book club members. Merit is married to a doctor who was severely abused as a child and who has taken to abusing Merit, telling her she is not intelligent, belittling and beating her. Merit hides this horrible secret for many years until the day her husband beats her publicly. On this day, the other housewives break into her home and rescue her from her husband, protecting her until a divorce can be secured.

Merit begins her life over with three children after her divorce. If not for the angry housewives, Merit believes she would not have made it. Merit is forced to get a job to help make ends meet. While working a clerical job, Merit often goes to the nearby library to use the pianos in order to practice for the lessons she gives her daughters. During one of these visits Merit meets Mr. Paradise, a man who becomes a dear friend. Mr. Paradise talks Merit into taking a job playing the piano in a piano bar. Merit overcomes her stage fright and does just that. Later, Merit and Mr. Paradise get married, adding another daughter to their now complete family.

Grant

Grant is a gay man who buys the house next door to Audrey. Grant is a flamboyant, open man who quickly becomes good friends with Audrey and the rest of the Angry Housewives. Through this friendship, Grant eventually is invited to join the Angry Housewives book club. Grant is in a monogamous relationship with a man named Stuart. However, Stuart is not faithful to Grant. Stuart is an angry person who often runs off for months at a time to be with other men. Grant always takes Stuart back even though Stuart is not kind to him. When Stuart contracts the AIDS virus, he blames Grant, despite the fact that Grant is tested negative. Despite this rocky relationship, Grant stands by Stuart's side and is there when Stuart dies.

Dr. Eric Iverson

Eric is Merit's first husband. Eric was raised by a cruel, abusive father who often took out his anger on Eric. When Eric married Merit, he continued this abuse against her. Eric often hits Merit and belittles her, calling her names and making her feel as though nothing she can do is good enough for him. Merit spends many years not only hiding injuries inflicted by Eric, but trying to be perfect in order to stop him from hurting her. These efforts are futile, however, because there is no way to stop Eric from hurting her. When the Angry Housewives witness Eric hurting Merit and rush to save her, Eric threatens to kill them all. The next day, typical to his style, Eric sends all the housewives



flowers with a card suggesting they forget what they witnessed. A divorce takes place shortly afterward. Eric continues to be mean and nasty to Merit and a neglectful father to their daughters. When their oldest child graduates from college, Eric and Merit have a confrontation that leaves Merit feeling empowered.

Flannery McMahon

Flannery is Slip's daughter. Flannery is a precocious young woman who bosses around all the other kids in the neighborhood. Flannery is a lot like Slip in that she is the powerhouse that propels the people around her. Flannery is also strong in her opinions. Flannery goes through a stage in her teens where she becomes the neighborhood tattletale, constantly telling on all her friends. This makes Flannery unpopular and causes a fight between Slip and Audrey. Later, when Flannery is an adult, she writes and publishes a book the Angry Housewives discuss in the book club.

Julia Nelson

Julia is Kari's daughter. Julia is adopted. All her life, Julia is aware of her adoption and even knows a little about her story, but chooses not to learn the details of her birth parents. Kari worries throughout Julia's childhood about these secrets being revealed and tries to protect herself and Julia from this possibility. However, when Julia is an adult and Kari realizes she is no longer living in fear, she decides to tell Julia. Julia learns her birth mother is Kari's niece, Mary Jo. Julia has known Mary Jo all her life and is upset to learn this truth. Julia refuses to speak to Kari for more than a year after this truth is revealed. However, Julia eventually realizes what Kari did, she did out of love and she decides to forgive her.

Primrose Reynolds

Primrose Reynolds is Faith's mother. Primrose gets pregnant with Faith as a teenager and resents the responsibility from the beginning, especially after Faith's father takes off just a few weeks after her birth. Primrose becomes an alcoholic, spending a great deal of time with different men, often leaving Faith either alone or with her grandmother. Faith sees this behavior and begins to imitate it because she has no other role models. However, a counselor helps Faith see she does not have to live her life this way. When Faith goes off to college, she decides to tell lies about her parents in order to help her become a different person, to shake off the shame of her true past. The summer before her senior year, Faith returns home to visit her mother. After her mother once again breaks a promise to Faith, she goes to the bar and drags her mother out. They fight. Primrose gets into the car to drive home, but Faith is afraid she is too drunk. Faith tries to stop her, but when she cannot she gets into the car with her. On the drive home they continue to argue and an accident results. Primrose is killed and Faith suffers a hip injury.



Objects/Places

Angry Housewives Eating Bon Bons

Angry Housewives Eating Bon Bons, or AHEB, is the name of the book club the ladies of Freesia Court organize and participate in for more than thirty years.

Nasty Notes, Half-Eaten Biscuits, Used Cotton Swabs

In defiance of her husband, Merit hides nasty notes, half-eaten teething biscuits and used cotton swabs in her hair.

Piano

Merit is a talented piano player. It is through playing the piano at the local library that Merit meets Frank Paradise, her second husband. The piano also becomes Merit's source of income when she begins to play piano in a piano bar.

Gun

Faith takes Wade's gun and threatens Eric with it when she and the other angry housewives become aware he is beating Merit.

Letters

Faith begins writing letters to her deceased mother early in her marriage as a way to record her thoughts, like a diary, and continues to do so throughout her married life.

Food

Audrey often turns to food as a source of comfort, especially at times of stress such as her divorce and her son's near fatal accident.

Neighborhood Circus

The angry housewives organize a neighborhood circus in order to give Slip an outlet for her acrobatic talents. The circus becomes an annual event throughout the children's childhoods.



Hospital

Slip battles cancer at the end of the novel, causing the angry housewives to spend many hours in her hospital room reminiscing about the past.

Snow

The housewives live in an area where it snows a lot. The first time the housewives get together as a group is was during a snowstorm in which they have a snowball fight, Faith's first.

Gone with the Wind

Faith, whose favorite book is *Gone with the Wind*, names her children after the children in the novel.

Winter Gardens

Winter Gardens is the name of Flannery's first published novel.

Freesia Court

Freesia Court is the residential street where the angry housewives live.

Trilby, Mississippi

Trilby, Mississippi, is the small town where Faith grows up. It is also the same town where Faith's mother dies in a car crash that leaves Faith with a permanent limp.

New Orleans, Louisiana

Faith travels to New Orleans in order to visit her son, Beau, who is attending school there. It is on this visit that Beau tells Faith he is gay.

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Freesia Court is located in a suburb of Minneapolis.

Themes

Friendship

Friendship blooms in this novel from the very first page. Faith is a lonely transplant from the south, unused to the snow blowing outside her door. When Faith sees a group of what appears to be teenagers having a snowball fight outside her house, she rushes out to yell at them, only to be invited to join in. The group of teenagers turns out to be a group of housewives blowing off steam. Faith joins in and discovers there is nothing more exhilarating than a spontaneous snowball fight. Afterward the ladies retire to Faith's living room where their conversation, a sort of getting-to-know-you dialogue, reveals the love of books each of these women share. At that moment the Angry Housewives Eating Bon Bons book club is born.

The first few meetings are simply meetings to discuss a book. However, it is not long before these women begin to share details of their lives with each other. Before long, they begin meeting outside of the book club, sharing their daily lives. What starts out as just a monthly discussion group quickly becomes a friendship between these five women that will last more than thirty years. Through their monthly meetings they begin to share their trials and tribulations, helping each other through two divorces, an adoption, a near fatal car accident, and several pregnancies. The ladies come to rely on one another, confessing they might not have made it through without their friends. A bond develops between these women that not even a dark secret can pull apart. The angry housewives survive because they have each other to turn to in the darkness.

Motherhood

Each of the angry housewives is a mother. Faith has twins. Faith worries she is not a good mother because she did not have a good role model as a child. Faith's own mother was an alcoholic who often neglected her daughter. However, the only thing Faith has ever wanted is to have children and give them the life she did not have. Faith does all she can to raise her children well and finds herself so devoted to her children that she is lost when they go off to college. Later, when Faith learns her son is gay, she feels as though she failed at her job. However, Beau is a strong, capable young man who proves sexual orientation has nothing to do with the ability to achieve a happy life.

Kari and her husband want to have children and try many times, but after several miscarriages it becomes apparent it was not going to be. Kari and her husband try to adopt, but the first attempt ends in heartbreak when the mother is able to prove she signed the papers under duress. Soon after, Kari's husband dies, leaving her convinced she will never be a mother. However, Kari gets a phone call one day from her niece announcing a child has just become available for adoption. Kari flies to San Francisco only to learn the child is the biracial daughter of her niece. Kari hesitates only briefly, accepting the child for the gift she is. Kari raises Julia successfully on her own, only to



suffer her daughter's anger when at the age of twenty-eight she learns the truth of her birth. However, Julia eventually forgives her mother and mends their relationship.

Audrey is a relaxed mother who allows her children to run wild, suffering juvenile angst when her eldest son begins to rebel against his parents. Slip is a supportive mother who encourages her children to strive to achieve whatever goals they set for themselves. Merit is a loving mother whose three daughters have an unshakable bond with each other, only broken when they open up to include Merit's late in life child, Portia. Each of these women is a mother who struggles with the many demands motherhood places on a woman. Each of these women does a wonderful job raising their children, often with the help and support of their friends.

Secrets

Everyone has a secret. The women of the angry housewives are no exception. Merit lives for several years the victim of domestic abuse before her friends learn the truth. Audrey hides a sixth sense that enables her to intuit events before they happen, like the fact her husband is cheating on her. Kari keeps secret the true identity of her daughter's birth mother for almost thirty years. Slip hides the fact that her cancer has returned. However, none of these women live with a secret as big as Faith's.

Faith grew up in the poor south, bouncing back and forth between her mother and her grandmother. Faith's mother was an alcoholic who often went on drinking binges that left her daughter alone for days at a time. Faith grew up following in her mother's footsteps, drinking and sleeping around with whatever boy happened to be available. However, a near death experience woke Faith up to her potential future and caused her to change her ways. When Faith was accepted into college, she shook off the dust of her past and created a whole new life. Faith's father suddenly became a doctor rather than the teenager who ran out when she was just two weeks old. Faith's mother became a respected doctor's wife who died tragically her senior year of college.

The strain of keeping up the lies begins to show on Faith after twenty years. Faith does not want to lie any longer, but she is afraid her family and friends will hate her, especially when they learn she killed her own mother. However, when Beau tells her he is gay and talks about his desire to not live a lie, Faith knows it is time to tell the truth. Faith takes Audrey to the small town where she grew up and tells the story of how she was so angry at her mother that an argument in the car caused an accident that left her mother dead and herself with a permanent limp. At first everyone is angry with Faith for lying all those years, especially her husband and Slip. However, they all come to see things through Faith's eyes and offer the forgiveness she has so desperately needed.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel switches back and forth between third person and first person. Each chapter has a different angry housewife as the narrator, some chapters written like a diary entry and others written through the third person as though observed by someone else. There is no pattern to the point of view, all the characters narrate in both views. The chapters remain in the same point of view throughout except when a chapter ends in a letter to Primrose written by Faith, each letter written in the first person point of view, changing the point of view in those chapters that are in third person.

The point of view works because it offers both closeness and distance. The first person points of view offer the reader an intimate look at the characters, inviting the reader into a mind that might not be obvious from another point of view. The third person point of view offers some distance from the narration, allowing the reader to see all the characters in a way they might if the reader were a fly on the wall during the book club meetings. The point of view offers a unique look at these characters not be available had the story been told in the third person with only one narrator, and gives the novel a sense of intimacy not be available otherwise. With so many main characters it is important to establish a sense of intimacy between the reader and each character and this point of view offers that intimacy.

Setting

The novel is set in Minnesota. The state is important only in the fact it is located in the eastern United States and it is an area where it snows quite often. These facts are important because the snow is what brings the ladies together the first time, as a power outage draws them outside where they have a spontaneous snowball fight. Also the fact the state is located in the east is important because Faith is from the south and this area is a complete shock to her, leaving her vulnerable to the friendship that blooms between her and the housewives.

A more important setting of the novel is the residential street on which the ladies live. Freesia Court had become an area populated mostly by older couples. As these couples begin to retire and move to warmer climates, they sell their homes to young couples. Faith and her husband Wade are one of these couples. Soon the whole neighborhood is occupied by young families with small children running through the yards. It is this climate that creates the Angry Housewives and forges a bond that will last for more than thirty years.

These settings work because they each interact with the plot in such a way as to enhance the plot. The state is important because it stresses Faith's feeling of isolation.

The street is important because it is this location that brings these young women together and their love of each other keeps them there. The setting is almost another character of the novel, becoming a part of the plot, interactive and enhancing.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. The novel contains dialogue and exposition, occasionally including words in a foreign language, most often that of the Norwegian people who occupy much of the area. The novel also includes some slang, but not a lot, stressing the level of education most of these women have. Each of these women is highly educated, all having attended college except for Merit. It is this sense of education that lends authenticity to these women participating in a book club.

The language works because it is true to the characters. If the characters spoke with a high amount of slang and broken language, the reader would have a hard time accepting that these women participate in a book club, which by its nature suggests education. The language also works because it progresses through time, reflecting the maturity these characters are experiencing as they grow older. If the language were any different, the reader would struggle to relate to these women, but because of the language used, the reader feels an almost unconscious connection to the characters.

Structure

The novel is divided in chapters each begun with the name of the character narrating, or hosting the meeting, the month and year, the name of the book being discussed, and most often the reason the book was chosen. A majority of these chapters ends with a letter written to Primrose Reynolds by her daughter, Faith. The book ends with an epilogue revealing the identity of the woman suffering cancer in the prologue and suggests an ending more optimistic than what is apparent in the woman's illness.

The novel includes as many story lines as there are main characters. The main story line follows the formation and continuation of the Angry Housewives Eating Bon Bons book club. This includes the friendship that develops between these women. The other story lines follow each woman through her rocky life, including Faith's struggle with her secret, Merit's abusive first husband, Audrey's divorce, Kari's desire to be a mother, and Slip's Vietnam Vet brother. The novel follows each story line closely and each comes to something of a conclusion by the time the main story line is drawn to a close.

Quotes

"A few years back, when I finally got smart enough to go to a therapist, she asked me how I had held things together all these years. It didn't take long to come up with an answer. 'That's easy. I belong to a book club.'" Epilogue, September 1998, Faith, p. 8.

"To say that Faith had a fractious childhood was to say that a began the alphabet." Part One, 1968-1970, The Members, p. 41.

"When Merit told Eric that she was joining a book club, her husband had laughed out loud. Then, as if someone had abruptly turned a switch, his laughter stopped." Part One, 1968-1970, June 1968, Merit, p. 47.

"Holy wet noodle, I am not a heat person. Heat brings the similarities between my hair and a Brillo pad all too close plus, unlike dewy Merit, I am not a delicate perspirer." Part One, 1968-1970, July 1968, Slip, p. 59.

"I do feel birth is miraculous, but it's my belief that to explain all the miracles of nature, someone—some being—had to be invented to take all the credit. Human beings like explanations, and God is a good explanation for the unexplainable things." Part One, 1968-1970, September 1968, Audrey, p. 85.

"It thrilled Kari, who was a long-standing member of the Democratic Party and the teachers' union, the PTA and the Lutheran Church, to be part of a group with the provocative name Angry Housewives Eating Bon Bons. To her it sounded like the code name of a subversive group Gloria Steinem and Sara Lee had put together, whose plans included taking over if not the world, then at least the world's chocolate supply." Part One, 1968-1970, April 1969, Kari, p. 117.

"When a cop grabs you up off the ground, your impulse is to scream and/or wet your pants. At least mine was. Instead, I looked to my fellow protestors for behavior guidelines." Part Two, The Seventies, May 1970, Slip, p. 133.

"Sometimes Faith wondered what had happened when the twins were in utero. Had Bonnie hogged all the space or taken more of the important nutrients out of the placenta? Why did she have all the bravura, the confidence? Why wasn't she afraid of

anything, whereas Beau thought monsters and danger were everywhere?"
Part Two, The Seventies, March 1974, Faith, p. 163.

"At one-thirty in the morning, I heard Bryan yell, 'Mom!' in my ear and scrambled up on the bed, ready to rip into him for waking me out of a dead sleep like that. Only he wasn't there. A gust of wind blew raindrops in through the open window, and I was filled with a cold that had nothing to do with the temperature."
Part Three, The Eighties, April 1984, Audrey, p. 265.

"Age hadn't been cruel to me, but it wasn't bending over backward for me, either."
Part Three, The Eighties, January 1987, Audrey, p. 303.

"I snuggled closer to him, and as he began reading again, I closed my eyes, enjoying beyond measure the singular experience of my husband giving voice to our daughter's."
Part Four, The Nineties, January 1996, Slip, p. 371.

"Even with the clicking and whirring of the hospital machinery, the room was doused in a certain peacefulness, as if the molecules themselves had settled down after the departure of the other Angry Housewives." Epilogue, Faith, p. 402.

Topics for Discussion

Why does Faith continuously write letters to her mother? What is the purpose of these letters? Are they therapeutic or do they serve as some sort of self punishment? How do the letters evolve throughout the novel? Do they change? Do they appear to help Faith? Why does Faith continue with the letters after her secret is revealed?

Why does the writer make Slip so small? How is this reflective of her personality? Do you think Slip is the strongest of the group? Does this have anything to do with the writer choosing to give her cancer?

Why does Slip react the way she does to Faith's secret? What does Slip learn about herself when she becomes angry at Faith? How does this compare to her fight with Audrey? What about Slip's relationship with Fred? What do all these situations teach Slip about herself?

Why does Audrey have trouble believing in God early in the book? Why does Audrey struggle in her faith? What changes Audrey's mind? Why does Audrey become a minister? What does this say about Audrey's personality? Is Audrey a good minister? Would you go to a minister like Audrey for counseling? Why or why not?

Why does Merit try to make Eric happy even though he hurts her? Why does Merit hide used tissues and food in her hair? What does this say about Merit's state of mind? What does it say about Merit's personality? Why does Merit stay with Eric so long? Merit slaps Eric at Reni's graduation. What does this say about the dynamics between them? What does this say about Merit's personality now?

Why is Kari so afraid Mary Jo will tell her husband about Julia's birth? Why does Kari keep Julia's birth secret? Should Kari have told Julia about Mary Jo at Ander's funeral? Did Julia react fairly? Why does Julia get so angry with Kari? How would you feel in this situation?

Grant is a last minute addition to the Angry Housewives. Why do the housewives invite him to join? Why have they not invited anyone else over the years? What is different about Grant that allows his inclusion at such a late date? Why did Faith fight his inclusion for so long? What does this say about Faith? What does it say that Faith changed her mind after Beau's revelations?