BASSED ON A TRUE STORY OF THE ONLY FATAL NUCLEAR ACCIDENT TO OCCUR IN AMERICA, The Longest Night is a deeply moving novel that explores the intricate makeup of a marriage, the shifting nature of trust, and the ways we try to protect the ones we love.

“A smart and detailed portrait of a dissolving postwar marriage… will remind many readers of Richard Yates’s Revolutionary Road.”
—SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE
Andria Williams’ debut novel *The Longest Night* is a book about many things—the Cold War, the American West, gender roles in the 1960s, the birth of nuclear power but above all it is a portrait of a marriage and the forces that challenge it. I was immediately drawn into the story by the opening scene of the novel—a man named Paul, racing through the night on a rural road, passing an ambulance and fire trucks that are rushing away from an accident that he is driving towards. What is taking him there, compelling him to put himself in terrible danger? Who is he trying to save?

Before we can get answers to this question, the novel flashes back to a blindingly hot summer day, three years earlier. A young family is driving cross-country from Virginia to Idaho Falls, where the husband, Paul, has been stationed for his next army tour. They stop at a lake in Northern Utah where local teenagers are diving from the rocks. The wife, Nat, is desperate to cool off, and leaves her one- and three-year-old daughters while she climbs to the top of the cliff and dives in, fully clothed. When she emerges from the lake, Paul is furious—embarrassed, ashamed, scared she could have hurt herself. But as a reader, I was fascinated. I wanted to know what Nat was looking for in that moment of freedom. Did she just want to escape the demands of being a wife and mother for those brief seconds? Did she want to show her husband that she was her own person, still? Did she want to set an example of fearlessness for her daughters, or was she not thinking of them at all?

When I describe Andria’s novel I often say that it reminds me of *Revolutionary Road*, if such a book were set in the American West. That is to say, it is a story about frustrated ambition; domesticity; the stifling social norms of a small town, ruled by a cabal of wives who never fail to match the color of their centerpieces to the tablecloths. Yet it is also a story about how love changes in a marriage—how it is shaped by distance and separation; the birth of children; the challenges in reconciling our adult selves with our adolescent ones. It is a story rooted in a uniquely specific time and place, that is utterly universal in its implications. I hope you will enjoy reading it.
On the night of January 3, 1961, a small nuclear reactor in the Idaho desert exploded. While explosions were not an uncommon part of nuclear project development out in the scrub desert, and the locals had grown used to odd clouds and four-story jets of water shooting into the sky, this one was different: it was unintentional.

The reactor in question, an Army prototype called the SL-1, had a history of steadily intensifying mechanical problems; the operators had been promised a new core in the spring. But so far the operators had been able to manage its quirks and irregularities, and mostly felt guilty for constantly troubling the firefighters at the nearby department who were forced to respond to every false alarm. The firefighters had already been out to the SL-1 twice that day, so when the alarm started blinking again on a below-zero night they were not thrilled about having to climb onto the truck (four of them having to ride outside, on the back, in the freezing air) just to drive out to the SL-1 and turn off its fire alarm again. When they got to the chain link fence surrounding the reactor, everything looked normal, except that none of the operators had come out to meet them, none were responding to their calls, and their dosimeters were reading off the charts at over 200 roentgens—the highest the handheld machines could go.

When I was reading about the SL-1 accident, toying with the germ of an idea that became my novel *The Longest Night*, I was fascinated by the accident at the reactor itself, but even more so by the various types of people who might have been involved. The Idaho Falls environs have all the historical and cultural layering that I find most interesting about the West. This region was originally populated by Native Americans, then Mormon settlers who tamed the Snake River Plain into farmland; it served as the home of the Minidoka Internment Camp during WWII, and after that as a military proving ground. By the time my two main characters, Paul and Natalie Collier, drive into town to start Paul’s first tour as an Army nuclear specialist, the land just northeast of Idaho Falls was the home of all the major nuclear projects in development in the United States.

So you had all these different people bumping up against one another: Mormon locals, Native Americans, an influx of generally young, enlisted military personnel and their wives, some scientists. Perhaps the most intriguing part of planning how to write the novel was switching all these playing cards around, thinking how I could bring these characters together in a way they only would be if forced by circumstance. It was important to me to show the types of people who might have been involved without writing caricatures; they needed to be
representatives of a sort, but also very individual. The best way to do that, I think, is to make some of them care deeply about one another. You can’t see someone as a “type” when you are in love with them; your mind sees everything about them as different, unique, and rare. So I plotted out which characters might feel very strongly about the others, put them in a room and got them talking.

Of course, if you hate someone, you also see them as uniquely horrible, so I had to make some of these folks adversaries, too.

I thought: what if, on the night of the accident, one of those firefighters streaming toward the reactor on the back of the truck were linked in some deep way to one of the operators at the scene? What if circumstances had put them at odds in some way, and now they were going to be forced to respond to this accident together?

And what if there was a woman involved, waiting back home, strongly invested in what might happen to each of them?

Once I had this scenario in mind, I was able to work backwards from there, figuring out who Paul and Nat were, what their marriage was like, and how this third person in the scenario—who I made into a young firefighter named Esrom—might have been connected to them.

Because *The Longest Night* is based on an historical event, it was important to me to try to get the details “right” even though the work itself is complete fiction. I didn’t want a one-to-one correspondence between any of my characters and anyone actually involved in the SL-1 explosion. All three operators were killed at the scene, so we will never know exactly what happened; the amount of speculation is just too great.

What I did want was to give a sense of a Western town layered with all of these different people; a sense of the 1950s with all the charm of its culture and its underlying, darker forces of social repression; a sense of the dawn of the nuclear age, a time when nuclear power was received as enthusiastically as, say, the computer chip, when its applications seemed so endless and revolutionary that the government was throwing money at all kinds of wacky ideas and the public would rather have believed that a nuclear reactor exploded because of the actions of one crazy, suicidal man instead of pervasive mechanical failure.

I wanted to build a world for the reader, a way to take them both back in time and into a world of imagination. In history, you have set events (with room for interpretation). In fiction writing, the possibilities are endless. Combine the two, and I think you have a unique method of explaining human nature, observing culture and power struggles, absolving or implicating the past, and giving warnings about the future.
TOMATO ASPIC

3 envelopes unflavored gelatin
3 cups cold tomato juice
2 cups tomato juice, heated to boiling
1/4 cup lemon juice
2 tablespoons sugar
1 1/2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
4-6 dashes hot pepper sauce

1. In large bowl, sprinkle unflavored gelatin over 1 cup cold juice; let stand 1 minute.
2. Add hot juice and stir until gelatin is completely dissolved, about 5 minutes.
3. Stir in remaining 2 cups cold juice, lemon juice, sugar, Worcestershire sauce, and hot pepper sauce.
4. Pour into 5 1/2 cup ring mold or bowl; chill until firm, about 4 hours.
5. To serve, unmold and if desired, fill with your favorite salad greens, or cut-up fresh vegetables.
6. Apply a thin layer of oil, or cooking spray to your mold or bowl to prevent aspic from sticking.
### Nat’s Macaroni and Cheese

- 8 ounces elbow macaroni
- 1/4 cup butter
- 1/4 cup flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups whole milk
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese

1. Cook macaroni according to package directions.
2. In medium saucepan, melt butter over medium heat; stir in flour and salt; slowly add milk.
3. Cook and stir until bubbly.
4. Stir in cheese until it has melted.
5. Drain macaroni; add to cheese sauce; stir to coat.

### Nat’s Deviled Eggs

- 8 eggs
- 2 tablespoons relish
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 3 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 1 teaspoon mustard
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Paprika to sprinkle on top

1. Cover the eggs with water. Boil in medium saucepan for three minutes; cover, remove from heat, and set aside for 17 minutes. Remove from water.
2. When cool, peel eggs, halve lengthwise, and scoop out the yolks.
3. Mix yolks in a small bowl with relish, ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, salt, and pepper. Mash to a soft consistency and scoop back into the egg whites. Arrange on a bowl and sprinkle with paprika for garnish.
# Cocktail Recipes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MITCH’S OLD-FASHIONED</th>
<th>MOSCOW MULE</th>
<th>JEANNIE’S MANHATTAN</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 teaspoon simple syrup</td>
<td>1.5 ounces vodka</td>
<td>2 ounces whiskey</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 dashes Angostura Bitters, plus more to taste</td>
<td>½ ounce lime juice</td>
<td>½ ounce sweet vermouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 slice orange peel</td>
<td>½ cup ginger beer</td>
<td>1 dash bitters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ounces good-quality rye or bourbon</td>
<td>Ice cubes</td>
<td>Ice cubes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 maraschino cherry</td>
<td>Lime</td>
<td>Maraschino cherry for garnish</td>
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Combine simple syrup and bitters in glass. Fill glass halfway with ice; stir well. Add ice to fill glass. Add orange peel and rye whiskey to glass. Stir again. Garnish with cherry, swizzle stick, and straw.

Pour vodka and lime juice into a mug (preferably a tin cup); add ice cubes and ginger beer. Stir to combine. Drop a lime wedge into the mug for garnish.

Scoop ice into a mixing glass. Pour in vermouth, then whiskey; stir. Strain into a cocktail glass. Add bitters and garnish with a cherry. And for God’s sake, when you’ve drained your cup, touch up your lipstick.
David Gillham: I loved this book, Andria. The characters, the setting, the friction and plot are all pitch perfect. But I’m curious, how did you first hear about the explosive events surrounding the military’s SL-1 atomic reactor (styled as CR-1 in the book)?

Andria Williams: Thank you, David! I’d read about it long ago while doing research for another project. Then, a few years ago, I came across a book called Atomic America by a former Navy nuclear officer named Todd Tucker. The book focuses in large part upon the SL-1, a tiny reactor in the Idaho desert that mysteriously exploded on a freezing January night in 1961. The rescue crew who arrived at the reactor, not knowing whether the operators were dead or alive, had to decide whether or not to risk their own lives on the very slim chance that they could save one of these men. Remarkably, all of the first responders did take that chance, putting themselves in grave danger.

After the accident, rumors swirled about the operators who’d been working that night. Whether or not it was useful to the investigation or even ethical, their personal histories became central to the story of what happened at the SL-1.

I started thinking about who these characters might be, what sorts of men would work that job in the late 1950s, who their wives might have been. When your imagination starts running wild like that, you just feel in your bones that you have the making for a good novel.

DG: Can you talk a bit about the rumors still orbiting the SL-1 meltdown and what made you want to dig deeper and ultimately create this terrific story?

AW: The 1950s were a time of boundless nuclear optimism. I can’t think of many times in history when science and government alike have put so much faith in a single technology. So when the SL-1 accident occurred, it was much easier for people to see it as having been a human error rather than a mechanical one. No one wanted to believe that the reactor had just blown up; the operators had to have done something wrong. Taking it even further, many of the investigators claimed that the operator lifting the central control rod must have knowingly yanked it above the four-inch limit, which would have flooded the core with energy and caused the reactor to go supercritical in a fraction of a second, blowing the whole thing up. But why would someone do this?
The investigators dedicated a remarkable amount of time and energy to investigating the young operators’ backgrounds, love lives, social histories. One of the young men was known for having big drag-out fights with his wife in front of their apartment building, where she’d throw all his clothes out the window and the cops would be called and so forth. In fact, his wife had, that very afternoon, stolen his paycheck and filed for divorce. So the story started to be told that he was distraught and, working that night, decided to end it all in a murder-suicide. Even the newspapers reported this story, and it stuck for decades.

Things got even more outlandish, with some rumors claiming that there had been a love triangle between this man and one of the other operators’ wives. Never mind that the wife in question was Mormon and eight months pregnant at the time, and that there is no evidence she and the operator ever even met. The rumors were much more salacious, exciting, and easy to understand, and they stuck—to the point that they are sometimes still used to explain the SL-1 accident.

But after reading about the accident, watching documentaries, looking up oral histories, I found myself agreeing with Todd Tucker’s conclusion that the operators themselves had been blameless in the accident, and that mechanical failure had been brewing for a long time. And this seemed even more poignant to me, even more the story I wanted to tell.

But because there’s no definitive answer to what happened at the SL-1, I decided to tell the story in fiction form, taking composites of various characters described in the reports I’d read, and using this story to give an overview of this segment of our culture at the sometimes surreal-feeling dawn of the atomic age.

DG: In the book, there are several memorable scenes of breakroom antics among the soldiers who work at the reactor. One of my favorites is the “Tic Tac Dough” scene in which the men play along with a popular game show. The banter between the soldiers is really wonderful. How did you go about crafting their language and the easy, authentic rapport you portray?

AW: Thank you! I really enjoyed writing scenes between soldiers. I’ve spent a lot of time around military folks by now and have enjoyed the certain shared sense of humor they often have. They spend a lot of hours together, so there’s a lot of teasing, of course; a universal love of the prank, a gallows humor that comes with the job, and a predominantly masculine energy to it all. Putting soldiers in rooms and bars and on the beach together gave me an excuse to work in historical details—music and TV shows of the time—while also just letting them talk to each other, show a little bit of who they were.

DG: There’s another scene in the book that I found very riveting. It centers around the men out for a night on the town outside of Idaho Falls. This is the Idaho Falls 1960 version of a “red light district.” The boys head out to celebrate a birthday and one of them hires a prostitute, a local Native American woman. An incredibly uncomfortable scene follows—drunken men climbing behind the wheels of cars, and, most heinously, the cruelty inflicted upon the woman. Will you speak a bit about writing this scene and its importance?

AW: This is the flip side to those nice guys joking around in the break room: no group of people can be one hundred percent clever and charming. I needed to show what might happen when the group dynamic changed, when the boss-man was present and encouraging his guys to do some unsavory things.

Military installations often generate a market for alcohol and sex, and Idaho Falls in the late fifties was no exception. Most any report written about the operators working the SL-1 mentions that at least two of them had been at some fairly wild parties, including one where they hired a local prostitute to entertain the men for two bucks apiece. I found this an interesting counterpoint to the code of chivalry the men kept in place toward their wives, who were supposed to be these domestic angels tending the home and hearth and waiting patiently for
their soldier boys to return home. Women who were not their wives, who didn’t fit this formula of extreme propriety, were seen as having signed away some of the right to manly protection that the housewives received. If you were nonwhite, or unmarried, or sexually loose—well, you didn’t have to be treated with kid gloves like these upstanding housewives were.

So Paul finds himself in a situation where a woman is being abused, but most all of the guys are going along with it, and there could be repercussions for him if he decides to be the one soft-heart who helps her out. These strict gender expectations cut both ways, and Paul is trapped by his own need to be stoic and macho and to have a good time out on the town. But the woman in question is “just” a prostitute, right?—I mean, she’s not one of their wives, because they would never treat a lady like that, for goodness’ sake. The operators’ fear of what will happen if one of their darling wives finds out allows the risky situation to carry on much longer than it should. Of course this is reprehensible, but it’s something that happens all the time.

I wanted to show how one act of bigotry taints everything around it, so when Paul gets home, Nat, who’s completely innocent in the situation, becomes the unwitting recipient of whatever disgust and self-loathing he is carrying.

DG: Jeannie Richards, the wife of Mitch Richards who is the big boss at the reactor, is a wildly enjoyable character to read about, but probably not so enjoyable for the other characters to endure within the confines of their little coffee klatch. Jeannie’s smart as a whip, and charming in her way, but also controlling and manipulative behind the perfect mask of her smile. She felt like a caged animal to me—a woman whose potential for good had been diverted and corrupted by snide neighborhood power struggles. Were you drawing on any particular example of the archetypical 1950s housewife in Jeannie’s creation?

AW: I think you are right on target in seeing Jeannie as a “caged animal.” She has that exact same snarling, frantic presence at times, especially when she is alone and can let down her façade of total control. And you’re right, she is very smart—much more streetwise than Nat—but she’s forced to channel her intelligence into social machinations and the losing campaign to promote her husband’s sluggish career.

I loved writing Jeannie’s sections because she serves as the perfect counterbalance to Nat, who is all sweetness and good intention. Sarcasm and sexuality are Jeannie’s weapons of choice, and what could be more fun than writing that? Her sections came to me so quickly and easily that I honestly can’t say where they came from; they had the most momentum of any of the parts of the novel that I wrote. I could just see her setting the table for that party or sneering at Mitch across the room or tunneling madly through his desk drawers in an effort to gather intel on what fool thing he’d been up to this time. But I will say that part of her character must have come from one of the officer’s wives whose deposition served a large part in starting the rumor mill about the operators at the SL-1, a busybody gossip who loved to tell anyone who’d listen about the huge fights one of the operators would have with his wife and how his wife probably deserved it, because her house was a mess. In the same way, Jeannie knows that undercutting other women is one of the quickest ways to get the things she wants, most of which have to come from men. The sad thing is, I think she and Nat are both trapped by their circumstances, and could probably have been friends of a sort if they had both just been honest with each other.

DG: Could you talk a bit about your research process for the Greenland section?

AW: I read a ton of oral histories, many of them found on a terrific web site called thuleforum.com, moderated by the generous Steffen Winther. The experience of being at Camp Century and its support camps, TUTO and Thule, was such a unique and specific one that men seem to have sought one another out in subsequent years to share their memories.
I sat and read scores of these personal stories and at times just laughed out loud, and at other times felt great sympathy for men serving at a base that was so isolated and remote that no one was allowed to serve more than six months there at a time because it was considered a psychological hazard. Sometimes, men would hallucinate; I remember reading reports that certain soldiers were convinced they had seen grazing cows and “medium-sized Midwestern cities” out on the polar ice cap. This was all before e-mail and Skype and whatnot, and these men must have felt very, very far away from not only their families but the rest of the human world.

DG: I have to bring up the cars. This book is full of fabulous vintage automobiles. Are you a car aficionado or did this come with the territory of writing about the late 1950s? Sometimes I felt as if you had a job similar to the producers of Mad Men, in your conjuring of a period piece, and to me the cars are at the very center of it all. But they’re more than just set decoration. Will you speak to how you so skillfully wove these powerful autos into the plot?

AW: The design styles of the 1950s are so instantly recognizable, so timeless and stylized. It’s an aesthetic I find immensely appealing, from home décor to clothing typefaces to, yes, the cars of the day. Is there anything so striking as a big, shiny, sharp-finned Cadillac from the 1950s? I don’t think so.

In a more serious vein, cars played an important psychological role during the fifties, a boom time in which more families than ever could afford their own automobiles. The interstate highway system was built in large part during this decade, starting in 1956. Vehicular mobility came hand-in-hand with upward mobility. A car was a symbol that you were not just going somewhere, but going somewhere.

For Paul, just owning a modest car is a huge achievement; he grew up so poor that he had to steal his brother’s shoes when he left home. So he feels good that he’s provided a car for his family. But then his new boss, Mitch, has this gorgeous Coupe deVille that he throws in Paul’s face any chance he gets. (Paul thinks he’s a success? Bah!)

For the women in the novel, particularly Nat, cars symbolize a freedom that is otherwise unavailable to them. Nat is a military wife who must stay put while her husband traverses the globe, so just being able to drive away from her house for an hour or two is immensely liberating. She and Paul have a notable argument over who gets to drive their family car, and it’s when this car is wrecked that an opening is created for Esrom to slide into the family dynamic. Later, when Paul learns that Nat has been driving Esrom’s car, it’s tantamount to hearing that she’s slept with him. He is horrified and betrayed.

DG: You very deftly highlight for the reader the significance of Idaho Falls in American culture. Of course there is the reactor meltdown, but there are many aspects of the town that I think are notable: the Native American history, the history of the Mormons, the town’s role as a bridge between the West and Midwest. Once you finished the book, did you feel like you were leaving Idaho Falls too?

AW: I’ve always thought Idaho is beautiful, although most time I’ve spent there was on a road trip in 1999 when I was twenty, and I’m not sure Idaho loved me back: my then-boyfriend (now my husband) and I were sleeping in the back of a Volvo station wagon in Pocatello and a young police officer, probably our exact age, woke us up, gave us a very disapproving look and told us we needed to move on. But on that trip we drove all through the western states, including Idaho, and my love affair with the landscape and history of the American West deepened.

The West has a severe natural beauty that has always struck me more strongly than any other landscape. It’s got a fascinatingly layered history, too. By the time Paul arrives to work at the National Reactor Testing Station, it’s already been Blackfoot Indian land; a Mormon settlement; the Minidoka Internment Camp for Japanese-Americans during WWII; a military proving ground; and as of his arrival is the development site for all the
major nuclear projects in the United States. If that doesn’t encapsulate the layered strata of history in the West—the land grabs, the power struggles, the manifest destiny and xenophobia and loss and ambition—I don’t know what does.

**DG:** Finally, please talk a bit about your writing process, and how you are connected to the writing community of military spouses?

**AW:** I have three young children, so I write fiction very early in the morning, usually about 4 a.m. to 6:15 or whenever my littlest, who is three-years-old, wakes up. Any mom knows it’s nearly impossible to write with a three-year-old in the house, so once she’s up my writing day is pretty much over.

In the evening, I try to spend a couple of nights a week working on other types of writing, and during that time I keep up my blog, the Military Spouse Book Review. I started the book review almost two years ago, before my own novel had sold; I was nervous that it might not sell, and so I tried to bolster myself with a backup plan that would keep me connected to the writing community and also support military spouses and women veterans, to whom I feel particularly loyal. Coming out of the cocoon of having had three kids in six years (a time in which my reading pace slowed to an embarrassing near-crawl), and with my husband about to go on a relatively short (but still, for me, daunting) six-month deployment, I was learning about all of these military women who wrote, despite the unpredictability and disruptiveness of military life. I wanted to share my response to their work and I wanted to promote their writing.

The Military Spouse Book Review publishes book reviews and essays by women connected to the military, and promotes and catalogues the writing of military spouses and female veterans. It’s a labor of love for me, but has given back tenfold in allowing me to get to know more about these amazing women who write, many of whom have become friends. All women connected to the military are welcome to contribute, and I hope to see the book review continue to grow and support them.
“MAYBE” by The Chantels
I listened to this song, by the all-girl group The Chantels, on repeat when writing Nat’s sections of the novel. “Maybe,” to me, is Nat. She would have listened to it—maybe while cooking dinner, with the girls underfoot; it would have made her think of Paul, off in Greenland, and maybe Esrom too.

“When I come home, will you be waiting?”

“WHEN I COME HOME” by the Del Vikings

“ONLY THE LONELY” by Roy Orbison

“EVERYBODY’S SOMEBODY’S FOOL” by Connie Francis

“SWEET TEMPTATION” by June Carter
Early in the novel, Brownie Franks compares Nat to June Carter. I always pictured Nat as being a bit like the young June: open, friendly, sweet, gangly, a tiny bit awkward, but magnetic nonetheless.
Discussion Questions

1. In an early scene, Paul and his family stop by a lake for a swim on their move to Idaho. Nat wants to go cliff-jumping, but it’s obvious that Paul would rather she stay on the beach. Why doesn’t Paul want her to join the group of young people on the cliff? Why do you think Nat disregards his fear even when she knows it bothers him?

2. After Paul and his boss, Mitch Richards’s, first meeting, Mitch drives off and leaves Paul stranded at work. Do you think this was a mere oversight, or was it intentional? Was Paul right to be so angry?

3. Paul is often worried about Nat and his daughters. Do you think his fears are justified?

4. When Nat first meets Jeannie at the dinner party, she’s alternately impressed and frightened by her. In what ways does Nat attempt to be the proper 1950s military wife, like Jeannie, and where does she reject this? Do you think she wishes she could be a “better” wife?

5. Mitch’s cream-colored Cadillac plays a large role in the novel. What do you think the car represents for Mitch, for Jeannie, and for Paul? Did you find its end fitting?

6. Paul, Jeannie, Nat, and Esrom all struggle with loneliness in various ways. Which character do you think does the best job overcoming their loneliness?

7. Were you surprised to learn of any of the historically-based details in the novel, such as the National Reactor Testing Station or the Army base below the ice in Greenland? Had you heard of any of these things before, and what conceptions of them did you have coming into the novel? If you did, did knowing that the story was based in part on a real event make it more interesting to you, or less?

8. Should Nat have refused the car from Esrom? Was it alright for her to accept it?

9. Nat’s friend, Patrice, is angry with Nat when she learns of her friendship with Esrom. Do you think Patrice overreacted, or was her frustration with Nat justified? Does her role as a fellow military wife give her particular insight into Nat’s behavior, and if so, why don’t you think she was more sympathetic?

10. Patrice’s anger serves as a wake-up call for Nat. Was Nat naïve in hoping that she could keep her relationship with Esrom a secret from her friend, her neighbors, and most importantly from Paul? Do you think either Nat or Esrom were innocent in the situation? If not, is one of them more to blame than the other?

11. What do you think happens to Paul in the years following the close of the novel? Do you see him living a long and happy life, or does his involvement with the reactor accident catch up with him? If so, what do you see happening to Nat? To Jeannie? To Esrom?