



AFTER ANNIE

ANNA QUINDLEN

BOOK CLUB KIT

AUTHOR LETTER

Dear Reader,

Non-spoiler alert: the most vivid, memorable, alive character in *After Annie* dies in the first sentence. You all know her, Annie Brown, the kind of woman who is the linchpin of the lives of so many people, the hub of a wheel that, without her, is just so many disconnected sticks. Meet her husband, Bill, who discovers that the life they share has been entirely engineered by his wife. Her best friend, Annemarie, who doesn't know how she will keep herself together and away from very bad habits without that mouthy little girl she met in first grade. Annie's daughter, Ali, who realizes that, absent the umbrella of mother love, she will need to grow up at only age 14, care for her three younger brothers, and puzzle out many of the mysteries and malfeasance of the adult world.

And in all their minds and hearts is Annie, who is loving but not sentimental, caring but nobody's fool, who is funny and sharp and unforgettable, which is what saves them all. The people in her orbit would be lost without their memories of her, and the lessons she has taught them by example about how to be happy. Bill relives their early years together, Annemarie the unrelenting ways in which her friend forced her to be strong, Ali the nights her mother made her stand in the silver light of the backyard and look up at the moon. In the year between the moment when Annie falls to the floor in her too-small kitchen, the meatloaf already on the table, and the morning when those she loved gather to leave keepsakes at the foot of her gravestone, they all learn to move forward together. "*You will prevail,*" a wise woman tells Bill. "*You have no choice.*"

This is a novel about prevailing, about the power of love to make us resilient, strong, the very best version of ourselves. And from its opening sentence it is about one of the most important truths we ever unearth: **No one beloved is ever truly gone.**

Annie lives. Trust me, she does, and you will love her as they do.

Anna Quindlen

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Annie, like all people, has many different selves: Everyone in her life knows one aspect of her extremely well, but only by looking at all of those parts together can we truly see the whole. Discuss the different, similar, and occasionally opposing views the people in Annie's life have of her. Who was she *truly*?
2. "I didn't lose my mother," Ali says. "I hate it that people say that. I didn't lose her, and she's not gone, and she didn't pass away. She's dead." Discuss the language and euphemisms we use to talk about death. Do you prefer to use "softer" language like "lost" and "passed away," or more straightforward words like "died"? Why do you think this is?
3. With which character do you feel you have the most in common? The least? Discuss.
4. Why do you think that the people in our lives sometimes loom larger after death?
5. When we lose someone we love, part of ourselves, part of our history, seems to die with them. Has this ever happened to you? What was it like? How does this happen to each character in *After Annie*?
6. "They were all floating in some in-between, where nothing seemed real and nothing seemed right," Quindlen writes. Have you had this experience with grief? What did it feel like for you? Do you remember when life started to feel real again?
7. Which scene in the novel moved you the most?
8. What do you think happens to the characters after the book ends? In 5 years? 20?
9. Have you read other novels by Anna Quindlen? What consistent themes do you notice throughout her work?

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