

BOOK CLUB To Go!

Rise and Shine

By Anna Quindlen

Introduction

It's an otherwise ordinary Monday when Meghan Fitzmaurice's perfect life hits a wall. A household name as the host of Rise and Shine, the country's highest-rated morning talk show, Meghan cuts to a commercial break—but not before she mutters two forbidden words into her open mike.

In an instant, it's the end of an era, not only for Meghan, who is unaccustomed to dealing with adversity, but also for her younger sister, Bridget, a social worker in the Bronx who has always lived in Meghan's long shadow. The effect of Meghan's on-air truth telling reverberates through both their lives, affecting Meghan's son, husband, friends, and fans, as well as Bridget's perception of her sister, their complex childhood, and herself. What follows is a story about how, in very different ways, the Fitzmaurice women adapt, survive, and manage to bring the whole teeming world of New York to heel by dint of their smart mouths, quick wits, and the powerful connection between them that even the worst tragedy cannot shatter.

(randomhouse.com)

About the Author

Anna Quindlen could have settled onto a nice, lofty career plateau in the early 1990s, when she had won a Pulitzer Prize for her New York Times column; but she took an unconventional turn, and achieved a richer result.

Quindlen, the third woman to hold a place among the Times' Op-Ed columnists, had already published two successful collections of her work when she decided to leave the paper in 1995. But it was the two novels she had produced that led her to seek a future beyond her column.

Quindlen had a warm, if not entirely uncritical, reception as a novelist. Her first book, *Object Lessons*, focused on an Irish American family in suburban New York in the 1960s. It was a bestseller and a Times Notable Book of 1991, but was also criticized for not being as engaging as it could have been. *One True Thing*, Quindlen's exploration of an ambitious daughter's journey home to take care of her terminally ill mother, was stronger still—a heartbreaker that was made into a movie starring Meryl Streep. But Quindlen's fiction clearly benefited from her decision to leave the Times. Three years after that controversial departure, she earned her best reviews yet with *Black and Blue*, a chronicle of escape from domestic abuse.

Quindlen's novels are thoughtful explorations centering on women who may not start out strong, but who ultimately find some core within themselves as a result of what happens in the story. Her nonfiction meditations -- particularly *A Short Guide to a Happy Life* and her collection of "Life in the 30s" columns, *Living Out Loud* -- often encourage this same transition, urging others to look within themselves and not get caught up in what society would plan for them. It's an approach Quindlen herself has obviously had success with.

(litlovers.com)

Reviews

“New friends await readers in Anna Quindlen’s latest work of fiction, characters you will delight in getting to know and miss once you’ve finished the book... [*Rise and Shine* is] well worth reading.” –*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

“An engrossing exploration of fame, shame [and] sisterhood...Witnessing how [the protagonists] handle their personal trials and power shifts is the real reward for readers of *Rise and Shine*.” –*The Hartford Courant*

“Quindlen pens a lavishly perceptive homage to the city she loves, while her transcendently agile and emphatic observations of the human condition underline the Fitzmaurice sisters’ discovery of the transience of fame and the permanence of family.” –*Booklist*

(*randomhouse.com*)

Further Reading

Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant by Anne Tyler

We Are All Welcome Here by Elizabeth Berg

Ordinary Love and Good Will by Jane Smiley

My Sister’s Keeper by Jodi Picoult

The Longings of Women by Piercy, Marge

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Possible Discussion Questions

1. *Rise and Shine* centers on the unique bond of sisterhood—potentially one of the most supportive, competitive, and difficult relationships in life. Describe Bridget and Meghan’s relationship and how each woman views her sister, and herself. What roles do they each play? Does this portrait of sisterhood reflect your own relationship with a sibling, or perhaps with a close friend? Do you identify with one of the Fitzmaurice sisters more than the other?
2. Meghan’s audacious on-air slip, and its repercussions, incites the novel’s forward action. How would you judge the seasoned anchorwoman’s mistake? Was she wrong to let her personal opinion and emotions show? Do you believe that the network’s reaction was justified? Finally, what was the public’s response to Meghan’s fall from grace?
3. Describe Anna Quindlen’s portrait of New York City. Is the Big Apple “unequivocally the center of the universe,” as some New Yorkers believe? Compare Bridget and Tequila’s experiences at the shelter with Meghan’s worldview from the Upper East Side. How does Quindlen attempt to capture all sides of the city?
4. Describe Meghan and Bridget’s conflicting perceptions and memories of their mother. How does the loss of their mother shape the Fitzgerald sisters’ lives and ways of relating to each other? What role does Aunt Maureen play?
5. Is Evan justified in leaving Meghan, or do you agree with Bridget, that there must have been another woman in the picture right from the start? What factors led to the failure of their relationship? How does Bridget deal with the breakup? Meghan?
6. Meghan retreats to Jamaica to escape the turmoil in her life and, in doing so, detaches from her old persona and responsibilities. What did you think of this episode? Was Meghan being selfish by isolating herself? How did it affect Leo? Bridget? Or was this period in Meghan’s life necessary and inevitable? Finally, discuss the outcome of the trip. Does Meghan sustain this growth of character when she reenters the real world? How about Bridget?

7. What attracts Bridget to Irving Lefkowitz? Describe Irving's attitude toward children and his reaction to Bridget's unexpected news. Will this relationship work for Bridget? Why or why not?
8. Bridget's daily experience in New York City is marked by relationships with "familiar strangers." What does she mean by this? Are there "familiar strangers" in your own life?
9. Discuss Meghan's role in apprehending the shooter in the Tubman projects; was her involvement self-serving, or was she defending her son and the safety of others? What were her true motivations, and how were her actions perceived? Do you agree with Meghan's decision to take matters into her own hands?
10. Quindlen writes in the first person, from Bridget's perspective. What effect does this narrative viewpoint have on the story? How would the book be different if it were told from Meghan's point of view?
11. In the last few pages of the novel, Quindlen writes, "Does someone have to break so someone else can be whole?" (p. 268). Who in *Rise and Shine* breaks, and who has been made whole? Is there more than one way to think about this question?
12. The dust jacket for *Rise and Shine* shows a beautiful butterfly, a symbol of metamorphosis. How does the concept of change apply to the characters in the novel? Consider, especially, Meghan and Bridget, Evan, Leo, Irving, Tequila, and Princess Margaret. Have you undergone similar changes in your own life? Finally, how did your opinion of the Fitzmaurice sisters, and your assessment of their relative strengths and weaknesses, evolve over the course of the novel?

(randomhouse.com)