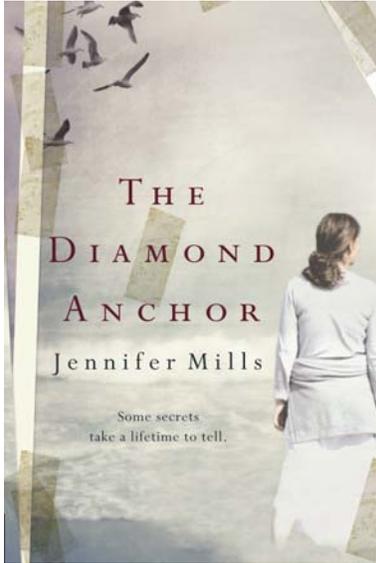


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BOOK CLUB NOTES

THE DIAMOND ANCHOR

JENNIFER MILLS



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The Diamond Anchor is a story of friendship, history, and the events that shape the lives of May McCabe and Grace Harper. As childhood friends, May and Grace are inseparable. However, a series of events drive their lives apart and for over fifty years the two women have little contact. A letter from Grace forces May to confront her past and explore the stories of her childhood, her relationship with Grace, and question whether her memories are an accurate recollection of the past. A story of intense friendship, hurt, love, and innocence, *The Diamond Anchor* also examines the notion of place, family, and ultimately, of what it means to be home.

1. “It is normal to love your friends...” (p.173)

The Diamond Anchor examines the friendship of May and Grace over a lifetime. How would you describe the friendship between May and Grace? Has their friendship been created in May’s memories? What influence does their friendship have on May’s sexual maturity?

2. What is the dynamic of the friendship between May and Clare? How does this add to the unfolding of the story of May and Grace?
3. Discuss the relationship May has with her mother, as the only girl in a family of three boys, and how you feel this shapes her future relationship with Grace, and May’s own children.
4. By the end of *The Diamond Anchor*, has May made her peace with Grace? Do you think that Grace will return to Coal?
5. Clare does a painting, which she then gives to May, prompting May’s powerful reaction. “It’s an impossible painting. She has stuck her hand down my throat and given the story chase, dredged you into being” (pp.307). What is the significance of this painting?

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6. *“There was too much in my husband’s silences, his pride shielding a hurt I didn’t know was there. Here I am wanting to keep some things to myself but they insist on seeping out of me like tears. Maybe we don’t say enough to each other because we are frightened of being left. And then we are left because we haven’t spoken.”* (p.280-281)

How would you describe the relationship May has with Ted?

7. Why has *The Diamond Anchor* been chosen as the title for this book? What is the significance of The Danker to the McCabe family, May and the town of Coal?
8. *“In any story, the parts you leave out are just as important as what you tell”* (pp.298-299).

May is the master of story-telling. “Tell me a story”, Grace would say. “True, or false?” May would ask. How does May’s story-telling shape the overall structure of *The Diamond Anchor*?

9. *“I’ve settled myself with the opinion that life is hard enough and a few comfortable delusions make it easier to build memories that cannot be violated”*. (p.282)

The letter, as a form of structure (the epistolary novel), has been used in other works, for example *The Colour Purple* by Alice Walker and *We Need to Talk About Kevin* by Lionel Shriver. May writes that she is penning *“the only story I know. It’s the one you starred in, the one where I learn to breathe”* (p.13). Do you think the letter is an effective method for telling a story? Is a memory over 50 years old reliable?

10. May has no desire to leave Coal because of her connections to the place. Grace leaves Coal the first chance she gets. Discuss the influence that the respective families of May and Grace have on the girls’ choices to stay or leave Coal. Discuss the importance of “place” and “home”.
11. *“You were right, it was time for me to face the real world. We had belonged together only in my imagination, if at all”*. (p.240)

May’s story-telling is the centre-piece of the book. Discuss the effect this has on Grace—is it prophetic? Does the audience ultimately question the extent of truth in the story? Discuss whether May’s story-telling was “responsible” for Grace leaving Coal.

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