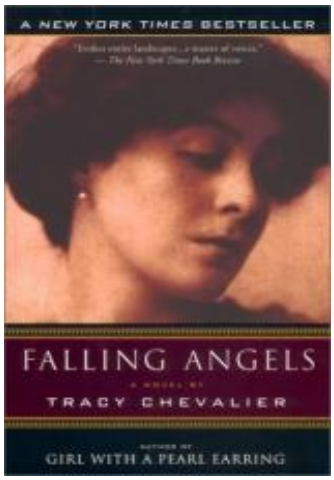
# Falling Angels

by Tracy Chevalier




## About the Book

**Falling Angels** chronicles the lives of two girls whose families own adjacent plots in a London cemetery?one decorated with a sentimental angel, the other with an elaborate urn. During a ceremonial stroll through the graveyard grounds, an act of mourning for the recently deceased Queen Victoria, Maude Coleman and Lavinia Waterhouse meet, forging a fast friendship.

Despite their distinct personality differences, Maude being more precocious and contemplative and Lavinia leaning to the impulsive and dramatic, the girls are instantly drawn to each other to the dismay of their mothers. Despite being neighbors, Kitty Coleman and Gertrude Waterhouse occupy different positions in the British class system?the Waterhouses are lower-middle class, while the Colemans are upper-middle class, with a larger house and garden, and live-in servants. The women have little in common, and their views on the changing political climate fall on opposite ends of the spectrum. Kitty looks forward to a more modern society, while the Gertrude reveres the late Queen Victoria and clings to Victorian traditions.

The death of Queen Victoria marked the end of an era. Britain emerged from the shadows of oppressive Victorian values to a more liberal Edwardian lifestyle. With these relaxed social standards came other advances?one of which was the growing interest in the women's suffragist movement, a topic that divides Kitty and Gertrude, as it did many women of the era. As with most periods of political turmoil, the fight for the right of women to vote had its own victim of change, as felt by both families.

A poignant tale of two families brought reluctantly together, **Falling Angels** is an intimate story of childhood friendships, sexual awakening and human frailty. Yet its epic sweep takes in the changing of a nation, the fight for women's suffrage and the questioning of steadfast beliefs.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** Chevalier alternates the narrative point of view to reveal the layered complexities of characters, events, and issues. Which character's perspectives were the most revealing? Which characters do you relate to the most? How does having so many characters affect how you perceive the story?

**2.** The turn of the century found England in a state of transition. How did the death of Queen Victoria signify a new era, a more modern climate? How do the conflicting opinions on death and mourning define the characters? In what ways do these differing attitudes indicate the social changes to come?

**3.** When the Waterhouses and Colemans first meet in the cemetery, what do the characters' first impressions of each other?and of the other family's grave ornament?expose about themselves?

**4.** How do the issues the female characters face differ with those women are facing now, a century later? What obstacles still exist? How might this story differ if it were set now?

**5.** While the entries from the male characters are concise and limited in number, these narratives reveal a good deal about their impressions of their wives, their neighbors, and other individuals and events. Discuss the various excerpts "penned" by Albert Waterhouse, Richard Coleman, and Simon Field. Which of these characters relates best to his female counterparts? Do they all view women in a similar way?

**6.** The peripheral characters of Jenny Whitby, Simon Field, and Dorothy Baker play key roles in several events. How do these individuals affect the lives of the Colemans and the Waterhouses?

**7.** The cemetery is a curious place to set a novel. On the one hand, it mirrors the outside world, with rigid rules of conduct that mourners are expected to follow. On the other hand, both children and adults experience a degree of freedom there. How does the making and breaking of rules there reflect on and affect the characters?

**8.** Lavinia, Simon, and Maude appear to represent the past, present, and future respectively. Does this change at all throughout the novel? Do they learn from each other?

**9.** What is Ivy May Waterhouse's role in the book? Why does she meet such a fate?

**10.** They say and Englishman's home is his castle. How do Kitty's and Gertrude's houses reflect their characters and class differences?

**11.** Does this book have a heroine? If so, who is it?

**12.** None of the characters is perfect?all have their flaws and irritations. Does this help or hinder the narrative?

## Author Bio

Tracy Chevalier is the *New York Times* bestselling author of such novels as GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING, which

has been translated into 45 languages and made into an Oscar-nominated film, a play and an opera. Born and raised in Washington, DC, she lives in London with her husband.

## Critical Praise

"A highly accomplished work that brings to life a time of radically shifting social, sexual, and political paradigms."

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