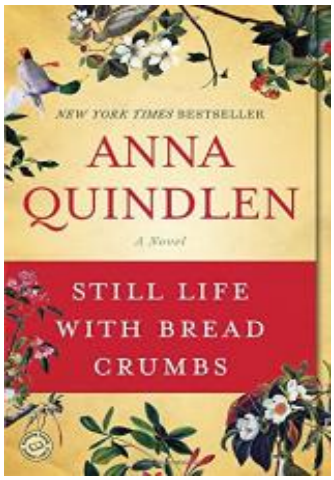
Still Life with Bread Crumbs

by Anna Quindlen



About the Book

STILL LIFE WITH BREAD CRUMBS begins with an imagined gunshot and ends with a new tin roof. Between the two is a wry and knowing portrait of Rebecca Winter, a photographer whose work made her an unlikely heroine for many women. Her career is now descendent, her bank balance shaky, and she has fled the city for the middle of nowhere. There she discovers, in a tree stand with a roofer named Jim Bates, that what she sees through a camera lens is not all there is to life.

Brilliantly written, powerfully observed, STILL LIFE WITH BREAD CRUMBS is a deeply moving and often very funny story of unexpected love, and a stunningly crafted journey into the life of a woman, her heart, her mind, her days, as she discovers that life is a story with many levels, a story that is longer and more exciting than she ever imagined.

Discussion Guide

1. What part of Rebecca Winter?s life do you relate to the most? How did the way Rebecca handled her hardships compare to decisions you?ve made in your own life?

2. One of the themes of STILL LIFE WITH BREAD CRUMBS is discovering how to age gracefully. What has been one of your biggest struggles when entering a different stage of life? What is something you?ve enjoyed?

3. Rebecca finds herself living far outside the comfort zone of her former New York City life. What do you think is the most difficult part of moving somewhere new? Have you ever been in a similar situation? How did you handle it?

4. At one point in the book, Jim says that he believes that people live in houses that look like them. How does your own house or apartment reflect your personality?

5. ?Language had always failed her when it came to describing her photographs?There was nothing she could say about the cross photographs that could come close to actually seeing them.? Rebecca realizes this after speaking at the Women?s Art League event. Do you ever find it difficult to describe the effect that art --- photographs, paintings, writing --- has had on you? What might that say about the power of artwork?

6. Throughout the book, Sarah is often the perfect antidote for Rebecca?s unhappiness. Do you have a person like this in your life? Think about one of the times that you were most grateful for him or her.

7. One of the turning points for Rebecca is when Ben tells her, ?You will always be Rebecca Winter.? How has Rebecca?s personal identity become entangled with her identity as an iconic artist? What helps her to ground herself?

8. The dog gradually becomes a bigger part of Rebecca?s life as she moves further away from her past self --- the ?not a dog person? city girl. The dog pictures are even the catalyst for Rebecca?s break with TG. What do you think the presence of the dog means in Rebecca?s life, especially after she discovers his name is Jack? How might the constant company of an animal have a different effect from that of the company of people?

9. When Rebecca finally learns the meaning of the crosses, she wonders if the great artists had ever considered ?the terrible eternity of immortality? for their subjects. We live in a culture of camera phones and constant photography. Was there ever a moment when you were particularly grateful to have a certain photograph? Do you ever wish that our lives were less documented?

10. O. Henry?s short story and the story of Rebecca?s mother?s Mary Cassatt both have a bittersweet quality to them. Think about a moment in your life that might have been upsetting or sad. Was there someone who helped you see beauty or happiness in that moment instead?

Author Bio

Anna Quindlen is a novelist and journalist whose work has appeared on fiction, nonfiction and self-help bestseller lists. She is the author of many novels: OBJECT LESSONS, ONE TRUE THING, BLACK AND BLUE, BLESSINGS, RISE AND SHINE, EVERY LAST ONE, STILL LIFE WITH BREAD CRUMBS and MILLER'S VALLEY. Her memoir LOTS OF CANDLES, PLENTY OF CAKE, published in 2012, was a #1 *New York Times* bestseller. Her book A SHORT GUIDE TO A HAPPY LIFE has sold more than a million copies. While a columnist at *The New York Times*, she won the Pulitzer Prize and published two collections: LIVING OUT LOUD and THINKING OUT LOUD. Her *Newsweek* columns were collected in LOUD AND CLEAR.

Critical Praise

"There comes a moment in every novelist?s career when she?ventures into new territory, breaking free into a marriage of tone and style, of plot and characterization, that?s utterly her own. Anna Quindlen?s marvelous romantic comedy of manners is just such a book?Taken as a whole, Quindlen?s writings represent a generous and moving interrogation of women?s experience across the lines of class and race. [STILL LIFE WITH BREAD CRUMBS] proves all the more

moving because of its light, sophisticated humor. Quindlen?s least overtly political novel, it packs perhaps the most serious punch?Quindlen has delivered a novel that will have staying power all its own.?

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