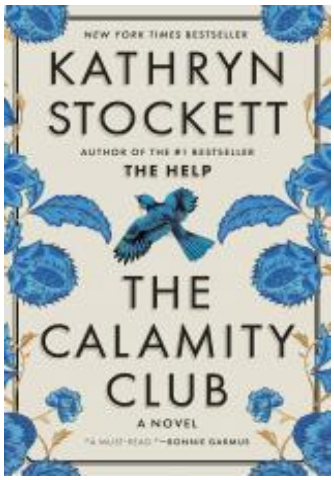
The Calamity Club

by Kathryn Stockett



About the Book

The multimillion-copy-selling author of THE HELP returns with a bold, bighearted novel about a group of unbreakable women fighting for what?s rightfully theirs --- and the power of friendship to change everything.

Oxford, Mississippi, 1933.

Abandoned by her mother one Christmas Eve, 11-year-old Meg Lefleur has learned the hard way to rely on no one. Now one of the unadoptable "big girls" at the Lafayette County Orphan Asylum, she fights each day to keep her spirit unbowed.

Birdie Calhoun, unmarried and outspoken, has come to Oxford to ask her socialite sister to help the struggling family she's left behind. But as the Depression tightens its grip, Birdie discovers that her sister's seemingly charmed life is a tapestry of lies.

Then Birdie encounters Charlie, a woman running low on luck with little left to lose. When their fates --- and Meg's --- converge, Charlie comes up with an audacious plan to claim what's rightfully theirs. But in a place and time where hypocrisy is rife and women's freedom is fragile, even the smallest act of defiance can have dangerous consequences.

THE CALAMITY CLUB will make you laugh, cry and cheer --- an epic testament to underestimated women who know that calamity can be the spark of new beginnings. This is Kathryn Stockett at her most confident, heartfelt and hilarious --- the triumphant return of one of the most beloved storytellers of our time.

Discussion Guide

1. Circumstances bring together Meg and Birdie, an orphaned child in Oxford and an unmarried woman from the Delta

whose paths would likely not have crossed otherwise, and yet they very quickly find kinship. What is the basis of Meg and Birdie?s friendship? What is it about Meg that moves Birdie to care about her, and what is it about Birdie that allows the normally wary Meg to trust her?

2. ?My mama left me on purpose and mamas do not come back.? Ava, Meg?s friend at the orphanage, makes Meg repeat these lines until she lets go of the fantasy that her mother will return for her one day. Accepting her desperate situation becomes a tool of survival for Ava, but Meg continues to hold out hope that her mama will find her. What allows Meg to keep her spirit unbowed, despite receiving no sign from her mother and despite Garnett?s cruelty and Meg?s isolation from the other girls?

3. Consider the theme of hope in the novel. Meg recalls lines from Emily Dickinson: ?Hope is the thing with feathers / That perches in the soul, / And sings the tune without the words.? Despite the devastating things that have upended her life, Charlie summons the courage to fight for what?s rightfully hers, while Mrs. Tartt says, ?I?ll never stop hoping for the best,? even as her world teeters on the brink. Picador never gives up hope that, despite his flaws, Rory is a man of character, and Birdie dares to dream of a life beyond the expectations people have for her. Which characters in the novel most fiercely cling to hope? Where does hope give way to delusion? In what instances does hope prevail, against all odds?

4. Even though Charlie is a virtual stranger to her when she pleads for help, Birdie vouches for her, persuading Mrs. Tartt to allow her to stay in her home, though Birdie herself is unsure if Charlie is being honest with her or if she?s a grifter. What do you think motivates Birdie to show her compassion? Do you think Frances is right to accuse Birdie of having a ?bleeding heart?? Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation, where you put yourself at risk for someone you barely knew? Are there other instances in the novel where someone takes a risk, acting from the heart instead of the head?

5. Kathryn Stockett has said that she was drawn to the word ?calamity? because it has echoes of Mark Twain in it. ?The calamity that comes is never the one we had prepared ourselves for,? Twain once wrote. How would you relate that statement to the world of THE CALAMITY CLUB --- and why do you think it?s a fitting title for the novel?

6. In the Author?s Note, Stockett explains, ?As a writer, and as a human being, I believe it?s my duty to imagine what it feels like to stand in another person?s shoes.? Do you think that act of empathy is incumbent on a reader of fiction too? Did the novel have that effect on you? To which characters did you most closely relate? For whom did you feel empathy? Did your feelings about any characters change over the course of the novel?

7. Who would you say is the hero of the novel? Among the novel?s more difficult characters, are there some for whom you feel compassion? Are there characters who earn redemption?

8. A hallmark of Stockett?s work is her humor. The shocking hilarity of the ?chocolate pie? in THE HELP is a memorable example of how she uses comedy almost as a weapon against some of her more unlikable characters. Were there comedic moments in THE CALAMITY CLUB that had a similar effect? Do you feel that the comedy creates tension or brings relief to the more tragic and dramatic elements of the novel, or does it work against them?

9. Stockett has said that it?s impossible to write a novel about Mississippi in the 1930s and not have it be about race. Indeed, the Oxford she depicts is strictly codified by race, religion, wealth and social class. Think of Birdie?s description

of walking through Freedmen Town and visiting the Black grocer, the growing line of men on the square waiting for work, the (mostly) privileged Ole Miss boys returning to campus, Frances? striving to enter the ranks of Oxford high society, and the circumstances of Charlie?s arrest. Discuss the ways in which social and religious hierarchies, racism, sexism and privilege animate the novel. Are any characters able to transcend the bounds of these strictures?

10. Stockett has said that she likes to write about ?the underestimated woman,? the woman society has overlooked or counted out, the woman who bears the burden of low expectations. ?Keep your eye on her,? Stockett says. ?She?s the one to watch.? Who in the novel epitomizes Stockett?s underestimated woman? Who comes to mind in your own life as an inspirational woman who succeeded beyond all expectations?

11. The story takes place over just a few months, from July to October 1933. The Great Depression, which hit Mississippi so hard, will continue for another six years, until 1939. What do you imagine happens to the characters after the novel ends? Do you think their experience in Oxford has changed them and changed their view of what may be possible in their lives, or are the social and economic forces against them too great for any individual to overcome?

Author Bio

Kathryn Stockett was born and raised in Jackson, Mississippi. After graduating from the University of Alabama, she moved to New York City, where she worked in magazine publishing and marketing for nine years. Her first novel, THE HELP, has sold over 15 million copies worldwide.

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