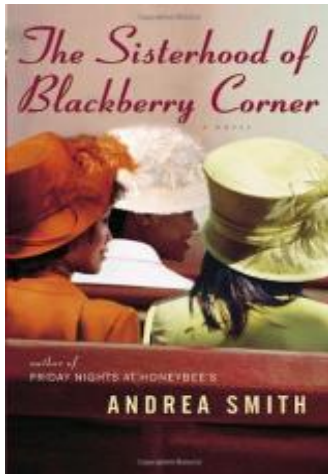


The Sisterhood of Blackberry Corner

by Andrea Smith



About the Book

Canaan Creek, South Carolina, in the 1950s is a tiny town where the close-knit African-American community is united by long-term friendships and church ties. Bonnie Wilder has lived here, on Blackberry Corner, all her life, and would be content but for her deep desire to have a child. She and her husband Naz cannot conceive, and he refuses to adopt. Even the support of her outrageous best friend Thora—to whom Bonnie tells everything—can't help fill the emptiness inside her.

Then Naz finds a blanketed infant on the banks of Canaan Creek, and suddenly Bonnie's life is transformed. She has found her calling. Together with Thora and the rest of the hilarious, tough, and all-too-human women from her church group, Bonnie creates an underground railroad for unwanted babies. But one of these precious gifts will come back to haunt her: a deception begun in good faith comes full circle, ultimately forcing Bonnie to find the courage to confront a difficult truth at the center of her own life.

Filled with compassion, humor, and tenacity in the face of almost insurmountable odds, here is a rich, inspiring tale of friendship and family, sisterhood and mother love—and of finding grace where you least expect it.

Discussion Guide

1. The Sisterhood of Blackberry Corner opens with Bonnie's receipt of a letter from Augusta Randall. What did you discover about Bonnie's community in these opening scenes? What differences seem to exist between Bonnie's world and Augusta's?

2. What makes the "Three Sisters" (comprising Pertwell, Manstone, and Canaan Creek) a special place? What changes does it experience between the 1950s and the 1980s? Are communities such as Bonnie's becoming a thing of the past?
3. In Chapter Three, Bonnie encounters an impoverished young woman whose children try her patience. The scene ends with Bonnie wondering, "Who gets what and why?" How would you respond to her question?
4. When the deceased child is discovered early in the novel, how do the primary characters react? What are the various methods used to try to solve the mystery of the child's death? How is justice served?
5. What attracts Bonnie to Naz? How does their relationship compare to other marriages in Canaan Creek (and elsewhere in America, for that matter) during the 1950s?
6. Discuss the various ways of parenting explored in the novel, from Ruby-Pearl to Naz's experience in foster care. What is the local children's home able to provide? What are its shortcomings?
7. What would you have thought about the work of the Sisterhood of Blackberry Corner if you had lived in Bonnie's community? Would you have supported her?
8. Were you surprised to discover the truth about Naz and Lucinda? In hindsight, what were the warning signs?
9. In your opinion, was anyone really responsible for Natalie's death?
10. At the end of Chapter Eight, Bonnie and her friends settle on a name for their operation. Why is it important for them to call it a sisterhood? Why are the other names rejected? Who forms the "sisterhood" in your life's work?
11. Discuss the adoption questions raised by the novel. In your opinion, what are the main reasons a parent would release a child to the care of others? Do our current foster care and adoption systems need reform? If so, what could Bonnie's experience teach those who have the power to make such reforms?
12. Noah comes to Bonnie in Chapter Sixteen. In what ways do they complete each other? Would she have faced similar adoption challenges today?
13. What does **The Sisterhood of Blackberry Corner** say about the nature of parenting and the making of a family? What does it take to make a home for a child? What are the qualities of a good parent?
14. Do you believe the reason Thora offers for giving Tally such a difficult time? What life experiences do she and Tally share? Why is he more eager to try to date again?
15. Discuss Bonnie's reunion with Augusta. What does her story indicate about nature versus nurture in predicting the outcome for a child? Why was Bonnie so hesitant to tell Augusta the truth?
16. What transformations in this novel are reflected in Smith's previous book, *Friday Nights at Honeybee's*? What does she show us about human nature and friendship in both books?

Author Bio

ANDREA SMITH has received fellowships from the Frederick Douglass Creative Arts Center and The New York Council on the Arts. She was born and raised in Brooklyn and now lives in Atlanta with her son. She is currently at work on her next novel.

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