

Book & Bake

Calamity Club by K. Stockett



Meg Lefleur

- Eleven year old orphan
- Smart; sharp cynical exterior
- Daughter of Charlie Lefleur
- Adopted by Tom & Lucielle Heidelberg
- Secretly hopes for a true family and closely guards memories of her mother

Birdie Calhoun

- Single, 24 year old from Footely, MS
- Sent to Oxford by family for financial support
- No-nonsense; driven by a quiet sense of justice
- Talented with book keeping
- Sister to Francis Calhoun



Charlie Lefleur

- Desperate, resilient mother of Meg Lefleur
- Enemy of Garnett Pittman; connected to Dr. Pittman
- Wrongfully arrested & subjected to state-sanctioned medical procedures (sterilization)

Francis Calhoun Tartt

- Sister to Birdie Calhoun
- Married to Rory Tartt
- Deeply insecure about her rural, middle-class upbringing
- Has a desperate need for societal approval which manifests insensitivity to non-elite



Mrs. Viktoria Tartt

- Widowed matriarch of the respected Tartt family
- Mother of Rory Tartt, mother-in-law to Francis Tartt
- Values tradition & social decorum
- Pragmatic; surprisingly adaptable
- Kind

Rory Tartt

- Son to Viktoria Tartt, husband to Francis Tartt
- Carries the burden of managing the Tartt family remaining assets and keeping up appearances in Oxford society
- Evasive in his marriage; deceitful
- Leaves his family in ruin



Ladies of the Calamity Club



Flossy Stolivsky

Ruby Slipper

Esmerelda

Dixie & Trixie

(“Nurse”)Virginia Cunningham



Tom Heidelberg

- Wealthy son of Big Tom and Isabelle Heidelberg
- Alcoholic; struggles to meet the patriarchal expectations
- Easily manipulated by his wife, Lucielle
- Adoptive father to Meg Lefleur

Lucielle Heidelberg

- Wife to Tom Heidelberg
- Status conscious; manipulates the adoption system to secure family funding
- Treats parenting as a performance
- Alcoholic; frequently belittles her husband



Jack Walsh

- Bank manager from Jackson temporarily working in Oxford to audit the local bank
- Grew up in poverty
- Compassionate, helpful, non-judgmental
- Financial advisor to Viktoria Tartt
- Romantic interest of Birdie Calhoun

Dr. Welty Pittman

- Town doctor in Oxford
- Husband to Garnett Pittman; avoids direct conflict with her
- Holds enough social & legal authority to intervene in child welfare cases when necessary
- Father to Meg Lefleur



Isabelle Heidelberg

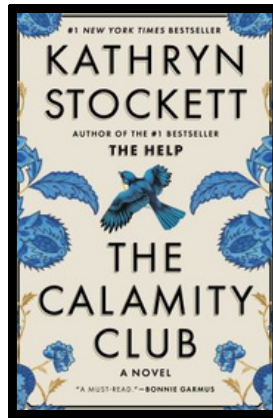
- Kind, yet controlling matriarch of the Heidelberg family
- Mother to Tom Heidelberg; uses wealth to dictate the behavior of her children
- Strongly suspicious of Lucielle's motives

Garnett Pittman

- Severe & hypocritical chairlady of the local orphan asylum
- Weaponizes her religious piety
- Harbors deep personal resentments that dictate her cruel administrative “deeds”



LET'S DISCUSS

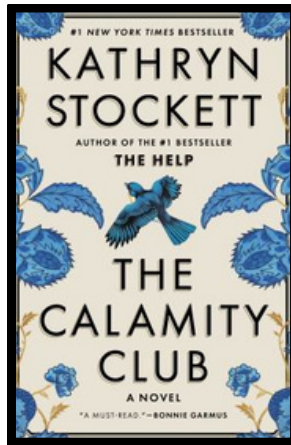


1. Hypocrisy is all over this novel. What examples stood out to you the most?
2. What lessons may be learned from the workers of the Calamity Club?
3. How does the novel use the word "feeble-minded" to show how fear can turn bad ideas into cruelty?
4. When money runs out, do the characters in the Calamity Club become less moral, or just more honest about survival?
5. Do you think the women of the Calamity Club are victims of the time or people living with the consequences of their past decisions?
6. The old dance floor in the Tartt's barn was used for social parties and is a sign of prosperity for that time - how does the dance floor represent something completely different for the Calamity Club?

7. What do you think Garnett Pittman was like as a child? How do you think her personal trauma impacted her decisions?
8. The boarded up window in the room where Meg was confined denies Meg of any outside perspective. How does Birdie's intervention impact Meg's outlook in general?



LET'S DISCUSS



9. How do you think Tom Heidelberg lost his way in life? (metaphorically speaking)
10. How does the novel explore the difference between lies that harm and lies that protect? At what point, if any, do the characters' deceptions become morally indefensible to you?
11. Idlewilde (Tartt's mansion) goes through a major transformation throughout the novel...do you consider this a fall from grace or the women's resourceful, if illicit, fight for survival?
12. Prior to reading *The Calamity Club*, how much did you know about the eugenics movement? How did Garnett Pittman use it to her advantage?
13. Did you enjoy Isabelle Heidelberg's character? What did you like? What bothered you?

14. Moral lines were crossed due to the impact of financially desperate times. How far would you go if you found yourself in the same situation?
15. Do you feel Francis Tartt evolved throughout the novel? Why or why not?
16. Rory Tartt's actions were despicable; do you feel any sympathy for him at all? Why or why not?



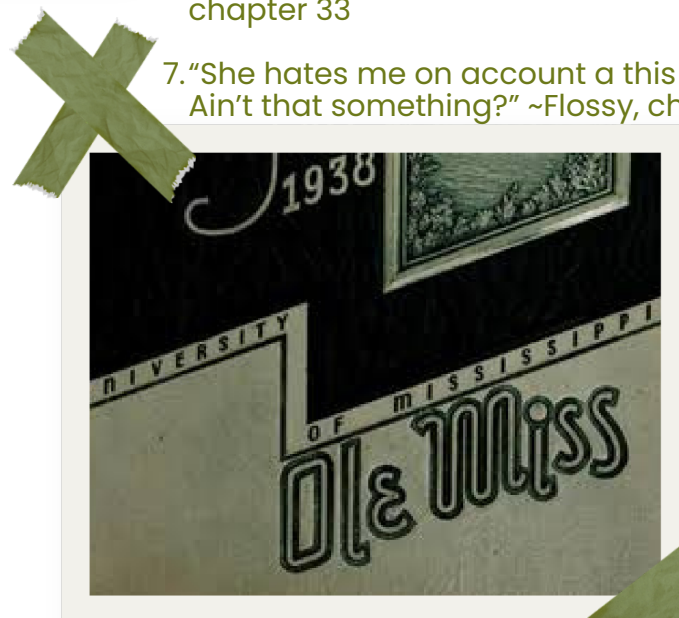
QUOTES TO NOTE



5. "I figured if a river as hell-bent as the Mississippi could change its mind, then, evidently, so could I." ~Birdie, chapter 29

6. "You lied to me about where you came from. She says it just like I damn knew she would. **Lying is not acceptable in this family.** Do you understand that?" ~Isabelle. Heidelberg, chapter 33

7. "She hates me on account a this is what I do. Ain't that something?" ~Flossy, chapter 44



1. "We do NOT accept: Coloreds, Indians, Jews, Mexicans, Oriental types, Twins, Anyone who has or has had Leprosy, Consumption, Missing Limbs or Harelip. No Boys. No Sick Children or anyone of a Retarded Nature. No Girls over the age of twelve. No Women in the Family Way. We do not deliver Babies here." ~Sign at the orphanage, Interlude page 8

2. "But here is what else I have come to know: If you give a girl a taste of fresh air and then take it away, she will grow fierce and wild to get that fresh air back again." ~Meg, chapter 12

3. "You people are terrible at being poor, I said to nobody." ~Birdie, chapter 18