



How to Eat a Cupcake

By Meg Donohue
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Introduction

Free-spirited Annie Quintana and sophisticated Julia St. Clair come from two different worlds. Yet, as the daughter of the St. Clairs' housekeeper, Annie grew up in Julia's San Francisco mansion and they forged a bond that only two little girls oblivious to class differences could until a life-altering betrayal destroyed their friendship.

A decade later, Annie bakes to fill the void left in her heart by her mother's death, and a painful secret jeopardizes Julia's engagement to the man she loves. A chance reunion prompts the unlikely duo to open a cupcakerie, but when a mysterious saboteur opens up old wounds, they must finally face the truth about their past or risk losing everything.

Questions for Discussion

1. Julia describes her relationship with Annie as a "yin-yang friendship." In Chinese philosophy, the concept of yin yang refers to interdependent opposites, or two halves of a whole. Have you ever had a friend whose personality or background was very different from your own? In what ways did those differences strengthen your friendship? In what ways did they weaken it? How has what you look for in a friend changed as you've gotten older? Are you more or less likely to befriend someone different from you now than when you were younger?
2. Julia really believes in cupcakes; she thinks they are more than a passing trend and that opening a cupcakerie will help her get through a difficult time in her life. Annie's cupcakes in particular have an almost magical affect on her spirits. What is it about cupcakes that holds such appeal for Julia? Do you think there is a reason our society is embracing cupcakes at this particular point in time?
3. Annie inherited her love of baking from her mother. Has a relative ever passed a hobby or profession down to you? If so, in what way does that hobby or profession become a memorial to the person from whom you learned? What does the act of baking mean to Annie?
4. The relationships Annie and Julia have with their own, and each others', mothers are central to this story. What are the differences between those relationships? In what ways are Lucia and Lolly different as mothers and caregivers? In what ways are they similar?
5. Annie and Julia are nearly but not quite sisters. Do you think the bonds of friendship can ever be as tight as the bonds of family?
6. Annie held a grudge against Julia for many years. Was her anger justified? In Annie's shoes, would you have been able to forgive Julia? How would it change your answer if Julia were related by blood?
7. Do you consider Julia to be a sympathetic or unsympathetic character? Do you think it's important for protagonists to be "likable"? Why or why not?
8. Julia carries the burden of an untold trauma for much of the novel. Why do you think she kept this trauma secret for as long as she did? Have you ever felt so terrible about something—either something you did or something that happened to you—that you did not allow yourself to think about it or talk about it? Did you ever end up telling anyone? Did talking about it make you feel better?
9. Annie and Julia's love of cupcakes reunites them. What do you think of the idea that food can bring people together? Is this a particularly female phenomenon or do men experience it too?
10. How do Annie and Julia each change over the course of the novel? 11. Where do you envision Annie and Julia now? Do Julia and Wes have children? Are Annie and Ogden still together? Has Julia convinced Annie to open another Treat? 12. How do you eat a cupcake? Is your approach reflective of your personality?

About the Author

Meg Donohue has an MFA from Columbia University and a BA from Dartmouth College. Born and raised in Philadelphia, she now lives in San Francisco with her husband, daughters, dog, and a weakness for salted caramel cupcakes.