

The Hurricane Sisters

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By Dorothea Benton Frank

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Introduction

Hurricane season begins early and rumbles all summer long, well into September. Often people's lives reflect the weather and *The Hurricane Sisters* is just such a story.

Once again Dorothea Benton Frank takes us deep into the heart of her magical South Carolina Lowcountry on a tumultuous journey filled with longings, disappointments, and, finally, a road toward happiness that is hard earned. There we meet three generations of women buried in secrets. The determined matriarch, Maisie Pringle, at eighty, is a force to be reckoned with because she will have the final word on everything, especially when she's dead wrong. Her daughter, Liz, is caught up in the classic maelstrom of being middle-age and in an emotionally demanding career that will eventually open all their eyes to a terrible truth. And Liz's beautiful twenty-something daughter, Ashley, whose dreamy ambitions of her unlikely future keeps them all at odds.

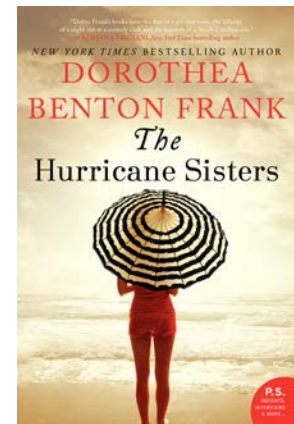
Luckily for Ashley, her wonderful older brother, Ivy, is her fierce champion but he can only do so much from San Francisco where he resides with his partner. And Mary Beth, her dearest friend, tries to have her back but even she can't talk headstrong Ashley out of a relationship with an ambitious politician who seems slightly too old for her.

Actually, Ashley and Mary Beth have yet to launch themselves into solvency. Their prospects seem bleak. So while they wait for the world to discover them and deliver them from a ramen-based existence, they placate themselves with a hare-brained scheme to make money but one that threatens to land them in huge trouble with the authorities.

So where is Clayton, Liz's husband? He seems more distracted than usual. Ashley desperately needs her father's love and attention but what kind of a parent can he be to Ashley with one foot in Manhattan and the other one planted in indiscretion? And Liz, who's an expert in the field of troubled domestic life, refuses to acknowledge Ashley's precarious situation. Who's in charge of this family? The wake-up call is about to arrive.

The Lowcountry has endured its share of war and bloodshed like the rest of the South, but this storm season we watch Maisie, Liz, Ashley, and Mary Beth deal with challenges that demand they face the truth about themselves. After a terrible confrontation they are forced to rise to forgiveness, but can they establish a new order for the future of them all?

Frank, with her hallmark scintillating wit and crisp insight, captures how a complex family of disparate characters and their close friends can overcome anything through the power of love



and reconciliation. This is the often hilarious, sometimes sobering, but always entertaining story of how these unforgettable women became *The Hurricane Sisters*.

Questions for Discussion

1. Describe the relationship between the three generations of women, Ashley, Liz, and Maisie.
2. Is their family truly dysfunctional, or are they normal? Are they happy?
3. Why doesn't Liz approve of her mother's relationship with Skipper? Is it scandalous? Why do we allow social disapproval to keep us from who or what we want?
4. Talk about Liz and Clayton's marriage. Is there anything Liz could have done to prevent Clayton's proclivities in New York? Why does he act as he does? What makes him stop? Should Liz forgive him? Are we a society too quick to divorce? Is forgiveness a weakness? How can Clayton regain Liz's trust?
5. Strong women are the heart of Dorothea Benton Frank's novels. Choose three adjectives that describe the women in the book. Explain why you chose each, and use examples from the book.
6. How does Dorothea Benton Frank use the location of her beloved Carolina Lowcountry as a character in the story? How is this family part of the Lowcountry? How much does place define who we are?
7. Abuse is an important theme in the novel. Do you think our society takes this issue seriously enough? How does abuse proliferate? How do their cultural predilections and personal desires blind them to the senator's behavior? What might have happened to Ashley if she didn't have her family behind her?
8. Think about the three generation of women. Have our notions of romantic relationships changed? Use examples from the novel to support your answer.
9. Which character embodies change the most in the novel?
10. Other generations have weathered financial downswings. What makes the experiences of Ashley's generation different? Are their parents wrong to try to dissuade Ashley and her friend from pursuing their dreams? Is it better to pursue what makes you happy or what makes you money? Why do we have to choose?
11. How are these characters reflective of today? Are they anachronistic in any way?
12. Do you have a favorite scene or part of the novel? Share your insights with the group.
13. What did you take away from reading *The Hurricane Sisters*?