

The Operator

William Morrow

By Gretchen Berg

ISBN: 9780062917188

Introduction

“Think *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* in the suburbs with delicious turns of jealousy, infidelity, bigotry, and embezzlement thrown in for good measure. *The Operator* is irresistible!”

— Kathryn Stockett, author of the *New York Times* bestselling novel *The Help*

A clever, surprising, and ultimately moving debut novel, set in a small Midwestern town in the early 1950s, about a nosy switchboard operator who overhears gossip involving her own family, and the unraveling that discovery sets into motion.

In a small town, everyone knows everyone else’s business . . .

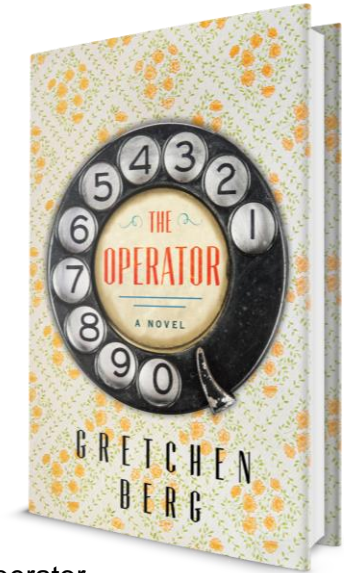
Nobody knows the people of Wooster, Ohio, better than switchboard operator Vivian Dalton, and she’d be the first to tell you that. She calls it intuition. Her teenage daughter, Charlotte, calls it eavesdropping.

Vivian and the other women who work at Bell on East Liberty Street connect lines and lives. They aren’t supposed to listen in on conversations, but they do, and they all have opinions on what they hear—especially Vivian. She knows that Mrs. Butler’s ungrateful daughter, Maxine, still hasn’t thanked her mother for the quilt she made, and that Ginny Frazier turned down yet another invitation to go to the A&W with Clyde Walsh.

Then, one cold December night, Vivian listens in on a call between that snob Betty Miller and someone whose voice she can’t quite place and hears something shocking. Betty Miller’s mystery friend has news that, if true, will shatter Vivian’s tidy life in Wooster, humiliating her and making her the laughingstock of the town.

Vivian may be mortified, but she isn’t going to take this lying down. She’s going to get to the bottom of that rumor—get into it, get under it, poke around in the corners. Find every last bit. Vivian wants the truth, no matter how painful it may be.

But as Vivian is about to be reminded, in a small town like Wooster, one secret usually leads to another. . . .



Questions for Discussion

1. Why does Vivian eavesdrop? If you had a job like hers, would you?
2. Vivian is a middle-child in the McGinty family. Are you a youngest, middle, oldest, or only child? How significant do you think birth order is in the development of personality traits? Do you see any similarities between the McGinty family and your own?
3. What do you think are Vivian's greatest weaknesses? Strengths? Do these change by the end of the book?
4. How do you think Betty Miller got to be the way she was? Was she the villain in this book?
5. Why do people gossip?
6. Do you think Bill Parker knew about Flora's "secret"? If yes, when do you think he knew? If no, how do you think he would have reacted when he finally found out?
7. Do you think Gilbert and Flora were justified in their actions?
8. Have you ever kept a big secret, like Edward did, from a significant other or close friend? Was it to protect you, or someone else? Was it ever uncovered?
9. How do you think you would have felt and reacted, at age fifteen (like Charlotte), if something similar had happened to you and your family?
10. Compare the individual struggles of Vivian, Betty, and Flora. How did each woman handle her stresses?
11. Who was your favorite major character, and why (and did your answer change between the beginning and end of the book)? Did you have a favorite minor character?
12. What do you think happens to Vivian? (Does she complete her high school courses? Go on to college? Embark on a new career?)