



A Fireproof Home for the Bride

Amy Scheibe

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READING GROUP GUIDE

About the book:

Emmaline Nelson and her sister Birdie grow up in the hard, cold rural Lutheran world of strict parents, strict milking times, and strict morals. Marriage is preordained, the groom practically predestined. Though it's 1958, southern Minnesota did not see changing roles for women on the horizon. Caught in a time bubble between a world war and the ferment of the 1960's, Emmy doesn't see that she has any say in her life, any choices at all. Only when Emmy's fiancé shows his true colors and forces himself on her does she find the courage to act—falling instead for a forbidden Catholic boy, a boy whose family seems warm and encouraging after the sere Nelson farm life. Not only moving to town and breaking free from her engagement but getting a job on the local newspaper begins to open Emmy's eyes. She discovers that the KKK is not only active in the Midwest but that her family is involved, and her sense of the firm rules she grew up under—and their effect—changes completely. Amy Scheibe's *A FIREPROOF HOME FOR THE BRIDE* has the charm of detail that will drop readers into its time and place: the home economics class lecture on cuts of meat, the group date to the diner, the small-town movie theater popcorn for a penny. It also has a love story—the wrong love giving way to the right—and most of all the pull of a great main character whose self-discovery sweeps the plot forward.

Discussion Questions

1. The title *A Fireproof Home for the Bride* is evocative of many positive things: safety, romance, a bright future. Yet the author imbues it with darker meanings by the end of the book. Why do you think she chose this title, and if you were to choose a different one, what would it be?
2. Though the secrets in the novel do not render Emmaline Nelson an unreliable narrator, how do they affect her ability to uncover the deeper truths of her family's past? Can you think of any family secrets that changed the way you thought about your parents or other relatives?
3. In the initial scenes of the novel, the pace is somewhat methodical and even claustrophobic at times. How does this style reflect the way Emmy sees the world? Did you share her feelings of relief when the narrative slightly shifted with her departure from her parent's house? Can you think of another heroine's journey that is echoed in this change?



4. Karin Nelson seems initially cold and removed. By the end of the novel, how does the reader's perception of her change? Are there circumstances in her past that help the reader understand why she is emotionally broken? How much has religion comforted or aggrieved her?
5. Though Emmy has lead a fairly sheltered life, what are the forces of change around her that bolster the innate strength she exhibits once she is on her own? In what ways do you imagine events that happen off the page influencing what is told on the page?
6. In the 1950s the idea of "having a stalker" was unimaginable. When Ambrose turns up in unexpected places, how does this affect Emmy over time? Do you think a modern woman would become uncomfortable earlier?
7. As Emmy's devotion to Ambrose shifts to puppy love for Bobby Doyle, how much of this is due to her release from her past? How much is due to the allure of his open, warm, and large family? What other aspects of Bobby Doyle sweep Emmy off her feet? Would their marriage have been a mistake?
8. While the author was researching aspect of the novel, she came across the KKK materials. Though she was born and reared in the Upper Midwest, this was her first awareness of the Klan's presence. Were you likewise surprised by the information?
9. Many women were holding jobs in the post-war era, but most went back to homebound life in the early to mid-50s. How is this reflected in the many women in the novel? When Emmy is instinctively drawn to a career that she knows little about is she aided more by the women or the men around her? In what ways? Could her work situation happen today?
10. The author is clearly fond of the people of North Dakota and Minnesota. How does her affection for her home show through in her place settings and characters? How does it make you feel towards them?
11. From which of Emmy's farm-trained abilities is she required to draw by the end of the novel? Is 18-year-old Emmy more prepared by her upbringing to take on responsibilities than women of the same age today?
12. The author has said that this is a book about prejudice and love. What do you think she means by this? What are the different kinds of prejudice she investigates? What are the different kinds of love she examines?

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