

Book Club Guide



From the Author



Dear Book Club Coordinator,

Since I'm a debut author, I thought it advisable to begin this letter with a proper introduction.

Hello, dearie! My name is Angela Bell. I'm a twenty-first-century lady with nineteenth-century sensibilities, and I reside in Texas with my jovial pup, Mr. Bingley Crosby. My favorite pastimes include reading voraciously, drinking copious amounts of tea, and writing letters with a fountain pen. Words are quite a passion of mine, which I suppose, is what led me to become a novelist. One might categorize my books as historical romance, but I like to describe them as *a cuppa Victorian whimsy* because as Anne Shirley would say, that sounds so much more poetical!

My debut novel, *A Lady's Guide to Marvels and Misadventure*, is one such cuppa. Inspired by *Around the World in Eighty Days* and *The Nutcracker* ballet, the story features a grand scavenger hunt across Europe, marvelous clockwork inventions, loveably eccentric characters, humorous shenanigans, themes of faith, and an enemies-to-lovers romance with all the banter. My prayer is that the stories I write will give readers a respite from the modern-day hustle and headlines. That each book would serve as a haven, providing readers with a healthy escape between the pages and allowing them to face the rest of their day with a cheered heart and an uplifted soul.





Thank you for considering *A Lady's Guide to Marvels and Misadventure* for your book club! It's been an honor to have the opportunity to write you this letter. If you fancy having me join your book club virtually, fill out the [Author Request Teleconference](#) form under Resources on the Open Book website. I'd be delighted to chat with your group over a cup of tea.

Farewell and happy reading, dearie!

Sincerely,

Angela

Angela Bell

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Cut Scene

from Chapter 26 – Cleverest Cumulous
by Angela Bell

Mrs. S. pointed to a sinewy cloud, floating in the blue expanse above Orangerie Park. “Ornithorhynchus anatinus.”

Theodore scratched his beard. Either his mind had gone to rust, or his tutor hadn’t been as proficient in Latin as his reference had claimed. Shifting on his corner of the blanket they’d borrowed from the Plucky Orange Peel, he contested the cheeky woman beside him with a raised brow. “English, please. Otherwise, your turn in Cleverest Cumulous will be deemed invalid.”

Mrs. S. beamed a cheery smile. “A thousand pardons, my boy. In laymen’s terms, that cloud is the spitting image of a platypus.”

“A plat-a-what now?”

“A plat-y-pus. You know, the egg-laying, duck-billed, beaver-tailed, otter-footed creature indigenous to Australia.”

Theodore’s second brow joined its mate on the top of his head. A duck-faced beaver in Australia? Did she expect him to swallow that load of humbug? “I cry foul.”

“It’s not a fowl, silly boy. It’s a mammal.” Shaking her head, Mrs. S. looked at him as though he were failing to comprehend basic arithmetic.

He sought help from her daughter, who sat on the opposite corner of the blanket, smirking at his state of confusion. “Tell me true, Miss Stanton. This duck, beaver, platy-ma-thing . . . ‘tis a concoction of Mother Frankenstein’s fancy, right? Such a creature cannot exist. Can it?”



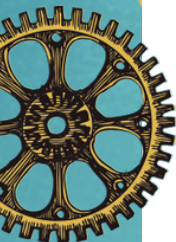
“Mum’s zoological knowledge is not to be doubted. She has collected a wealth of scientific volumes over the years, and one of these volumes contains a lithographic print of two platypuses, which could be produced as evidence in a court of law. However, since we can’t readily fetch it from our library, I shall serve as her witness.” Placing one gloved hand over her heart, Miss Stanton raised the other in the air. “I swear, on my honor, that the platypus does in fact exist, and that the cloud in question bears a remarkable resemblance to said creature.”

Well, knock him down with a sprig of holly and call him figgy pudding. “You win again, Mrs. S. I couldn’t find a cleverer cumulous, if were I to search the whole of the sky.” A metallic melody reverberated in the pocket of his waistcoat. “About face, Stantons. Time for cygnet patrol.”





There's Absolutely Always Time for Dessert!



Mr. Arthur gave a mock gasp. “But, Miss Stanton, we’ve not yet had dessert.”

“We haven’t the time to indulge, sir. The hour grows late, and Grand’s next clue is yet a long walk away.”

Like a cat sprawled in the sun, Mr. Arthur didn’t stir from the comfort of his chair. “There is absolutely always time for dessert.”

~ excerpt from *A Lady’s Guide to Marvels and Misadventure*

In *A Lady’s Guide to Marvels and Misadventure*, the characters embark on a merry scavenger hunt across Europe inspired by *Around the World in Eighty Days*, and in each city the characters visit, they enjoy a regional dessert inspired by the confectionary citizens of the Land of Sweets who dance to honor Clara’s bravery in *The Nutcracker* ballet.

Here’s a list of desserts featured in the novel for your book club to enjoy! All would pair beautifully with a piping pot of Darjeeling, Clara’s favorite tea.



Time for Dessert!

Citrus Custard

- Excerpt: *“When the second course had been cleared, Mudgett brought in Mrs. Collins’ crowning achievement—a three-tiered citrus custard arranged to perfection on a cobalt blue glass pedestal cake stand and decorated with candied orange peels and blossoms.”*

Stroopwafel

- Excerpt: *“Think of this: two flattened waffle biscuits, round and crisp and golden as the evening sun, joined together by the perfection that is caramel. It is resplendent.”*

Větrník

- Excerpt: *“A waiter interrupted the lullaby, carrying a plate of the dessert Mr. Arthur had requested. Větrník—puffed choux pastries baked a golden brown, enhanced by a sheen of caramel icing, and filled with swirls of cream.”*

Kugelhopf

- Excerpt: *“The molded cake placed before them resembled a crown dusted with confectioner’s sugar. Clara accepted her portion without protest. Filled with raisins and slivered almonds, the popular Alsatian treat was more brioche than cake. Rich and satisfying without being too sweet.”*

Gingerbread

- Excerpt: *“Clara’s heart stumbled a few beats. Snatching the fan on her chatelaine, she created a breeze before her face, which must surely match the color of the gingerbread on her plate—little hearts dipped in red icing.”*

Chocolate Truffles

- Excerpt: *“Clara raised a brow over the rim of her cup. Why, that cheeky hobgoblin. She attempted to bite back a smirk and failed miserably. ‘Those chocolate truffles were rather delectable.’”*

Chocolate Truffles

Prep Time: 5 minutes

Refrigerate Time: 2 hours

Serving: 8–12 truffles

Ingredients:

8 oz semi-sweet chocolate

½ cup heavy cream

¼ tsp. vanilla extract

Pinch of salt

Cocoa powder

Instructions:

- 1) Heat cream until almost boiling and pour on top of chocolate chips.
- 2) Mix and add vanilla and salt.
- 3) Refrigerate for 2 hours.
- 4) Scoop balls, roll in cocoa powder, refrigerate until ready to eat.
- 5) Enjoy!



Twirl through the Pages

Story-inspiration playlist for thematic
ambiance while reading or during your club
meeting.

- *The Nutcracker* (Complete Ballet Score) by Tchaikovsky
- *Around the World in Eighty Days* (Complete 1956 Original Soundtrack) by Victor Young
- “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring” by Bach
- “The Last Rose of Summer” from a poem by Thomas Moore
- “Sir Roger de Coverley” traditional country dance
- “Abide with Me” (hymn) by Henry F. Lyte
- “Clear” by Needtobreathe



Discussion Questions



1. Clara was born with a starry-eyed wanderlust, but after suffering unexpected losses and a heartbreaking betrayal, she packed her travel guides away in the attic along with her childhood dream of exploring the world's wonders.

- Q: If you could take a dream trip anywhere in the world without financial or health constraints, where would you go and why? Of all the places you've been fortunate enough to visit—whether it be a far-off land or a hidden gem in your own town—which place was your favorite and why?

2. Mrs. Stanton has quite the menagerie of rescued animals who get into some rather hilarious shenanigans—like when Fred the ermine decides to scamper across the dinner table, leaving tiny paw prints in the guests' custard.

- Q: Do you have a funny memory involving a beloved pet, farm animal, trip to the zoo, or a wildlife encounter? Share your most amusing animal shenanigan story!

3. Dependence on God vs. reliance on self is an overarching theme the characters must explore from different angles as their self-reliance stems from very different beliefs: Clara's self-reliance stems from a belief that God expects her to take care of her own by her own might and main, while Theodore's self-reliance stems from a belief that his shame disqualifies him from seeking help from the only Maker capable of reassembling a shattered soul, and Rupert's self-reliance stems from a belief that a man has to help himself because depending on anyone else leads to disappointment and pain.

- Q: What does self-reliance look like in your own life, and what is the belief it stems from? Is that belief similar to Clara's, Theodore's, or Rupert's? How does self-reliance impact our relationship with God?



4. When Clara leaves London to follow her grandfather's scavenger hunt across Europe, she learns that her family's well-being is ultimately in God's hands, not on her shoulders. Unlike the Titan Atlas who bears the weight of world alone, she has four people and one God ready to lend her support. She can release her white-knuckled illusion of being in control and rest assured that Emmanuel is God, so she doesn't have to be. (Psalm 46)

- Q: How does acknowledging that Emmanuel is God impact our daily life? Have you experienced a season where it felt like the weight of the world was on your shoulders? With the perspective of hindsight, can you look back and see how God was with you as an ever-present helper, source of strength, or refuge in that season?

5. In Theodore's upbringing, family only watched your back to find fault with your posture. When Mrs. S. bids him not to confuse the character of his heavenly Father with the voice of his earthly one, hope sparks in his shame-chased soul that God might deign to mend the brokenness he tries to hide. As Theodore tentatively returns to the Lord's house, he learns that God never asked him to be worthy—He only asked him to come. Theodore can always depend on his Heavenly Father to graciously crown him with love and compassion. (Psalm 103)

- Q: Aside from shame, what might keep someone from coming to God with their brokenness? Aside from grace and compassion, what facets of God's character listed in scripture could encourage someone to lay their brokenness at His feet? How has God graciously shown you compassion?



6. As a boy, Rupert was forced to shoulder the consequences of his father's gambling addiction, including his mother's death in debtor's prison. When his father dies, Rupert's again left to bear the weight of his actions. His father's broken oath to mend his ways solidifies Rupert's belief that depending on anyone other than yourself is insane. Unlike Clara, Rupert never unburdens his shoulders, and unlike Theodore, he never comes to his Heavenly Father. Driven by desperation, Rupert clings to the belief that he must help himself, rather than learning to lift his eyes to where help comes from. (Psalm 121)

- Q: Why is self-reliance ultimately harmful? What facets of God's character listed in scripture prove that He is a dependable source of help? When we're tempted to cling to self-reliance, what practical steps can we take to seek help from the Lord?

7. In *The Nutcracker* ballet, Godfather Drosselmeyer gives a little Clara the gift of a dream. In *A Lady's Guide to Marvels and Misadventure*, Grandfather Drosselmeyer gives a full-grown Clara the gift of learning to dream again, with unburdened shoulders and uplifted gaze, dependent on an ever-present, ever-faithful God.

- Q: In what practical ways can you make unburdening your shoulders and uplifting your gaze a daily practice? In what ways do you need to learn to dream again? How does the pursuit of God-given dreams deepen our faith and enrich our lives?

An Open Book

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