

Addled

by JoeAnn Hart



About the Book

Eden Rock Country Club is a grand New England institution, a lush haven of leisure and cocktails, where gossip and intrigue lurk discreetly behind a veil of old-world propriety. But one Fourth of July, a flock of geese descends on the club's manicured lawns; never fond of outsiders, the Eden Rock denizens find these new guests distinctly unwelcome. When Charles Lambert, a bond trader with a strong portfolio but a weak golf game, accidentally kills a goose with a wayward drive, he sets in motion a series of events that will leave the club and its members changed forever.

His wife, Madeline, must face the mutterings of other members about the state of her marriage and his sanity. Meanwhile, their daughter, an animal rights activist, mounts a quixotic campaign to make the club go vegan, much to the annoyance of Vita, a talented, obsessive chef who has her own plans for the geese. A deftly observed social comedy, **ADDLED** is a rich and riotous story of old money, new ideas, and the power of passion to disrupt even the most orderly of worlds.

Discussion Guide

1. Food and hunger play a major role in **Addled**. Everyone obsesses about it in one way or another. Dr. Nicastro will eat anything, Phoebe almost nothing, and Vita wrestles with the moral issues of being a chef. To what extent do you question where the burger on your plate came from? If we acknowledge that a cow is a living creature like ourselves, must we give up eating meat, like Phoebe, or is there some middle ground that considers the well-being of the animal we depend upon for food?

2. Money, who has it and who doesn't, is also a driving force in the book. Everyone is acutely aware of who's got what and where he or she stands in the pecking order. Is this unusual, or within your own neighborhood, does everyone know the value of each other's homes and cars? Do neighbors act differently towards one another depending upon their material wealth?

3. In **Addled**, the winner of the Fothergill Cup tells Dr. Nicastro that being flexible won him the game, and that the trick to golf?and life?is about accepting one's game, and one's self. Have you had experiences in sports or games that you have been able to carry over in your everyday life? Or is it just a game?

4. Geese at the Club dramatizes the eternal conflict between man and nature, and in the process create problems between humans as well. Phoebe, the animal rights activist, wants the geese at the Club protected, insisting that they have every right to be there as people. Gerard, the club manager, wants them exterminated at any cost because they have become a nuisance to the members, the dominant species. Make an argument for their point of view about what should be done about geese. Whose position prevails at the end, if either?

5. Geese are not the only population under scrutiny at the Club. Arietta Wingate maintains a ledger in which the women of the club are coerced into revealing the biological fathers of their children instead of the merely legal. Arietta explains that they must sacrifice a bit of privacy for the sake of the greater good. Since 9/11, we have been asked to sacrifice many liberties in the name of national security, to the point where the government wants to know what books you've checked out of the library. At what point does the public good become a means of social control? What do you think of the book? Can you imagine it existing in your circle?

6. Even before 9/11, security has been an ongoing concern in America. The Club is a walled and closed community, with a guard at the gate. Gating, whether at a club or a housing development, is a form of social ordering that does not solve any problems of the world, but merely regulates and hides them. Is this isolation a detriment to the larger community, or is it a welcome release, giving members a place to restore themselves before facing the world? Do you belong to a club? What benefits do you get out of it? What are the downsides, if any?

7. In the opening scene of **Addled**, Charles Lambert accidentally kills a goose with an errant golf shot and realizes he is just as off course as the ball. He turns to art to redeem his past and give meaning to his life. Does art have that sort of power? Most of us do not have the option of devoting ourselves to the artistic life, but are there other ways that art can add depth to our every day lives?

8. When Charles locks himself up in the garage for the summer, his wife Madeline is left to deal with the members of the Club, who are shocked by Charles' recent behavior. Madeline becomes increasingly isolated and her thoughts turn to the body jewelry on young lifeguards. It never occurs to Charles that Madeline feels rejected, and since he wants to surprise her, he does not share his inner transformation with her. But neither does she ask, so that by the end of **Addled**, she is halfway out the door. Is this miscommunication between a husband and wife unusual? Is she overreacting? What happens to a marriage when one partner changes and the other doesn't? Does it always have to end in divorce?

9. The average golf course uses more than 2000 pounds of chemical pesticides a year, 4 to 7 times the amount used by farmers, so Phoebe certainly has good reasons to want to try to change Eden Rock to organic controls. But she is extreme in her methods, which puts the members off. What are the alternatives? Ask nicely and form a committee? What are ways in which you could go about creating environmental change in your own community, short of tying yourself to a

tree?

10. In **Addled**, everyone has their place, either in the kitchen or the dining room, like an American Upstairs/Downstairs. The people upstairs are oblivious to the presence of the people serving them, and yet the people downstairs are hyperattentive to the needs and character of those they serve. What are the class issues here? Relate them to your own social circle.

11. The author takes a humorous tone in this tale of many characters. Why do you think she made that choice? Do you find the members of your circle funny as they go about their lives? What is the role that humor plays in getting along with our friend and relatives?

Author Bio

I was never one of those writers who always knew she wanted to write, or for that matter, always wrote. I was born in the Bronx, but our family moved to a Westchester suburb when I was in the second grade. Our back yard abutted the Pleasantville Country Club golf course, a very modest, snack shack sort of place.

Oddly, I don't ever remember seeing any golfers, but they must have been there invading my dreams. I went to St. Thomas Aquinas down the street, where everyone was a transplant from the city and "writing" was called "penmanship." At Pleasantville High, I served a brief stint as editor of the school newspaper before the advisor cut off funding to keep me from printing another word. After which, I spent one year at Skidmore College studying art before dropping out to study life. Eventually I made my way to Boulder, Colorado, where I met my husband, who'd grown up in Manhattan.

It seemed everyone in Boulder was a transplant from the city too. But no sooner had I arrived, then he decided to move his business to Gloucester Ma. where he had inherited a family summer home. We winterized the old farmhouse, somewhat, and filled the barns with animals. Over the years we've had hundreds of chickens, geese, ducks, some guinea fowl, dozens of rabbits, a pair of retired 4H ponies, many goats, and a couple of pigs. Right now we're down to two goats and a pig, a domestic herd of cats and a standard poodle. We also produced three children.

While they were young, I chipped away at an undergraduate degree at Harvard Extension, mostly to escape the children, but also because I knew I could not nag them about the value of education if I didn't have one myself. My major was social sciences, and this being the 80's and early 90's, I wrote dozens of academic papers on postmodern deconstructionist gender roles. It was the only serious writing I had ever done up to that point and it was completely unintelligible to anyone without a working knowledge of Derrida and Lacan. To insure that its students did not enter the world believing that that's what writing was, Harvard required degree candidates to take two expository writing courses.

So I grit my teeth --- I had survived the math requirement, I would survive writing. To be on the safe side, I took the most basic course they offered, Word Choice, where I learned how to use a thesaurus. Then I took Writing From Life, which was a memoir course, although at the time I didn't even know what that meant. No matter, I learned how to cannibalize my life for the page, and in the middle of the semester, the professor called me into her office and said I should be writing fiction. At first I thought she was accusing me of lying, but it turned out she was just encouraging me

to stray from the truth. So I strayed, and here I am.

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