

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
THE FACE ON THE MILK CARTON

CAROLINE B.
COONEY

THE
GRANDMOTHER
PLOT



A NOVEL

**“Caroline B. Cooney quickly flips expectations
upside-down in this deceptively dark mystery.”**

—Julie Hyzy, *New York Times* bestselling author, for *Before She Was Helen*

READING GROUP GUIDE

1. Freddy doesn't mind being "Arthur" on occasion, because at least then his grandma still knows he's family. How would you feel in his place? Are there any other circumstances where you might set aside your identity to preserve someone else's comfort or happiness?
2. Freddy considers his own biggest flaw to be "failing to think." Do you think he's right? How is this failure present throughout the story?
3. Laura struggles to consider herself worthy of forgiveness or trust. Do you think she's too hard on herself? If she were your friend, what advice would you give her?
4. Many of Freddy's problems come from selling pipes to make more money than he could with beads or other glass projects. How do we value art as consumers? How do artists know the value of their work?
5. Do you ever feel like you're trying to please someone who isn't there? Are your experiences similar to Freddy's ongoing quest to make his mother proud?
6. Laura's natural nosiness leads her to take pictures of Maude's records at MMC. How does she justify her actions to herself? Do you think that justification is good enough? Where do you draw the line between privacy and safety?

7. None of the characters are who they seem to be at first. Which characters were you most surprised by? Who did you find most sympathetic?

8. Freddy's sisters constantly assume that he doesn't have any responsibilities because they don't take his career seriously. What are the consequences of that assumption? If you've ever been in a similar situation, how did you handle it?

A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

Why did you decide to write Freddy's story?

When my own mother was in dementia care, I was struck by the deep goodness of the staff and the constant, loving attendance of so many families. Dementia is horrifying for the patient and for the people who love her, but it's a privilege to be able to visit and comfort and hug and read to her. My mother's courage and constant good cheer were beautiful. I wanted to tell the rough and cruel story of dementia.

If you are the family of a dementia patient, you face sacrifice, sorrow, and above all, a decision: the decision not to abandon somebody just because that person's mind abandoned her. Not everybody visits or cares. I wanted to write about somebody very unlikely, somebody you would never expect to do his best and make the hardest sacrifices: Freddy. I wanted love, because it's love that keeps families close in these really lousy circumstances.

Which character do you most relate to?

I'm very similar to Laura in many ways. I have owned smashed brass, had a parlor pump organ and three pianos, and did indeed live on Magna Lane where the extended Ives family summered. As a church organist and member of quite a few concert choirs over the years, I created a woman I knew well. But Laura *did* abandon her mother, a decision I came across only once in real life, and it was wrenching. I wondered how that family dealt with it later—whether it bothered them or whether they shrugged, as they did over their person.

You include some pretty specific details about Freddy’s lamp-work process. How did you research glasswork? Have you ever tried it yourself?

I have a Freddy, of course, or I could never have written this book. My Freddy is a lampworker who talked to me for days about what he does, where he does it, and why he does it. This is his vocabulary, his attitude, his studio. That was yet another privilege—getting close to an existence so removed from my own.

What’s on your reading list these days?

For my own reading, I like high action mysteries and I like history. I read mysteries by the armload. If there’s no action, I set it down. Stuff has to happen. I am working my way through the Louise Penny, the Sarah Shaber (both series), and the Daniel Silva books, in order. History for me is a slow read, a completely different occupation from mystery reading. My two histories at the moment are Erik Larson’s *The Splendid and the Vile* and Valerie Hansen’s *The Year 1000*. I like to have a few books open to the next page in every room of the house, so I can start in immediately, slouching down on the nearest comfy chair or sofa. I like reading several books at a time. You savor an exciting chapter, but instead of racing on, you switch to history.