

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Bonnie Garmus is a copywriter and creative director who has worked widely in the fields of technology, medicine, and education. She's an open-water swimmer, a rower, and mother to two pretty amazing daughters. Born in California and most recently from Seattle, she currently lives in London with her husband and her dog, 99.

[Author's Website.](#)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The late 1950s into the early 1960s was supposedly a halcyon time in American history. But was it? The war was over and men returned home to take back the jobs women had done in their absence. As a result, women were pushed into more subservient roles. What influences played a part in encouraging women to accept their place as only in the home? And why, in today's world, when women are in the workforce in record numbers, are they still doing most of the housework and child-raising?
2. Elizabeth Zott had no formal education, and yet she was able to self-educate, thanks to her library card. With the advent of technology, the library almost seems outdated, though many would argue that the library is more important than ever. Do you think libraries are important if so, why?
3. Why does Elizabeth always wear a pencil in her hair? Is it a weapon or is it a symbol of strength?
4. Elizabeth refuses to accept limits placed on her by society and insists that others also ignore those limits. How do each of those characters ultimately rise to that challenge? And in what ways have you or others been limited by societal norms?
5. In the book, rowing is a metaphor for how Elizabeth sees a better society: that no one person in the boat is more important than the other. Have you ever participated in anything – work, sports, community efforts – where everyone must “row as one” in order to succeed? What are the hurdles people must overcome in order

to reach the point where “it all feels easy”?

6. Six-Thirty is amazed by not only how often humans lie to each other, but how poorly they communicate overall. He struggles to understand the word “smart,” finding its very definition unintelligent. What does “smart” actually mean to you? Have you ever thought about what your pet might be trying to teach you?
7. The dictionary first defines faith as “the complete trust or confidence in someone or something” and “a belief in religious doctrine” second. Madeline draws the same distinction – that faith isn’t based on religion. Knowing this, what role does religion play in the book? What is a Humanist? What does the science of psychology tell us about the human’s desire to believe in something greater than themselves? And why do Elizabeth, Calvin, and Wakely all believe that personal responsibility – faith in one’s self – is more important?
8. The book includes male characters who are sympathetic to Elizabeth’s plight, and yet, with the exception of Calvin and Dr. Mason, have trouble standing up for women or other minorities in the workplace. Why do good-hearted people have trouble speaking up? And what are the consequences of not speaking up?
9. Elizabeth is sometimes depressed by the circumstances in her life. Not coincidentally, her show airs in the “Afternoon Depression Zone.” And yet she’s never a victim. How does she continually pick herself up? What fuels her resilience? And why, after she’s reached stardom, is she more miserable than ever?
10. Harriet Sloane is an inveterate magazine reader. How do magazines and media shape our culture? And what did Harriet mean when she first told Elizabeth to “recommit”? is there some dream of yours that you wish you would recommit to?
11. Friendship and family are interconnected themes in the book. Can friendships sometimes provide family better than family itself? Walter isn’t Amanda’s biological father, but he loves her fully and is the most present person in her life. On the other hand, Avery Parker still loves the son she never knew. How do you define family?
12. Madeline fills her family tree with Sojourner Truth, Amelia Earhart, and Nefertiti to point out that all humans are related. But if humans are 99.9 percent the same, why do we treat each other so differently?

Penguin Random House issuu.

## BOOK REVIEWS

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### Booklist

Garmus debuts with a perplexing feminist fairy tale set in 1960s Southern California. Plucky chemist Elizabeth Zott believes she's not like other women ("Most of the women she'd met in college claimed they were only there to get their MRS," Garmus writes. "It was disconcerting, as if they'd all drunk something that had rendered them temporarily insane"). She proceeds to fall madly in love with her colleague, have his child, and then, after being sidelined by double standards, sexual harassment, and scandal around her pregnancy, she's dismissed from her job and becomes an overnight sensation as the host of a daytime cooking show. This trajectory, and its few tragedies, are intermittently interrupted by the anthropomorphized thoughts of her dog, Six-Thirty: "Humans were strange, Six-Thirty thought,

the way they constantly battled dirt in their aboveground world, but after death willingly entombed themselves in it." In the end, everything works out--not because the patriarchy is destroyed or fairness is achieved, but thanks to the favors of a rich female benefactor equipped to strike back at those who humiliated Zott. While the scenes of Zott hosting her show do have their charm, the overall effect is about as deep as a Hallmark card. The author has a great voice, but contemporary readers will be left wondering who this is for. Agent: Jennifer Joel, ICM. (April.)

### Library Journal

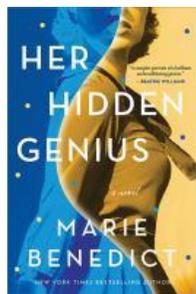
It's the 1960s, and chemist Elizabeth Zott is getting pushback from her male-only colleagues at the Hastings Research Institute--except from misanthropic Nobel Prize contender Calvin Evans, who's enchanted by her mind. Meanwhile, Elizabeth has a surprise second calling; she becomes star of a hit TV cooking show called Supper at Six, mixing in chemistry ("combine one tablespoon acetic acid with a pinch of sodium chloride") as she subtly signals that women needn't accept things as they are. Sold in heated auctions to an eye-popping 34 countries so far, this debut promises to be really big.

### Kirkus Reviews

Two chemists with major chemistry, a dog with a big vocabulary, and a popular cooking show are among the elements of this unusual compound. At the dawn of the 1960s, Elizabeth Zott finds herself in an unexpected position. She's the star of a television program called Supper at Six that has taken American housewives by storm, but it's certainly not what the crass station head envisions: " 'Meaningful?' Phil snapped. 'What are you? Amish? As for nutritious: no. You're killing the show before it even gets started. Look, Walter, it's easy. Tight dresses, suggestive movements...then there's the cocktail she mixes at the end of every show.' " Elizabeth is a chemist, recently forced to leave the lab where she was doing important research due to an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Now she's reduced to explaining things like when to put the steak in the pan. "Be sure and wait until the butter foams. Foam indicates that the butter's water content has boiled away. This is critical. Because now the steak can cook in lipids rather than absorb H<sub>2</sub>O." If ever a woman was capable of running her own life, it's Elizabeth. But because it's the 1950s, then the '60s, men have their sweaty paws all over both her successes and failures. On the plus side, there's Calvin Evans, world-famous chemist, love of her life, and father of her child; also Walter Pine, her friend who works in television; and a journalist who at least tries to do the right thing. At the other pole is a writhing pile of sexists, liars, rapists, dopes, and arrogant assholes. This is the kind of book that has a long-buried secret at a corrupt orphanage with a mysterious benefactor as well as an extremely intelligent dog named Six-Thirty, recently retired from the military. ("Not only could he never seem to sniff out the bomb in time, but he also had to endure the praise heaped upon the smug German shepherds who always did.") Garmus' energetic debut also features an invigorating subplot about rowing. A more adorable plea for rationalism and gender equality would be hard to find. Copyright (c) Kirkus Reviews, used with permission.

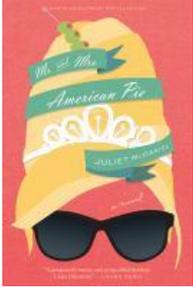
## READALIKES

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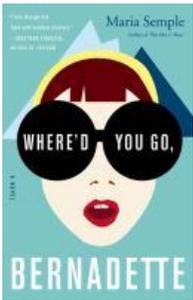
### *Her Hidden Genius* by Marie Benedict

Rosalind Franklin has always been an outsider. Whether working at the laboratory she adored in Paris or toiling at a university in London, she feels closest to the science. When she is assigned to work on DNA, she believes she can unearth its secrets. Rosalind knows if she just takes one more X-ray picture she can unlock the building blocks of life. Never again will she have to listen to her colleagues complain about her, especially Maurice Wilkins who'd rather conspire about genetics with James Watson and Francis Crick than work alongside her.



**Mr. & Mrs. American Pie by Juliet McDaniel**

Dick Nixon was just sworn in as the thirty-seventh President of the United States. Neil Armstrong just took one small step for man and one giant leap for mankind. And notable Palm Springs socialite Maxine Simmons just found out that her husband is leaving her for his twenty-two-year-old secretary. After a public meltdown at Thanksgiving, Maxine finds herself not only divorced but exiled to Scottsdale, Arizona. However, these desert boondocks will not be her end--only her Elba. The former beauty queen sets her eyes on a new crown: that of the Mrs. American Pie pageant, awarded to the nation's best wife and mother. Maxine only has one problem: to win the crown she'll need to find--or build--a family of her own.



**Where'd You Go, Bernadette by Maria Semple**

Bernadette Fox is notorious. To her Microsoft-guru husband, she's a fearlessly opinionated partner; to fellow private-school mothers in Seattle, she's a disgrace; to design mavens, she's a revolutionary architect; and to 15-year-old Bee, she is her best friend and, simply, Mom. Then Bernadette vanishes. It all began when Bee aced her report card and claimed her promised reward: a family trip to Antarctica. But Bernadette's intensifying allergy to Seattle -- and people in general -- has made her so agoraphobic that a virtual assistant in India now runs her most basic errands. A trip to the end of the earth is problematic. To find her mother, Bee compiles email messages, official documents, and secret correspondence