



Summary

Washington, DC, 1950. Everyone keeps to themselves at Briarwood House, a down-at-the-heels all-female boardinghouse in the heart of the nation's capital where secrets hide behind white picket fences. But when the lovely, mysterious widow Grace March moves into the attic room, she draws her oddball collection of neighbors into unlikely friendship: poised English beauty Floss, whose facade of perfect wife and mother covers gaping inner wounds; policeman's daughter Nora, who finds herself entangled with a shadowy gangster; frustrated baseball star Beatrice, whose career has come to an end along with the women's baseball league of WWII; and poisonous, gung-ho Arlene, who has thrown herself into McCarthy's Red Scare.

Grace's weekly attic-room dinner parties and window-brewed sun tea become a healing balm on all their lives, but she hides a terrible secret of her own. When a shocking act of violence tears the house apart, the Briar Club women must decide once and for all: who is the true enemy in their midst?

Capturing the paranoia of the McCarthy era and evoking the changing roles for women in postwar America, *The Briar Club* is an intimate and thrilling novel of secrets and loyalty put to the test.



About the author

Kate Quinn is the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of historical fiction. A native of southern California, she attended Boston University where she earned a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Classical Voice. She has written four novels in the Empress of Rome Saga, and two books in the Italian Renaissance, before turning to the 20th century with "The Alice Network", "The Huntress," "The Rose Code," "The Diamond Eye," and "The Briar Club." She is also a co-author in several collaborative novels including "The Phoenix Crown" with Janie Chang and "Ribbons of Scarlet" with Stephanie Dray, Laura Kamoie, Eliza Knight, Sophie Perinot, and Heather Webb. All have been translated into multiple languages. Kate and her husband now live in Maryland with three rescue dogs.

Discussion Questions

- The novel is set against the backdrop of the Red Scare and McCarthyism. How do these historical events impact the lives and choices of the characters?
- The point of view rotates among the women of the boarding home. Frequently when we get to a new point of view we find that the truth differs from the perceptions that others have. Why do you think Quinn chose to tell the story in this way and what is she trying to say with it?
- Whose point of view did you most enjoy inhabiting? Alternatively, which character did you have the most difficulty connecting with, and what contributed to that?
- Briarwood house itself narrates some of the chapters. How does the house's perspective shape the reader's understanding of the events and characters? Did you enjoy hearing from an inanimate object?
- Compare and contrast the different women living at Briarwood House. How do their backgrounds, personalities, and secrets contribute to the dynamics of the group?
- Discuss the role Grace March plays in bringing the women together. What does her character represent in terms of female empowerment and community building?
- Examine the themes of secrecy, deception, and truth-telling in the novel. How do the characters' hidden pasts and double lives affect their relationships?
- Food plays a significant part in the story. Discuss the symbolic meaning of the Briar Club's communal meals and how they foster a sense of belonging.
- Which recipe most tantalized your taste buds? Have you tried or are you planning to try any of the recipes in the book?
- Discuss the murder mystery. Were you expecting it to play a larger role in the story? Were you surprised by who the victim and who the perpetrator were?
- Have you read other novels by Kate Quinn? This one is set in a different time period (not WW II), and uses a different narrative device. How did it compare to her previous work?