



Discussion Questions:  
***The Ladies of Garrison  
Gardens***  
by Louise Shaffer

1. Did you agree with Laurel's decision to offer the board members of the Gardens a chance to stay even though they have been abusing the privileges of their positions for so long? Would you dismiss them or ask them to stay if you were in her position? Do you think any of them will stay without their privileges?
2. When Laurel gathers her "gifts" for future women at Garrison Cottage (p. 317), she creates a sort of time capsule in a suitcase. What items would you put away? Why would you choose those things? If you have mementos from previous generations in your family, discuss their meanings to you and why you have chosen to pass them down over other objects.
3. Laurel finds the dress and the sheet music in the old suitcase and doesn't know what it means – have you ever found something like that and speculated about the story behind it? Have you discovered something in your house that belonged to a previous owner? Did you create a story around the object or trace the true history of it?
4. At the end of *The Ladies of Garrison Gardens*, Peggy says that "more than anything else she would have wanted her daughter to have courage." What are some qualities you would wish upon your daughters, or upon women in general? What is the most important quality for a woman to cultivate in herself? Which qualities do you wish you had more or less of and why?
5. Was Iva Claire a strong woman? Is Laurel a strong woman?
6. Did you find Iva Claire's Mama to be a sympathetic character? Was her behavior toward her daughter justifiable in your view?
7. Were you surprised by Iva Claire's decision to "pull a switch"? Was she justified in taking over Myrtis's persona?
8. Do you think Laurel would have done anything differently if she had received Tassie's letter or if she knew Miss Myrtis's true story? Was Essie right to tear up the letter?
9. Louise Shaffer made a conscious decision to withhold information from Laurel (i.e. Miss Myrtis's history). How did this affect your reading of the novel? Were you frustrated that Laurel did not receive Tassie's letter?

10. With recent corporate scandals and malfeasance filling news headlines, how did you view Stuart's actions and manipulation? Or his colleagues'? Did his behavior seem to be average for the business world, in your opinion? How accountable do you feel executives should have to be for their behavior, and what are appropriate perks for chief executives?
11. Do you think Laurel will be able to run the gardens and the resort successfully? This brings up a broader question – do we always need the “experts” who tell us how to do things or are there times when people who are smart, willing to learn, and have the right intentions can do as well or better than the honchos. (Think Enron when answering this one).
12. On a similar topic, is Laurel being realistic when she tells her executives that they should make sacrifices in bonuses and perks before they cut benefits for workers – could this actually happen in today's business climate?
13. Do you think Louise Shaffer's experience as an actor and television writer has influenced her novels? Are there telltale traces of her former professions in her dialogs, plots, or characters? Did you find these enriched your experience of the novel?
14. Play casting director and discuss who you would cast in a movie version of *The Ladies of Garrison Gardens*.
15. Since becoming friends with the three Miss Margarets, and learning the truth about her father, Laurel has mellowed, gained some self esteem, and is no longer as self destructive as she used to be – do you believe that kind of change can really happen to someone at her age? Do you know someone who has changed in this way?
16. Do you believe The Weiner is the right guy for Laurel? If not, who would you choose for Laurel? If you answered yes, do you believe Laurel has evolved enough to appreciate him?
17. Laurel and Peggy finally found a relationship that filled in the gaps for each other before Peggy died. Have you seen this kind of relationship yourself, or have you experienced it personally?
18. Even though Laurel and Miss Myrtis never met and it would seem as if they couldn't be more different, they are sisters under the skin, and Laurel will be picking up the torch for Myrtis. Do you think life and history often work like that? Do we have connections to people from the past that we aren't even aware of? Do you believe that we finish their unfinished business?
19. Iva Claire was a child who became her mother's mother. Do you think this happens more often than we know with mothers and daughters? What about your relationship with your mother or grandmother – what characteristics do you share with them?
20. Do you think the tragedy that occurred when Iva Claire lost her temper would have happened if she hadn't been defending her mother?