

**Recommended Reading for Girls**  
By Ellen Struve  
Character Breakdown (in order of appearance)

- \*HEIDI: Swiss girl, speaks German, prominently featured in the novel Heidi by Johanna Spyri.
- MARILYNN SAUNDERS: 59 years old, an avid reader, currently undergoing chemotherapy for recurrence.
- AMY SAUNDERS: 32 years old, a recently laid off database manager, Marilynn's youngest daughter.
- JACKIE SAUNDERS MORAN: 36 years old and 36 weeks pregnant, a graphic designer, Amy's older sister.
- \*SARA CREWE: British girl, prominently featured in the novel A Little Princess by Frances Hodgson Burnett
- \*ANNE SHIRLEY: Canadian girl, prominently featured in the novel Anne of Green Gables by L. M. Montgomery
- \*PENNY PARKER: American girl, amateur detective and reporter, prominently featured in the Penny Parker mysteries series by Mildred Wirt Benson (The original author of 31 Nancy Drew™ mysteries.)

\*All literary roles may be played by adults.

Place

The Saunders family home

Time

The beginning of spring.

AMY

No, Mom really. I can go.

MARILYNN

I wouldn't be so sure. Those things can knock you out. They do me.

AMY

But.

MARILYNN

Why don't you go on up to your room and get some rest?

*MARILYNN exits to kitchen.*

Scene 3

*Upstairs, AMY is reading in bed. Downstairs SARA CREWE is ironing sheets. ANNE SHIRLEY is polishing the furniture. JACKIE enters by the front door. She is wearing a particularly heinous maternity top with a bow.*

JACKIE

Hello?

ANNE SHIRLEY

Good afternoon.

SARA CREW

Hello.

JACKIE

Still here.

ANNE SHIRLEY

Oh, I hope you don't think we have overstepped our bounds. We didn't mean to interfere with your responsibilities.

JACKIE

Where is... uh?

SARA CREWE

The Woman On the Couch is still out. Miss Amy was upstairs resting, but I believe she may now be reading a book.

JACKIE

Fantastic.

ANNE SHIRLEY

It is, isn't it?

SARA CREWE

Would you care for something to eat?

JACKIE

No.

SARA CREWE

Heidi has been baking all morning. You mustn't hurt her feelings. She is rather sensitive.

*(to Heidi)* Das Dienstmädchen ist hier. Bring ein Tablett!

Eng: "The servant is here, make her a tray"

JACKIE

Where's the other one?

ANNE SHIRLEY

Just down the hall, I think.

JACKIE

Snooping.

*HEIDI comes out from the kitchen covered in flour with a tray with a slice of bread and butter, paper doily maybe some kind of vase. Ridiculous. She sets it down.*

ANNE SHIRLEY

Oh I don't think you should say that. Even though it's true. I find that people who simply say things that are true get into trouble for it. I am forever getting into trouble for it.

SARA CREWE

*(to Jackie)* Danka shöen.

JACKIE

Danka shöen. Sorry about not recognizing you earlier.

*ANNE SHIRLEY and SARA CREWE fold sheets. They are amazing at it.*

ANNE SHIRLEY

Oh, that's perfectly alright. You can't very well be expected to know everything. Please don't imagine we aren't sympathetic to your plight. We have, all of us, well almost all of us, been servants at some point. But just because you're a servant doesn't mean you can't gain the benefits of knowledge.

Even in your (*beat*) advanced condition, you might improve your situation.

SARA CREWE

Perhaps we could provide some valuable instruction?

JACKIE

In what, sheet ironing?

SARA CREWE

If you wish, but I had rather thought you might wish to learn how to read, despite your condition.

ANNE SHIRLEY

We could teach you! I'm first in my class. I taught half the younger students. Heidi taught Peter and Sara is used to teaching servants. Why, we're practically experts.

JACKIE

You think I'm a servant who can't read?

*PENNY PARKER enters from Marilyn's room.  
JACKIE picks up the plate with the bread.*

PENNY

Oh good, the Housekeeper's here.

JACKIE

What's wrong with you people? What is it about me that makes you think I am an illiterate maid?

*LITERARY GIRLS look at Jackie's gigantic belly.*

I am not a servant. I can read. So? What? I'm pregnant. I'm going to have a baby. That's what happens when/

*All the girls except HEIDI drop what they are doing and pay rapt attention.*

PENNY PARKER

What? That's what happens when what?

*JACKIE loses courage.*

JACKIE

Some mysteries are better left unsolved.

*PENNY PARKER grabs HEIDI's hand and leads her to the kitchen. Jackie has a moment of introspection.*

PENNY PARKER

Come on kid, nothing interesting is going on out here.

JACKIE

Oh God.

ANNE SHIRLEY

Oh no! Is it your condition? Are you ill?

JACKIE

I'm just... turning into my mother.

ANNE SHIRLEY

Well, you can read at least. I'm relieved. I simply wouldn't be able to live if I couldn't read.

SARA CREWE

If you can read, how is it you did not know us?

ANNE SHIRLEY

Perhaps her drunken husband prevented her? All the women I have known in her condition had drunken husbands.

JACKIE

I don't have a drunken husband. (*LITERARY GIRLS react.*) I mean, I have a husband. Look, just because I didn't know who you all were doesn't mean anything. Books weren't my thing. They were Amy's thing. Mom's thing. Not mine. I'm just not all that interested in stories.

ANNE SHIRLEY

Not interested in stories?

SARA CREWE

I should not have survived without stories. Are you never distressed? Do you never have need of comfort?

JACKIE

Nope. I'm good.

SARA CREWE

But, books and stories and make believe give you so many places to go and so many people to see.

ANNE SHIRLEY

And really, the most dreadful, wonderful, horrible heart-breaking things happen in books.

JACKIE

See, that's it, that's the problem. People like Amy read all these books and they think life is like that. There's that phrase--- Lose yourself in a book. Yeah. Lose yourself. That's the problem.

*PENNY enters.*

I mean, I get that Amy has totally lost it.

PENNY PARKER

What exactly is it she has lost? It could be important. It could be the missing clue.

JACKIE

I get that Amy has lost her grip on reality. What I don't get is why I should have to see you too. I didn't even recognize you. I should be immune.

SARA CREWE

If that is your concern, Amy assured us The Woman on the Couch is not contagious.

JACKIE

I should be immune to you. I am pregnant. I have a condition. And that is scary enough.

ANNE SHIRLEY

I agree. That is very bad. I worked in households with babies. Babies are terrifying. I hope it won't be twins.

JACKIE

It won't be.

ANNE SHIRLEY

Good. Then it will be only half as terrifying.

JACKIE

You have a lot of experience with babies?

ANNE SHIRLEY

Certainly.

JACKIE

Is it really hard?

ANNE SHIRLEY

It is constant work, but. But wait. You aren't truly a servant are you?

JACKIE

No.

ANNE SHIRLEY

And have you never been a servant?

JACKIE

No.

ANNE SHIRLEY

Then do you have servants?

JACKIE

No.

ANNE SHIRLEY

And have you ever taken care of babies before?

JACKIE

No.

ANNE SHIRLEY

Then yes. I suppose it shall really be terribly, terribly, horribly difficult.

SARA CREWE

Don't worry. Very often people don't survive it to begin with. My mother didn't.

JACKIE

AMY! Get down here. You better be reading the complete idiot's guide to exterminating unwanted pests.

*AMY reluctantly closes her book and goes downstairs. LITERARY GIRLS exit.*

Hey there Miss Amy.

AMY

Holy Moly. Did the birds and the mice get together and make that for you?

JACKIE

Todd's mom bought it.

AMY

I don't think she cares for you.

*PENNY PARKER sneaks back in.*

JACKIE

Apparently my morning ensemble made me look like the maid. I thought you were going to handle this.

AMY (to PENNY PARKER)

Could you keep lookout?

*PENNY PARKER exits to MARILYNN's room.*

JACKIE

How exactly is this handling it?

*AMY puts some bread from the tray in JACKIE's mouth.*

AMY

Eat.

*JACKIE eats the bread.*

Good isn't it. Totally homemade. I mean Totally. Like even the butter.

JACKIE

You can't make butter.

AMY

Yeah you can, we did it in Kindergarten, you just need milkfat and a certain level of intensity. Look at this.

*AMY picks the baby blanket up off the railing.*

JACKIE

Is that my blanket? It's beautiful. You made this?

AMY

No. It has cables...

*AMY pulls a baby sweater from underneath the blanket.*

and a matching sweater. They did it.

JACKIE

It's adorable.

AMY

That's why they're here.



JACKIE

They've come for the baby?

AMY

No, they're here to fix everything. This blanket was a wreck. Now look at it. Think about it. These girls. That's what they do. They make things better. They make people better people. They make people better period.

JACKIE

They make a better butter.

AMY

I'm serious. Look at us. We were pissed at each other. Now, here we are, eating amazingly tasty fresh bread. This is their purpose. They mend broken hearts, and find lost treasure and get people out of their wheelchairs just by pushing them down a mountain. They can do it.

JACKIE

Do what?

AMY

Convince her to do the trial.

JACKIE

I thought you were going to convince Mom to do the trial.

AMY

I tried that. She drugged me and sent me to my room. But she'll listen to them. I know she will. That's why they are here. They can cure her.

*(Beat)*

JACKIE

You can't just say that to me.

AMY

See, you are worried. You're just as worried as I am.

JACKIE

You can't just say that to me because I am having a baby. You can't just say that to me because we both know sometimes things do not work out like *you* think they will. When Todd and I decided to go ahead with this plan, she was fine. And she was going to help out. And I was going to work part-time. And everything was going to be easy. And then I got pregnant and then she... wasn't fine.

AMY

You're not worried. You're mad. You're mad at Mom.

JACKIE

Shut up.

AMY

Hey, I am angry at Mom for a lot of stuff too, but I'm angry at her for stuff she actually did wrong. You're angry at her for something she can't do anything about.

JACKIE

Please, you're still mad at mom about Amar. It's not like Mom could've done anything about Amar.

AMY

She could've if she'd wanted to.

JACKIE

Really? Mom could've made you Indian? Because that was pretty much his parents' big objection as I recall.

AMY

She could've made us feel like someone was on our side.

JACKIE

Let me get this straight. Are these girls here to fix Mom or are they here to fix you?

AMY

I am not broken.

JACKIE

And I am not angry.

*PENNY PARKER enters, cooing in frantic signal.*

PENNY PARKER

The pigeon has come home to roost.

*JACKIE and AMY don't get it.*

*PENNY PARKER grabs HEIDI to go upstairs.*

AMY

Wait.

JACKIE

Be sure about this. They think pregnant women can't read.

AMY

They think single women are evil. She will love them.

*We hear MARILYNN coming in. AMY is torn.*