

# READING GROUP NOTES

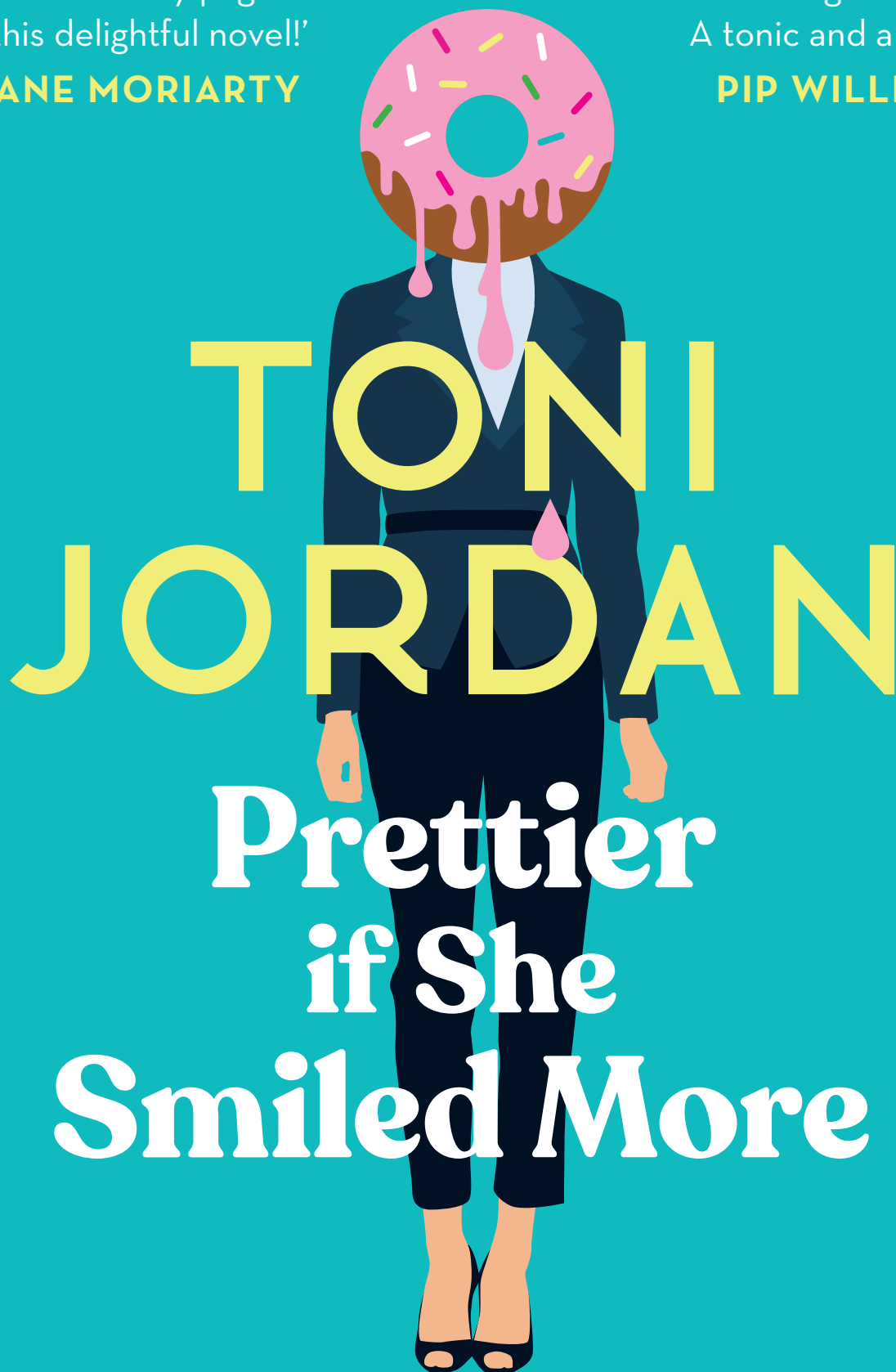
PRAISE FOR *DINNER WITH THE SCHNABELS*

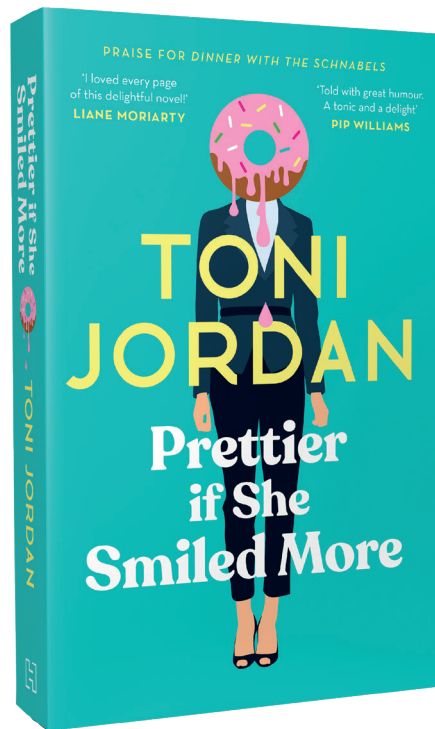
'I loved every page  
of this delightful novel!'

**LIANE MORIARTY**

'Told with great humour.  
A tonic and a delight'

**PIP WILLIAMS**





## ABOUT THE BOOK

As the eldest child in a single-parent family, Kylie's always had more important things on her mind than smiling for random strangers. Controlling her job, her home, her romantic life and - most importantly - her family takes all her concentration. She's always succeeded, though, because that's just who Kylie is.

When her fiercely independent mother breaks an ankle and needs help, it's up to Kylie, as usual, to fix things. She reluctantly packs her bags and moves in, but back in her childhood home, things start to unravel. Could it be that Kylie's carefully curated life is not so perfect after all?

*Prettier if She Smiled More* will make you laugh and make you cry. Is it too late to start over?



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Toni Jordan has worked as a molecular biologist, quality control chemist, TAB operator and door-to-door aluminium siding salesperson. She is the author of six novels including the international bestseller *Addition*, which was longlisted for the Miles Franklin Award, *Nine Days*, which was awarded Best Fiction at the 2012 Indie Awards and was named in Kirkus Review's top 10 Historical Novels of 2013, and *Our Tiny, Useless Hearts*, which was longlisted for the International Dublin Literary Award. Toni has been published widely in newspapers and magazines. She holds a Bachelor of Science in physiology and a PhD in Creative Arts. Toni lives in Melbourne.

## GENERAL

1. How does the reading experience of *Prettier If She Smiled More* compare to Toni Jordan's previous book in the same universe, *Dinner with the Schnabels*?
2. What do you think the book's cover is trying to convey about Kylie and her journey?
3. What does the title *Prettier if She Smiled More* reveal about the essence of this book?

## WRITING STYLE

4. This novel is structured as days of the week, as in *Dinner with the Schnabels*. What purpose does this structure have, do you think?
5. Sarcasm and humour play a significant role in *Prettier If She Smiled More*. How does it enhance the story of Kylie and the Schnabels? What are some of the funniest moments that made you laugh out loud?
6. Much of Kylie's anguish towards having to be the responsible child is internal monologue. How does this compare to her external disposition among peers?

## KEY THEMES

### Theme #1: Family

7. How do the family dynamics of the Schnabels differ from a typical nuclear family?
8. As the eldest child in the Schnabel family, how does Kylie's expectations of herself differ from her perceived or real expectations of her younger siblings?
9. Kylie's reactions to potentially being pregnant are denial, resignation and ultimately contentment. In what ways do Kylie's past and present familial experiences inform her attitude towards a pregnancy and how does this change over time?

### Theme #2: Resilience

10. Kylie faces Three Disasters: Pharmacy King, Colin and Gloria. How does each disaster contribute to the overall character arc that Kylie undergoes throughout the story? What does it reveal about Kylie that she categorises these three events in the way she does?
11. After her breakup with Colin, Kylie appears unbothered and characteristically logical, as below. How do Kylie's feelings towards Colin change over the course of the book?

*'Really. Having a boyfriend meant putting up with so much inconvenience, and for what? Nice shoulders/neck; nice, regular if unimaginative and abbreviated sex, and allergies.'* (p.75)

### Theme #3: Wellbeing

12. Even if she doesn't admit it to herself explicitly, Kylie feels lonely. Why do you think Kylie has a hard time acknowledging her own emotional struggles?

*'The people waiting around her were mostly in pairs, Kylie noticed. Kylie was the only one on her own.'* (p.85)

13. Kylie's revelations at the end of the book reveal that her childhood significantly altered the course of her career and life. What feelings does Kylie experience during this revelation?
14. Emotional paralysis is deeply explored. For instance, Kylie feels stuck in her ways as a result of family expectations that she has internalised from childhood. However, Kylie also finds comfort in the familiar, such as the pharmacy. How does Kylie deal with this paralysis? Has she overcome it by the end of the book, do you think? What could she do to overcome this paralysis?

## KEY CHARACTERS

### Kylie

15. What is Kylie's relationship with and attitudes towards her siblings? Is this typical for an eldest child, do you think, or is Kylie an extreme case?
16. Kylie is often described by the people around her as fierce, independent and stern, as below. Do you think this is a positive or negative attribute? Does Kylie agree?

*"You know how little girls want to be princesses? Not her. Queen Kylie, we used to call her."*

*'Princesses have no practical power. They're subordinate,' Kylie said. 'Only the monarch has royal prerogative recognised in common law.'*

*'You must have been a fascinating child,' said Alice.'* (p.68-69)

17. While at the bar with Tansy, Gloria and Alice post-Colin, Kylie ruminates over the relationships she values in life. What are your thoughts on her discontent towards romantic relationships? Is she being honest with herself in this scene?

*'Who cared about boyfriends? The most important relationships in life were the ones with other women.'* (p.75)

### **Gloria**

18. Gloria and Kylie often come into conflict with each other. Does their conflict derive from Gloria being a foil to Kylie's character - or a reflection of it?

*This, right here, was the reason Kylie and Gloria clashed. Why couldn't she just do as she was told? Why did she insist on having things her own way all the time?* (p.80)

and

*'Soon her Fitbit would need charging and she hadn't brought the charger and Gloria wouldn't have one - that kind of sensible monitoring of her health parameters was in direct opposition to Gloria's laissez-faire approach to everything.'* (p.94)

19. Why does Gloria resist when Kylie tries to employ a nurse to care for her during her ankle recovery?  
20. Gloria's tennis open day is a rowdy event, but she remains calm throughout. What does Kylie learn about dealing with uncertainty and messiness during this event?  
21. Kylie remarks that Gloria is 'frivolous' and an 'anti-feminist' example of the patriarchy because she enjoys wearing makeup regularly (p.102). What does this observation reveal about Kylie's and Gloria's characters respectively?

## **CONTEMPORARY ISSUES**

### **The Cult of Wellness**

22. Kylie's Fitbit is a character unto itself. What does it represent in Kylie's life and how might this be reflective of broader society?  
23. Often, physical wellness is considered a symptom of 'having your life together'. How could this be a detriment to one's overall health and wellbeing?

### **Pandemic**

24. As in its predecessor, *Prettier If She Smiled More* makes casual reference to the COVID-19 pandemic. How does it feel to read fiction which features the pandemic? What challenges do you think the pandemic poses for writers of fiction?

