

Book Club Questions – *Saving the Ghost* by M E Fuller

At the end of the first chapter, Ellen feels an unstoppable rise of panic begin to radiate throughout her body. What did you imagine was happening to her and why?

*“For ten years I’ve been depression free—not sober— so I don’t get a chip or a cake or an atta girl. But then, I don’t have a group to acknowledge my anonymity. I’m in recovery in secret.”* Did Ellen have options other than struggling in secrecy and isolation? How does this compare to Mercy keeping the family tragedy a secret?

Ellen is at the beginning of her road to uncover the depths of her pain from childhood abuse. She asks herself, *“Why now?”* How has the funeral of her father brought her to this moment?

What did Ellen hope to accomplish by confronting her mother, Virginia?

Why do you think Virginia was so cold and detached from her daughter in child and adulthood? What might have been her story?

What is the impact on Ellen, of her mother’s suicide? Why do you think she killed herself?

After her mother’s death, Ellen decides to return to Capitol to see Mercy. She believes that connecting with Mercy, as she did in childhood, will bring closure to her *“family book of horrors.”* What are her expectations of Mercy? Are they realistic?

Ellen discusses her plan to visit Mercy with her neighbor, Patsy. *“If I’m honest, I’m still looking for someone to pay for my pain. She’s a nice old lady—but there it is.”* Why does she change her plan and reroute to Ely, opting for isolation over confrontation?

Ellen recalls her first car ride with her mother to Capitol. What are the contrasts for her between life with her parents and life with family in the north woods? How could this model of family life have enabled her to cover up her pain?

Ellen fantasized that Nellie Jane was her real mother and vowed that someday she would live in Capitol, with Nellie Jane in her cabin. How did this attachment and vow actualize in her adult life?

Ned and Ellen argue at the cabin. Ellen is driven deeper into isolation as Ned pushes for his right to be heard. Why is she so angry?

How do you think Ellen’s vision brought her to a place of calm? How did the experience help in her healing?

Ellen makes her trip to Capitol to visit with Mercy who confesses that she’s always been afraid of her brother, Ellen’s father. Ellen tells her aunt of her father’s abuse and her mother’s neglect. Mercy then recounts the family tragedy, the brutality of her own father and her brothers, William and Terry. Why did Mercy withhold the truth about Nellie Jane?

Ellen tells Mercy and Nellie Jane that she wants to visit the old family farmland. Mercy and Nellie Jane attempt to discourage her interest in the place. Why?

Ellen and Ned make the move to Capitol. They both feel connected to the community and family. Life is rolling along smoothly until Nellie Jane dies in a car accident and CiCi reveals that she has cancer. Ellen's stress level is high when Lydia arrives, looking for Mercy. Why does Ellen take an instant dislike to Lydia?

Nellie Jane left her cabin to Ellen. Mercy encourages Ellen to sell the property to Lydia for a family getaway. Ellen eventually agrees to sell. Why?

Cousin Missy arrives at the urging of her mother, Mercy. Ned, Ellen, and Missy gather at Mercy's, who reveals the truth about Nellie Jane. Why is Mercy telling the story now? How does the truth affect Ellen?

Ellen is in a state of profound depression. How does CiCi help her?

Ellen's struggles to be heard as a unique individual suffering in a collective of family pain. *"I'm stuck between what I want, which is fantasy, and what I can have, which is reality."* Though the battle is unresolved, she comes out of her depression. How did that happen?

Why does Ellen want to try again to connect with her uncle, Terry? What are her expectations?

Ellen and Ned return to Capitol after CiCi's funeral. They are awakened by sounds of others in the house. Members of Lydia's family with Mercy are preparing food for Ellen's birthday. Why would Mercy be so disrespectful of Ellen's need to grieve?

Why does Ellen have such a difficult time at Carl's welcoming party?

Spring is coming and Ellen is feeling stronger than ever. She is more often intimate with Ned. How does sexual intimacy speak to Ellen's healing?

Why does Ellen find Lydia so intrusive? And how does this lead to a fight between Ned and Ellen, sending her back to the cabin in Ely?

Ellen, at the cabin, catches a glimpse of what it means to forgive. She is eager to share this epiphany with Mercy. She tells Mercy she's ready to move forward and Mercy dies. How does this derail Ellen's move toward forgiveness?

When Lydia takes over the reception after Mercy's funeral, Ellen is enraged and leave for home. A community of women arrive at her house to be with her. They knew the truth about Nellie Jane all along. What made them decide to support Ellen?

Lydia and Ellen face off. What is the confrontation about? What is the outcome?

Ellen, feeling the healing, wants to share her story with Terry. What does she hope to accomplish by attempting to see him again?

How does violence against Ned bring Ellen's journey into focus?

Why did Carl and Lydia leave Capitol?

Why doesn't Ellen read Terry's journal?

What is the significance of the new Stetson?