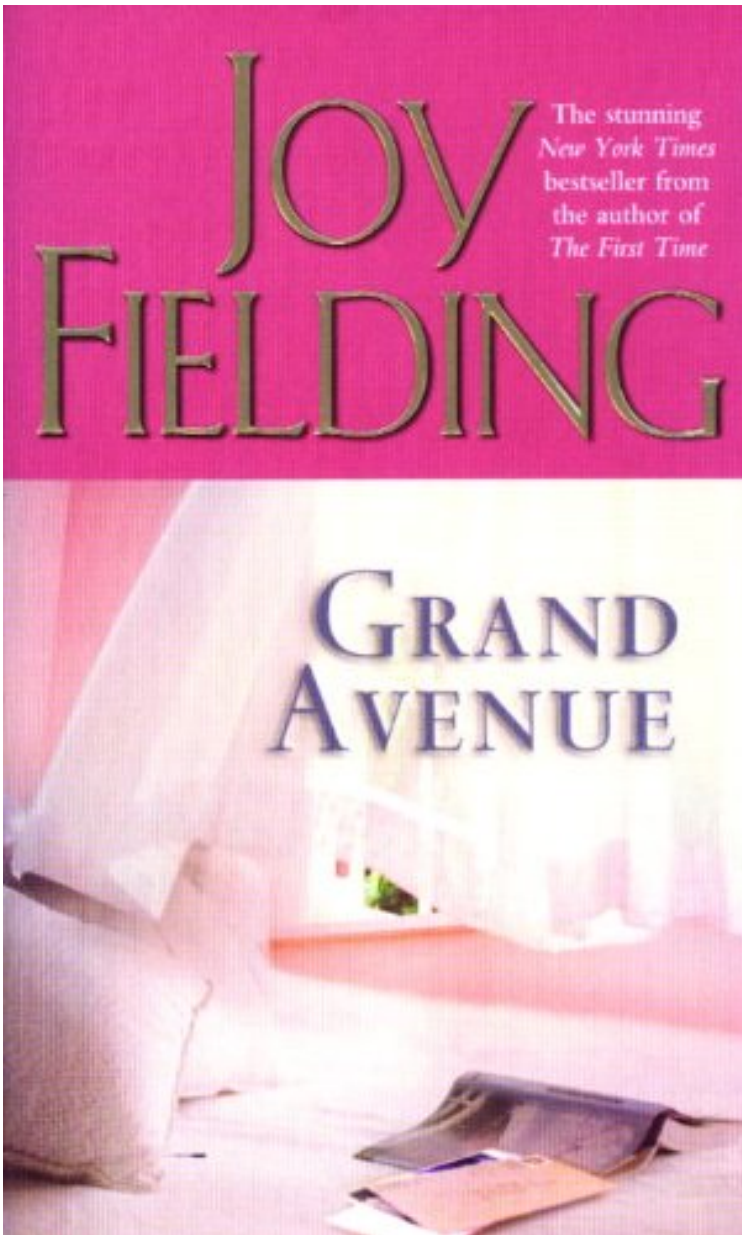


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Grand Avenue



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFor four women, the bonds of friendship had sustained them for twenty years, through marriage, motherhood and murder.Looking back, it seemed like paradise lives filled with the blessings of friendship, marriage, children and career. Over twenty years, four friends shared everything through good times and bad, and together they faced the challenges of life and love head on. Now, one of their number sits alone to ponder the strange twists and turns of fate and the unpredictability of circumstance. Now, she must sift through each of their pasts to discover exactly what went wrong, how dreams turned to nightmares, how

friendships faded and how lives were destroyed. In this powerful novel, Joy Fielding explores the bonds women forge, the nature of friendships, and the meaning of unconditional love. From the Paperback edition.

Extrait Introduction

We called ourselves the Grand Dames: four women of varying height, weight, and age, with shockingly little in common, or so it seemed at the time of our initial meeting some twenty-three years ago, other than that we all lived on the same quiet tree-lined street, were all married to ambitious and successful men, and each had a daughter around the age of two. The street was named Grand Avenue, and despite the changes the years have brought to Mariemont, the upscale suburb of Cincinnati in which we lived, the street itself has remained remarkably the same: a series of wood-framed houses set well back from the road, the road itself winding lazily away from the busy main street it intersects toward the small park at its opposite end. It was in this park—the Grand Parkette, as the city council had christened the tiny triangle of land, unaware of the inherent irony—that we first met almost a quarter of a century ago, four grown women making a beeline for three children's swings, knowing the looser would be relegated to the sandbox, her disappointed youngster loudly wailing her displeasure for the rest of the world to hear. Not the first time a mother has failed to live up to her daughter's expectations. Certainly not the last. I don't remember who lost that race, or who started talking to whom, or even what that initial conversation was about. I remember only how easily the words flowed amongst us, how seamlessly we moved from one topic to another, the familiar anecdotes, the understanding smiles, the welcome, if unexpected, intimacy of it all, all the more welcome precisely because it was so unexpected. More than anything else, I remember the laughter. Even now, so many years later, so many tears later—and despite everything that happened, the unforeseen, sometimes horrifying detours our lives took—I can still hear it, the undisciplined, yet curiously melodious collection of giggles and guffaws that shuffled between octaves with varying degrees of intensity, each laugh a signature, as different as were ourselves. Yet, how well those diverse sounds blended together, how harmonious the end result. For years, I carried the sound of that early laughter with me wherever I went. I summoned it at will. It sustained me. Maybe because there was so little of it later on. We stayed in the park that day until it started raining, a sudden summer shower no one was prepared for, and one of us suggested transferring the impromptu party to someone's house. It must have been me, because we ended up at my house. Or maybe it was just that my home was closest to the park. I don't remember. I do remember the basement, shoes off, hair wet, clothes damp, drinking freshly brewed coffee and still laughing, as we watched our daughters parallel-play at our feet, guiltily aware that we were having more fun than they were, that our children would just as soon be in their own homes, where they didn't have to share their toys, or compete with strangers for their mother's attention. "We should form a club," one of the women suggested. "Do this on a regular basis." "Great idea," the rest of us quickly agreed. To commemorate the occasion, I dug out my husband's badly neglected Kodak Super 8 movie camera, at which I was hopeless as I am with its modern counterpart, and the end result was something less than satisfactory, lots of quick, jerky movements and blurred women missing the tops of their heads. A few years ago, I had the film transferred to VHS, and, strangely enough, it looks much better. Maybe it's the improved technology, or my wide-screen TV, ten feet by twelve that descends from the ceiling with the mere push of a button. Or maybe it's that my vision has blurred just enough to compensate for my failure as a technician, because the women now seem clear, very much in focus. Looking at the film today, what strikes me most, what, in fact, never fails to take my breath away, no matter how many times I view it, is not just how ineffably, unbearably young we all were, but how everything we were—and everything we were to become—was already present in those miraculously unlined faces. And yet, if you were to ask me to look into those seemingly happy faces and predict their futures, even now, twenty-three years later, when I know only too well how everything turned out, I couldn't do it. Even knowing what I know, it is impossible for me to reconcile these women with their fate. Is that the reason I return so often to this tape? Am I looking for answers? Maybe it's justice I'm seeking. Maybe peace. Or resolution. Maybe it's as simple—and difficult—as that. I only know that when I look at these four young women, myself included, our youth captured, imprisoned, as it were, on video tape, I see four strangers. Not one feels more familiar to me than the rest. I am as foreign to myself as any of the others. They say that the eyes are the mirror of the soul. Can anyone staring into the eyes of these four women really pretend to see so deep? And those sweet innocent babies in their mothers' arms— is there even one among you who can see beyond those big tender eyes, who can hear the heart of a monster beating below? I don't think so. We see what we want to see. So there we sit, in a kind of free-form semi-circle, taking our turns smiling and waving for the camera, four beguilingly average women thrown together by random circumstances and a suddenly rainy afternoon. Our names were as ordinary as we were: Susan, Vicki, Barbara and Chris. Common enough

names for the women of our generation. Our daughters, of course, are a different story altogether. Children of the seventies, and products of our imaginative and privileged loins, our offspring were anything but ordinary, or so each of us was thoroughly convinced, and their names reflected that conviction: Ariel, Kirsten, Tracey, an Montana. Yes, Montana. That's her on the far right, the fair-haired, apple-cheeked cherub kicking angrily at her mother's ankles, huge navy blue eyes filling with bitter tears, just before her chubby little legs carry her rigid little body out of the camera's range. No one is able to figure out the source of this sudden outburst, especially her mother, Chris, who does her best to placate the little girl, to coax her back into the safety of her outstretched arms. To no avail. Montana remains stubbornly outside the frame, unwilling to be cajoled or comforted. Chris holds this uneasy posture for some time, perched on the end of her high-backed chair, slim arms extended and empty. Her shoulder-length blond hair is pulled back and away from her heart-shaped face into a high pony-tail, so that she looks more like the well-scrubbed teenaged babysitter than a woman approaching thirty. The look on her face says she will wait forever for her daughter to forgive her these imagined transgressions and come back to where she belongs. It seems inconceivable to me now, and yet I know it to be true, that not one of us considered herself especially pretty, let alone beautiful. Yet Barbara, who was a former Miss Cincinnati and a finalist for the title of Miss Ohio, and who never abandoned her fondness for big hair and stiletto heels, was constantly plagued by self-doubt, always worrying about her weight and agonizing over each tiny wrinkle that teased at the skin around her large brown eyes and full, almost obscenely lush lips. That's her, beside Chris. Her tall helmet of dark hair has been somewhat flattened by the rain, and her stylish Ferragamo pumps lie abandoned by the front door amidst the other women's sandals and sneakers, but her posture is still beauty pageant perfect. Barbara never wore flats, even to the park, and she didn't own a pair of blue jeans. She was never less than impeccably dressed, and, from the time she was fifteen, no one had ever seen her without full make-up, and that included her husband, Ron. She confessed to the group that in the four years they'd been married, she'd been getting up at six o'clock every morning, a full half-hour before her husband, to shower and do her hair and make-up. Ron had fallen in love with Miss Cincinnati, she proclaimed, as if addressing a panel of judges. Just because she was now a Mrs. didn't give her the right to fall down on the job. Even on weekends, she was out of bed early enough to make sure she was suitably presentable before her daughter, Tracey, woke up, demanding to be fed. Not that Tracey was ever one to make demands. According to Barbara, her daughter was, in every respect, the perfect child. In fact, the only difficulty she'd ever had with Tracey had been in the hours before her birth, when the nine-pound-plus infant, securely settled in a breech position, and not particularly anxious to make an appearance, refused to drop or turn around, and had to be taken by Caesarian section, leaving a scar that ran from Barbara's belly-button to her pubis. Today, of course, doctors generally opt for the less disfiguring, more cosmetically appealing cross-cut, one that disturbs fewer muscles and lies hidden beneath the bikini line. Barbara's bikini days were behind her, she acknowledged ruefully. Something else to fret over. Something else that separated the Mrs.' from the Miss Cincinnati of this world. Watch how regally Barbara slides off her chair and onto the floor, casually securing her skirt beneath her knees while showing her eighteen-month-old daughter the best way to stack the blocks she's been struggling with, patiently picking them up whenever they fall down, encouraging Tracey to try again, ultimately stacking them herself, then restacking them each time her daughter accidentally knocks them over. Any second now, Tracey will curl into her mother's protective arms, the dark curls she inherited from Barbara surrounding her porcelain doll face, and close her eyes in sleep. "There was a little girl," I can still hear Barbara say, in that soothing singsong voice she always affected when talking to her daughter, as I watch her lips moving silently on the film, "who had a little cu...Revue de presse Library Journal Emotionally compelling...Hard to put down...Fielding fully develops her four women characters, each of whom is exquisitely revealed.