



One Sunday Morning

By Amy Ephron
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Introduction

One Sunday Morning is an elegant study of morality and discretion among a group of friends, set in the 1920's in New York and Paris. Ephron's precise and beautifully crafted prose conveys a depth and understanding of both timeless human nature, and a specific era, with grace and economy. In this spare yet expansive story, one chance event affects the lives of a group of friends in surprising ways. When Mary Nell and her friends happen to catch a glimpse of Lizzie Carswell emerging from a hotel with Billy Holmes the morning after a party, they each promise not to tell. But this vow is hard to keep. Ephron's portrayal of New York society of the time, with its rigid concept of propriety and morality, is both accurate and evocative of a time gone by, while also ringing true for our time and culture. She opens up the nightlife of 1926 in a way that allows readers to feel that they've been there. And the story of Lizzie Carswell's supposed transgression, and the way it echoes in the lives of each character, contains truth and understanding of the most complex of human lives. Ephron places her characters at a moment in their lives where hope meets reality, and youthful fantasies dissolve in the face of real behavior. Mary, the main character, encounters disappointment, and learns from it, and then makes the choice to use it in a creative way. The narrative itself is then seen to be evidence of what Mary learns. Ephron's book works like a Victorian jewelry box. Press the right spring, and secret compartments open up to reveal unexpected treasures.

Questions for Discussion

1. The book opens with the scene in which the girls see Lizzie Carswell from a window. This scene is then repeated a few pages later as it happens in the narrative. This passage then ends the book as well. How does the effect of the passage change each time it appears? What is the effect of this repetition on the reader?
2. At the time, Mary wonders if what they've observed would have seemed quite so important if Betsy Owen had not commented on it. In what ways does Betsy's comment serve to give a meaning to the scene of Lizzie leaving the hotel? Why are Lizzie's actions important to her?
3. This story takes place during the years of Prohibition, and yet it also shows how free the times were for young people of a certain class, with speakeasies and plenty of alcohol and drugs, and a tolerance of transgressive behavior. Does this set up a contradiction in the characters' lives? In what ways is this revealed?
4. What do you think it is that attracts Mary to Geoffrey Rice? What does this attraction reveal about her character?
5. Of all the women, Lucy Collins seems to be the one who most aggressively pursues exposing Billy and, yet, on a closer look, Lucy is also the one who has a secret. Does this seem a contradiction? Lucy, also, has made the most traditional choices of all, marrying young, etc., yet she has enormous conflict about the choices she has made and not pursuing other roads. Is this true for women today?
6. In a way, Billy Holmes is the one who is "keeping up appearances". As his conflict becomes apparent, how does this affect the other characters? And do you think it's a conflict that is of its era or do some of the same complications exist today?
7. Mary and Geoffrey discuss their feelings about weddings and about the institution of marriage. (Pages 89-90) How are their responses different from each other, and what might this tell us about their possible future together? Do you feel that the questions they raise here are still pertinent in today's world?
8. With which character in this story did you most identify, and why?
9. Which character do you think learns the most, or changes the most, in this story, and why?

About the Author

Amy Ephron is the author of *White Rose*, *A Cup of Tea*, *Cool Shades*, *Bruised Fruit*, and *Biodegradable Soap*. She lives in Los Angeles, California, where she also works in the film industry.