



The Maytrees

By Annie Dillard
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Introduction

In post World War II Cape Cod, Toby Maytree falls in love with Lou Bigelow, a reserved, Ingrid Bergman-like beauty. The two lovers marry and live among their bohemian friends in a shack on the Provincetown seaside. The Maytrees need very little to pass their days: books, poetry, painting. The arrival of their young son Petie seemingly completes them. Years later, Toby leaves Lou for their friend, free-spirited Deary. Lou stays in Provincetown with her grief, living alone, and even enjoying her solitude, while Toby and Deary move to Maine. When Toby finally returns, it's to ask Lou the unthinkable: to care for dying Deary. A story of love and affection, *The Maytrees* follows the ebb and flow of life and forgiveness, and our very tenacious existence on this planet.

Questions for Discussion

- 1) When Maytree asks, "Say, Lou—here's a question. Keats put, 'Who shall say between Man and Woman which is the more delighted?' What do you think?" Lou answers "The woman." Why does Lou add later that night as Maytree is falling asleep, "If the man is John Keats" (page 38)?
- 2) What does Maytree feel towards Lou when Pete gets hit by the car? Why does her forgiveness of the driver so upset him, and how does her ability to forgive ultimately bring him back to her?
- 3) How does Toby and Lou's love for each other mimic the ebb and flow of the seaside?
- 4) Lou's father left her when she was young. How does this influence how she handles Toby leaving her?
- 5) Most of the Maytrees friends, including Deary, fall in and out of relationships. Despite the still conservative post World War II era, none of these relationships feel salacious. How and why does it take on a different feeling when it happens to the Maytrees?
- 6) What does the book's sparse landscape and living on the edge of a forceful sea say about our time here on Earth?
- 7) How does the book's title reflect its overall theme of acceptance?
- 8) *The Maytrees* has been hailed as a "meditation of love." How did this story make you feel about love?
- 9) Deary transforms herself from a Spartan bohemian to a materialistic New England matron. What do you feel triggers this abrupt change in her?
- 10) Does Toby misunderstand or take Lou's quietness for granted early in their relationship?

About the Author

Annie Dillard has written eleven books, including the memoir of her parents, *An American Childhood*; the Northwest pioneer epic *The Living*; and the nonfiction narrative *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. A gregarious recluse, she is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.