



The First Warm Evening of the Year

By Jamie M. Saul
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Questions for Discussion

1. Why do you think Laura Stevenson choose Geoffrey Tremont to be the executor of her estate? Why not her best friend, Marian, or her brother, Simon?
2. Laura and Geoffrey were close friends in college. Why did they drift apart? How can one rekindle an association from the past? Why is it difficult for many of us to sustain close bonds over time?
3. How does Geoffrey feel about Shady Grove when he arrives to settle Laura's affairs? What is it about the small town that appeals to him? How does the time he spends there compare to his life in New York City? What are your impressions of Shady Grove? If you live in a big city, could you relocate to a small town? What are the advantages? Are there drawbacks?
4. What draws Geoffrey Tremont to Marian Ballantine? How does meeting her affect who he is and the life he leads?
5. What does Marian think of Geoffrey? Why does she resist getting involved with him? What do you think of these two characters? Are they right for each other? Do they spend too much time analyzing and talking about love rather than allowing themselves to experience it? Or do they need distance and time to sort out their feelings and come to terms with what they truly want?
6. Simon, Marian's brother suddenly reappears in Geoffrey's life as well. What are the forces that have shaped their feelings towards one another? Are you sympathetic to Simon? How does Geoffrey's brother, Alex, complicate matters?
7. Describe Geoffrey's relationship with Alex. How do his insights and actions affect Geoffrey and the decisions he makes?
8. When Geoffrey meets Marian, he is involved with Rita D'Angellis. She calls their relationship "dysfunctional." Why? Do you agree?
9. Simon calls his sister, Laura, and Marian "losers" for their lives in Shady Grove. What makes him say this? Do you share his opinion? What is the difference between complacency and contentedness? Which word best describes each of the characters in the novel, both at its beginning and at the end?
10. Eliot Wooten has loved Marian for years, even though their relationship has never blossomed into romance. Why does Eliot remain constant? If Geoffrey hadn't appeared, would Marian have changed her mind about Eliot? Is being close enough to the one you love "good enough"? Do you think Eliot will have his own "Marian" kind of revelation as Geoffrey does?
11. While pursuing Marian, Geoffrey also contends with the ghost of her late husband, Buddy. Everyone talks about Buddy as if he were perfect, even Marian in her own way. How does this affect Geoffrey and his feelings about love and commitment? What about Marian? What changes her outlook on love and life?
12. What keeps many of the characters in *The First Warm Evening of the Year* from deeply connecting? How do they transform over the course of the novel? How do we form and sustain connections, especially as we get older? Is it easier or harder to be alone?
13. Does allowing yourself to experience love to have the capacity for passion make you "feel a little bit crazy," as Geoffrey tells Alex? Is love a form of madness? How do you define love?
14. "We were not in our twenties and starting out together, or in our thirties favoring the prospects, or reeling from the wreckage. After forty you'd better be prepared to recognize what your true needs are, and locate the better parts of yourself and who around you can best identify them," Geoffrey muses. Explain this insight. How do relationships change as we age and how do we manage the expectations we have for ourselves and our partners and for love itself as time goes by?
15. Think of three adjectives that best describe your feelings after reading *The First Warm Evening of the Year*. Explain why you chose those words using examples from the novel to explain your choices.