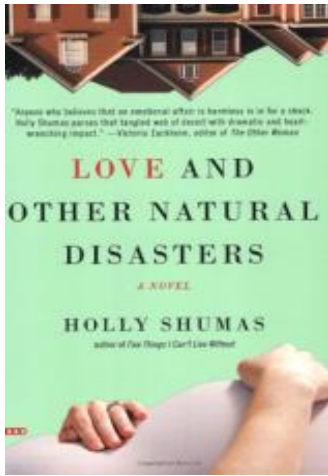


Love and Other Natural Disasters

by Holly Shumas



About the Book

Eve is eight months pregnant and in the middle of a Thanksgiving celebration when she discovers that her husband Jonathan has developed an intimate relationship with a woman over the past year. Jonathon asserts his innocence (an affair involves physical intimacy, and he didn't have any), while Eve feels deeply betrayed by the emotional connection he shared with someone else. What Jon has done seems so terrifyingly out of character that Eve finds herself questioning her entire reality. Did she ever really know Jon at all? Was their happiness together a lie? Is emotional intimacy more forgivable than sexual intimacy? And can their marriage survive?

Discussion Guide

1. After learning that her husband Jon has been emotionally involved with another woman for the past year, Eve thinks, "In all these years, I'd never had occasion to doubt Jon's love and fidelity. It was like suddenly finding out you've been living in someone else's marriage—someone else's bad marriage. I mean, these sorts of things don't happen in good marriages, do they?" Do they?
2. The first time Eve reads Jon's e-mail, she's doing it to prove his innocence. Does that make it less wrong? When she continues to do it, is her behavior justified by circumstance? If not, would it be justified by any circumstance?
3. Psychologist and infidelity expert Shirley Glass has said that there are three main traits that distinguish an emotional affair from an ordinary friendship: emotional intimacy that is greater than in the marriage, sexual tension, and secrecy. Does Jon's relationship with Laney qualify?
4. Eve's friend Tamara thinks Jon's actions are less of a betrayal because there was no sex, while her friend Lil thinks an emotional affair is worse than a sexual one. Which point of view does Eve find more convincing? Which do you?

5. Did you find yourself siding with Jon and/or Eve at different points in the book, and being frustrated by the other spouse? Think of the strongest reaction you had to either Eve or Jon, and what experiences from your own life influenced it.
6. The reader doesn't find out very much of substance about Laney. Why do you think the author chose this approach instead of, say, having Eve call Laney so the reader could get a sense of Laney's voice? Was it the right choice for the story the author was trying to tell?
7. Tamara advances her stuffer theory: men who don't feel comfortable expressing their anger stuff it down until it hinders their ability to love their partners. Do you buy Tamara's theory? And is Jon ultimately a stuffer?
8. If you were to develop a corresponding theory about Eve's anger, what would it be?
9. Eve decides against staying together for the sake of the children. In initiating an official separation, she tells Jon, "I think they're better off seeing us first-rate, even if it's apart." Do you agree?
10. Eve and Tamara are initially much closer than Eve is to Lil. This element changes during the course of the book. Why do you think this happened? Does Eve become more like Lil and less like Tamara?
11. Eve's mother finds love in the form of Phil Tibbs. Though it's not the relationship she would choose for herself, Eve ultimately supports it. Have you had situations like this in your own life?
12. When Eve finally confesses to Jon that she read his e-mails, he becomes uncharacteristically furious, even throwing a glass. Is his response appropriate in the context of what's come before? Could you argue that it represents growth for him?
13. Were you surprised that Eve had sex with Ray Dubrovnik, and that it clarified her feelings for Jon?
14. Ultimately, Jon and Eve both assume responsibility for their own role in what's happened, and try to find forgiveness for the other. What do you think the main offense of each person was?
15. Is it a happy ending?

Author Bio

I grew up dreaming of being a writer. I woke up after two semesters at an MFA program in creative writing. There are people who are born writers, I decided, people for whom it's write or die. And for me, it just wasn't like that. I could live without it.

So I did. I stopped writing and got my master's degree in marriage and family therapy. I was thrilled to shift from dream to vocation. I'd still be immersed in people's stories, but I didn't have to do that pesky creation anymore. I'd have an office. I'd help people. And I'd be solvent.

As it turned out, a lot of people wanted my back-up dream. While I was paying my dues, I found myself incidentally inspired and started writing **Five Things I Can't Live Without**. It was the kind of uninhibited writing experience I hadn't had since I was a kid, and it was phenomenal. Then luck struck twice, and in addition to selling my novel, I soon had a therapy job that I continue to love. Helping people in an office while solvent is really all it's cracked up to be. So is publishing your first novel.

When I wrote **Five Things I Can't Live Without** --- the story of a serial monogamist and chronic overthinker who becomes a Cyrano of online dating --- I didn't have much experience with online dating myself. My research was talking to plenty of friends as well as perusing the various websites. Belated thanks go to the unsuspecting Salon personals, Match.com, eharmony, and their myriad subscribers.

In my off-time, my favorite websites include www.salon.com (the magazine, not the personals), www.defamer.com (a delightfully snarky take on celebrity gossip), www.overheardinnewyork.com (pretty much what it says? a voyeur's dream in the voyeur's dream city), and www.blogger.com (if you're ever in the mood for a cross-section of life, they have a feature that randomly presents blog after blog, both American and international.) As for books, I've been blown away by **Truth and Beauty: A Friendship** by Ann Patchett and **Man Walks into A Room** by Nicole Krauss. My all-time favorite chick lit is **The Big Love** by Sarah Dunn, and for true inspiration, I go back --- way back --- to the source: Shel Silverstein's **The Missing Piece** and **The Missing Piece Meets the Big O**. He told me all I needed to know about love and relationships when I was seven but it took a while to sink in.

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