

The Days of Summer

by Jill Barnett



About the Book

Financier Rudy Banning and his wife Rachel, a popular artist, lead a life of privilege, wealth, and domestic unhappiness, while Jimmy Peyton is on his way to becoming a music legend. They have nothing in common until the day their cars collide leaving behind three children whose lives are forever changed. While Kathryn Peyton struggles to raise Laurel alone, Cale and Jud Banning are sent to live with their grandfather, destined for an upbringing intended to turn them into predators in a dog-eat-dog world.

But fate has a cruel surprise in store for the Banning brothers, who years later meet and fall for Laurel. Soon brother is pitted against brother as they vie for the heart of this innocent young woman --- a clash of wills that gradually draws them all closer to forbidden love and the truth of their tragic connection.

Discussion Guide

1. The Bannings and Peytons are the real victims of the automobile crash that killed Rudy, Rachel, and Jimmy. Victor's grandsons come to live with him and he makes a concerted effort to drive them apart. What is it about Victor that makes him believe in his motives? Do you understand or agree with his reasons? Kathryn moves in with Jimmy's mother for Laurel's sake. Why do you think she really made the move? What is it about Kathryn that does not allow her to separate herself from Jimmy's death? Does this make her pitiable or sympathetic? Why?
2. A recurring theme in the book is about the mistakes we make in the name of love. Describe each character's failure at love and their capacity for understanding what love is.
3. Which characters change? How? Which characters don't change? Name a scene that tells you they cannot change. What does the characters' ability or inability to change say about the nature of love, family, and loyalty?

- 3.** Victor writes Cale off as irresponsible and too easily distracted by women, and believes there is no potential for greatness within him. Do you think his perception impacts Cale positively or negatively or both? Why?
- 4.** How does Laurel both exacerbate and heal the wounds between Cale and Jud? Do you think she ultimately has a positive or negative effect on their lives? Why or why not? How are Cale and Jud different from Victor? In what ways do they exemplify the lessons he taught them? How does the next generation reflect a growth and change in male relationships?
- 5.** A prominent part of the book describes the experience of young love and burgeoning sexuality. Laurel misunderstands sexual thrill as love and pays a terrible price for it. Is her response believable? Does her failure to love and understand love make her more or less sympathetic?
- 6.** How does a woman know or learn the difference? Do you believe that Laurel's love was true in Part Two? Did you feel differently in Part Three and by the end of the book? Why?
- 7.** Many of the main characters have histories that haunt them. How does the past become an influential part of the present? Discuss the points at which memory and mistakes affect a character's actions or change how a moment is played out. Do any of the characters ever fully escape their individual and collective pasts?
- 8.** What motivates Jud to pursue Laurel? Were Jud and Laurel meant to be? Should Cale and Laurel have been the destined lovers?
- 9.** Kathryn's grief over the loss of her husband colors everything, including her interactions with her daughter. Do you understand her reaction? Kathryn fears the Bannings will continue to destroy them. When she warns Laurel away from Cale, then Jud --- both at the cost of her relationship with her daughter --- was she right? Was her intention to save her daughter worth the ultimate damage to their relationship? Do you believe she is a good mother?
- 10.** In Part Three, we come to see who these characters have become after thirty years. How much did the turbulence, the social and sexual influences of the late 1960's and early 1970's affect the earlier decisions of the characters? Discuss how their decisions would have been different if they were facing the same problems today.
- 11.** Laurel's secret about Greg O'Hanlon haunts her for years. How do you feel about her original decision? Even in 1970, was it justified? When she finally seeks him out, should she have told him the truth? Should she have told Jud and Cale?
- 12.** Victor spends years collecting artwork. What drives him to do it? Why does he hide the pieces away? What does that say about Victor? Is he a man capable of love? How does his relationship with Kathryn in Part Three change or further your opinion of him? How did you feel about Victor by the end of the book?
- 13.** Thematically, what is the purpose of the third generation? How are they like their parents and grandparents? How are they different?

14. Which character learns the most by the end of the book? Which character has changed the most? How did Victor and Kathryn's weaknesses, strengths, and actions influence the biggest changes?

15. At its heart, **The Days of Summer** is about characters who must face difficult choices, terrible pain, and betrayal. This is certainly what makes the characters seem so damaged, yet allows for their dramatic rise to grace. Do you believe the characters are victims of their own self perceptions, choices, and realities? Is there one character you would like to have seen change more? If so, who and why?

Author Bio

Jill Barnett sold her first book to Simon & Schuster in 1988 on fifty pages and an outline, and has gone on to write thirteen novels and five short stories. There are more than five million copies of her books in print in seventeen languages. Her work has earned her a place on such national bestseller lists as *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Barnes & Noble*, and *Waldenbooks*, who presented Jill with the National Waldenbooks Award. She lives in the Pacific Northwest.

Critical Praise

"An intense and compelling exploration of the darkest places in the human heart, Jill Barnett's **The Days of Summer** is a powerful novel about destiny, choices, family ties, and the way they're all connected in our lives. Fast paced and provocative, it's a story you won't be able to put down...one you'll want to talk about long after you've finished the last pages."

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