

The Sweetheart Deal  
By Polly Dugan

Reading Group Guide

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Polly Dugan uses rotating narration to take us inside the minds of her characters. Compare how each family member (including honorary family member Garrett) processes grief and loss in his or her own way. Which character were you able to relate to the most? Whose transformation, or growth, over the course of the novel was the most gratifying for you to witness? How come?
2. Discuss Audrey's initial reaction to learning about Garrett and Leo's secret pact. Do you think her feelings are justified? Why or why not? How do you think you would have reacted in her position?
3. Without hesitation, Garrett left his life on the east coast to be with Audrey and her sons in the wake of Leo's death. What do you think motivated that decision? What would you have done?
4. When Audrey first discovers that it was a long-ago, late-night promise to Leo that brought Garrett out west, she finds herself doubting the sincerity of Garrett's emotions for her. What, in your opinion, proves that the love Garrett expresses for Audrey is real? Reflect on a romance you've experienced in your own life. What about that person's actions revealed the depth of feeling they had for you? How do you demonstrate your love to the people who matter to you?
5. Reflect on how you felt about Garrett when you first met him, and then how you felt about him at the end of the book. Did your stance towards him change? How so, and why?
6. Consider an example of when you've made a promise to a friend never expecting to have to carry through on it. What was it? What were the circumstances? How would your life have been altered had you been put in a position that required you to fulfill that promise?
7. How did the multiple perspectives offered on Leo's death, and life in its aftermath, color your read? Imagine if the story had only been told from Audrey's point-of-view. How do you think it would have changed your experience as the reader?
8. Throughout the novel, as Audrey copes with her loss and struggles to make sense of her emotions, she finds herself recalling particular scenarios in which Leo wasn't, perhaps, the most considerate of her in their relationship. Do you think that the mixture of intense love and resentment she experiences towards Leo is natural and understandable? Why or why not?
9. Consider the way *The Sweetheart Deal* concludes. Were you surprised by the ending? Did you find it to be satisfying? Discuss alternate ways it could have ended.