

Questions for Discussion

I Meant It Once

Stories by Kate Doyle

1. Near the end of the first story, Margaret's friend asks her: "Do you ever feel weird that this still bothers you?" How do you understand this question in relation to the other stories in the collection?

2. Where does the title of the collection, *I Meant It Once*, show up in the book? What does it mean literally to the character who says it? How does it relate to the other stories?

3. Story collections might be compared to record albums: made up of separate pieces, arranged together intentionally. What makes these stories belong together in one book? Why do you think the themes are explored in several stories, rather than as one long story (a novel)?

4. In her book *The Cost of Living*, Deborah Levy writes: "It was not that easy to explain to him, a man much older than she was, that the world was her world too." Nearly every story in the book is narrated by a young woman. Does this quote illuminate something about their experiences?

5. Relationships in these stories span years, sometimes decades: between old friends, siblings, couples, or children and their parents. How does the past color the present in these dynamics? How does present color memories of the past? How do these stories make you think about the nature of memory: what people hold onto, what we forget, what we misremember?

6. What do the fish offer the narrator of "The Goldfish in the Pond at the Community Garden"? How do you understand this and other moments in the book that drift into the surreal?

7. This is a work of fiction, yet the first story begins with the phrase *This happened to me*. Does this book feel like fiction, nonfiction, or something in between? Why does it feel that way—and does it matter?

8. Friendships fray in some of these stories, while in others, romantic relationships end. Did you wonder, as you read, about the line between friends and more than friends? Why do you think you wondered about it? Do you see the term *breakup* as applicable to the unraveling of these friendships?

