

The One That Got Away

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did the alternating timelines affect your perception of Clara and Benjamin's characters, and their evolution throughout the novel? What would you say were the characters' major areas of growth as they aged?
2. Discuss Clara and Benjamin's memories of their relationship. Do you notice a difference in how the young adult versions of Clara and Benjamin feel in their relationship versus how their thirty-something selves remember feeling? Have you ever remembered something to be better than it actually was? Explain.
3. In your own experience or what you've observed through someone else, what is it about first love that is so compelling and memorable?
4. Do you think a person's experience of first love has an impact on their subsequent romantic relationships? If so, in what ways?
5. Benjamin was taught at a young age to conceal his emotions: "*Never apologize to nobody. That's what his football coach used to say. Don't let them see your weakness. No one respects the weak*" (page 77). How do you think this toxic version of "masculinity"—presented to him in his developmental years—affected Benjamin's ability to communicate his feelings as an adult, if at all? How did this affect his relationships with his girlfriends, father, and son?
6. Discuss the significance of football within the novel. Why do you think it's so important to Benjamin? Why is it such a lightning rod for Clara?
7. How did Clara's childhood and family dynamics shape her adolescence and early adulthood? How did Benjamin's mother's illness and untimely death affect him?
8. What do you think draws Clara to Thom, and why does their connection fizzle? In what ways does Clara's sexual trauma ultimately affect her marriage?
9. Benjamin strongly believes that "all violence has a root. A cause" (page 317). Examine the ties between sexual abuse and violence for Benjamin and Gary.
10. When Clara is ending her marriage with Thom, she tells him, "I had to love myself—that's not something you could do for me" (page 316). What do you think the novel suggests about self-love within a relationship? How significant is it?
11. What do you make of the way Clara and Benjamin left things after he went to jail? Why do you think they withheld their feelings from each other for so long, and are those feelings solely romantic? Is there a certain kind of pressure that gets put on romantic relationships that this book hints at?
12. What is your opinion of Clara and Benjamin's dynamic at the end? What role do you think Clara will play in Aiden's life moving forward?

