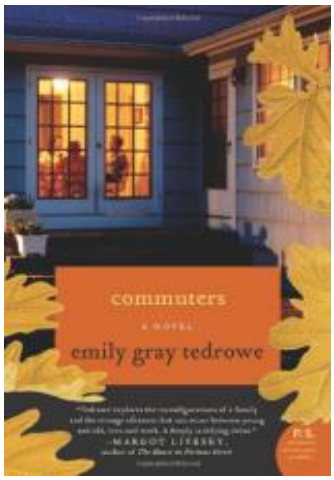
Commuters

by Emily Gray Tedrowe



About the Book

At 78, Winnie Easton has finally found love again with Jerry Trevis, a wealthy Chicago businessman who has moved to the small, upstate town of Hartfield, New York, to begin his life anew. But their decision to buy one of the town's biggest houses ignites anger and skepticism --- as children and grandchildren take drastic actions to secure their own futures and endangered inheritances. With so much riding on Jerry's wealth, a decline in his physical health forces hard decisions on the family, renewing old loyalties while creating surprising alliances.

A powerfully moving novel told from alternating perspectives, **Commuters** is an intensely human story of lives profoundly changed by the repercussions of one marriage, and by the complex intertwining of love, money, and family.

Discussion Guide

1. How does the title **Commuters** reflect the novel? What are the different meanings of this title for each of its main characters --- Winnie, Rachel, and Avery?

2. When Winnie is cut off by the local reporter during her interview, she is unable to truly describe what marrying Jerry is like for her. What do you imagine she might have said, if allowed to finish?

3. Rachel and Winnie?s mother-daughter relationship is built on the practicalities of living in the same small town; they see each other often, and talk on the phone regularly. How well would you say they know each other? How does their relationship change over the course of the novel?

4. What role does food play in **Commuters**? How do different characters approach meals at home, cooking, and eating in restaurants --- and how does that tell you more about them as people?

5. One of the novel?s main themes is money. What does having or not having money mean to Winnie, Rachel, and Avery? What about Jerry, Bob, Annette or Nona? What decisions or mistakes are made because of money? Within the novel, is money a blessing or a burden?

6. At first, Avery is furious about having to go visit his grandfather as a condition for living in New York. What changes his feelings? How are Avery and Jerry alike or different --- and what does each man gain from having known the other?

7. What kind of marriage do Rachel and Bob have? What do you imagine their life was like before Bob?s accident, and what do you envision for them after the book ends?

8. A central place in the book is 50 Greenham Avenue. Discuss what this property means to the different characters. Should Winnie and Jerry have bought this house?

9. For Winnie, the pool is ?a willful touchstone.? What does this mean? Why is she so determined to install a pool in front of her new home? As her neighbor, what would you think of her decision to cut down the historic sycamore tree?

10. Commuters is told from alternating perspectives of three characters, over the course of one year. How did the novel?s structure affect your experience of reading it? Were you more attuned to one character?s story over the others? Why or why not?

11. What do you think about Winnie?s decision to allow Jerry to go home to Annette? How do the other characters view this?

12. Since Avery?s email to Winnie from Rome mentions nothing about Nona, she wonders what happened after their reunion. What do you think the future holds for Avery and Nona?

13. In the last scene, Winnie joins her family at the pool in front of her house. What are her emotions? How have her gains and losses over the past year affected her? What will be the consequences of her marriage to Jerry --- and her love for him?

Author Bio

Emily Gray Tedrowe is the Chicago-based author of the novels THE TALENTED MISS FARWELL, BLUE STARS and COMMUTERS. She earned a PhD in English literature from New York University, and a BA from Princeton University. She has received an Illinois Arts Council award, as well as fellowships from the Ragdale Foundation, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and the Sewanee Writers Conference. A frequent book reviewer for *USA Today* as well as other publications, Tedrowe also writes essays, interviews and short stories.

Photo Credit: Marion Ettlinger

Critical Praise

"In her wonderfully cohesive debut novel, short-story writer Tedrowe graduates to elegant novelist with a winding, convincing familial drama about the ties that bind and the bonds that bend to the breaking point?The author?s deft handling of a large and distinctive cast should win raves?A lovely and literate family drama that wins bonus points for its sincerity and open-hearted delivery."

Commuters

by Emily Gray Tedrowe

Publication Date: June 29, 2010
Paperback: 378 pages
Publisher: Harper Perennial
ISBN-10: 0061859478
ISBN-13: 9780061859472