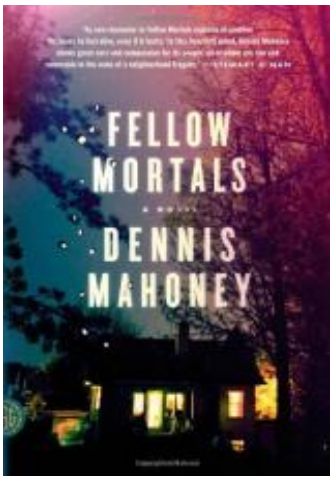
ReadingGroupGuides
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Fellow Mortals

by Dennis Mahoney



About the Book

In Dennis Mahoney?s captivating debut novel, a community is torn apart by tragedy while one of its beloved citizens is forced to carry the crippling burden of blame. When Henry Cooper set out on his mail route one crisp spring morning, he unwittingly sparked a fire that destroyed a neighborhood and claimed the life of a local artist?s young wife. In the aftermath, some point to Henry?s carelessness, while others exalt his heroism. His wife is his ardent defender, but the judgment of others begins to take its toll. While the victims slowly rebuild their lives, the sculptor Sam Bailey finds it particularly difficult to see Henry as anything other than a menace who should pay for the death of Sam?s wife. Exploring the complex terrain of loyalty and loss, **Fellow Mortals** charts the fall of a man who has dedicated his life to doing the right thing and then finds himself embroiled in a fierce struggle to understand what the right thing is.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the difference between a house and a home. What do our houses provide besides shelter? In the wake of the tragedy, how do the characters in **Fellow Mortals** find a sense of home, even in a tree house?

2. What does the novel tell us about the many ways in which humanity responds to loss? How would you have felt about Henry if you had been a victim of the fire? What are the limits on your ability to forgive?

3. What accounts for Henry and Ava?s strong marriage? How do they handle their disagreements? What is their trust built upon?

4. As Sam grieves for Laura, what image of their relationship emerges? How do his sculptures help him cope with regret and yearning?

5. How did your impressions of Billy change throughout the book? Is his anger a response to the many disappointments

he experiences?including romantic and financial ones?or is his anger the cause of those disappointments?

6. Ethan and Danny provide us with a child?s perspective on tragedy. How does their outlook compare to that of their parents? Is Peg overprotective or wise?

7. What is at the heart of Sheri and Billy?s struggle in their relationship? What is the best solution for anyone who is in Sheri?s situation?

8. In what way do Joan and Nan form a sort of ?marriage?? How do they navigate uncertainty and change? When enabled them to make an unspoken commitment to sharing a household for the rest of their lives? Would you be content to set up housekeeping with one of your siblings in a later stage of life?

9. In chapter 20, Ava and Sam describe how they met their spouses. What makes it easy for them to bond? What do you think Henry?s motivation was in sending Ava to be with Sam?

10. How would you characterize Henry?s personality? Is he self-destructive, or is his sense of duty a good model for waging peace?

11. How does Sam?s wooded landscape serve as a mirror of his mind, and of the minds of his former neighbors? What tone does it set for the novel?s closing scenes?

12. Why is Ava determined to help Billy when he is injured? Why does she opt for rescue rather than revenge?

13. Were the novel?s tragedies accidental? What does it take for healing to occur in their aftermath?

14. Ultimately, what does Henry teach us about the precarious nature of fate and atonement?

Author Bio

Dennis Mahoney is the author of FELLOW MORTALS, a *Booklist* Top Ten Debut; BELL WEATHER, an Indie Next pick; GHOSTLOVE; MY HEART IS FULL OF BLOOD; and OUR WINTER MONSTER. He lives in Troy, NY, with his wife, son and dog.

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