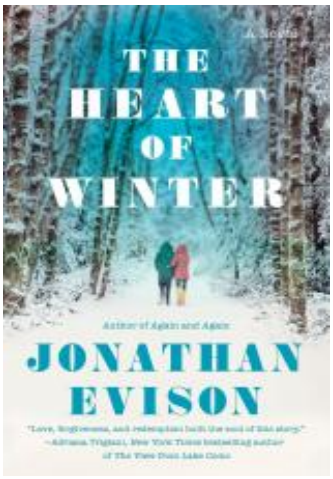
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The Heart of Winter

by Jonathan Evison



About the Book

The extraordinary new novel by Jonathan Evison, about a married couple in their golden years, from when they met across big ups, deep downs and survive-it-all, opposites-attract love.

Abe Winter and Ruth Warneke were never meant to be together --- at least if you ask Ruth. Yet their catastrophic blind date in college evolved into a 70-year marriage and a life on a farm on Bainbridge Island with their hens and beloved Labrador, Megs. Through the years, the Winters have fallen in and out of lockstep, and from their haunting losses and guarded secrets, a dependable partnership has been forged.

But when Ruth?s loose tooth turns out to be something much more malicious, the beautiful, reliable life they?ve created together comes to a crisis. As Ruth struggles with her crumbling independence, Abe must learn how to take care of her while their three living children question his ability to look after his wife. And once again, the couple has to reconfigure how to be there for each other.

In this big-hearted and profound portrait of a marriage, Jonathan Evison explores 70 years of big moments in subtle ways, elegantly braiding the Winters? turbulent history with their present-day battles, showing us how the oddly paired college kids became parents, fell apart and back together, and grew into the Abe and Ruth of today. Endlessly heartwarming and moving, THE HEART OF WINTER is a reminder that true love lives in small, everyday moments.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the title. What is *The Heart of Winter*?

2. At the beginning of the book, Abe believes his 90th birthday will be his last. How does this opening set up the story?

3. Frankness and honesty are a key part of Abe and Ruth?s marriage. How does it help them over the years? What do you think of this philosophy?

4. In sharing her diagnosis, Ruth reflects on each of her children. How do the different family relationships develop over the book?

5. Ruth and Abe?s first meeting doesn?t go well. What do you think made them fit together in spite of it?

6. What did you think of Abe?s plan to challenge Ruth to a bowling contest for a date?

7. How does becoming a mother change Ruth?

8. Abe surprises Ruth by getting a job on Bainbridge Island. What did you think of his plan? How does the small town compare to the city?

9. ?Ruth couldn?t help but think of that first night...how Abe had all but begged to accompany Ruth to church the next day, just to be near her. Now that he?d secured a future with Ruth, such eager devotion was a thing of the past.? (p. 100) What do you think of Ruth?s thoughts here?

10. How do the family dynamics work and change before and after Ruth?s surgery? How do health concerns interfere with or help their relationships?

11. How did Ruth and Abe handle the situation with Leonard Haruto, both separately and together?

12. The children want Ruth to go to Twin Pines for recovery care after she leaves the hospital, while Abe wants her to come home to the farm. Did you understand both sides? Which would you have suggested? Did your opinion change based on what happened next?

13. How does Karen?s disappearance and death impact the family?

14. Ruth calls Abe her ?counterpoint.? How do we see that dynamic demonstrated between them?

15. How did you feel at the end of the book?

Author Bio

Jonathan Evison is the author of the novels ALL ABOUT LULU, WEST OF HERE, THE REVISED FUNDAMENTALS OF CAREGIVING, THIS IS YOUR LIFE, HARRIET CHANCE!, LAWN BOY, LEGENDS OF THE NORTH CASCADES, SMALL WORLD, AGAIN AND AGAIN and THE HEART OF WINTER. He lives with his wife and family in Washington State.

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