

# The Lemonade Year

by Amy Willoughby-Burle

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## About the Book

LOVE. LOSS. AND SECOND CHANCES.

Nina's once-sweet life has unexpectedly turned sour. Her marriage is over, her job is in jeopardy, and her teenage daughter is slipping away from her. Then her father dies, and issues with Nina's mother come to a head; her estranged brother, Ray, comes home; and her sister, Lola, is tempted to blow a big family secret out of the water. They say the truth will set you free, but first it will make a huge mess of things.

All Nina has left is her final photography assignment: shooting images for the book *32 Ways to Make Lemonade*. Well, that and the attention of a younger man, but Oliver's on-again-off-again romantic interest in her ebbs and flows so much she is seasick. And then Jack, her ex-husband, shows up, wanting to get back together.

As Nina struggles to find a way through her complicated relationships and to uncover her true path, she discovers just how valuable a second chance at life and happiness can be.

## Discussion Guide

1. Mother and daughter relationships are central in this novel. What are some opportunities that Nina has either missed or taken in order to have a better relationship with her daughter as well as with her own mother? Where did Nina and her mother fail or succeed in their relationship?
2. The theme of fatherhood also runs throughout this story. Discuss the fathers in this novel and the roles they play. Discuss the roles that men play in a family as a whole and how their absence and/or presence is felt.
3. Family is the tie that binds, but those bonds can sometimes feel like restraints. Discuss the ways in which family ties

are used in this story. To what degree are those constraints true or the product of misunderstandings?

**4.** In this novel, Nina wants desperately to achieve a goal that is out of her control. What role does Nina's own desperation play in the demise of her marriage? Have you ever let your own desires for something negatively affect a relationship? Were you able to see it in time to save that connection? If so, how did you change the course of your thoughts and actions? If not, what would you do in hindsight to have kept the relationship intact?

**5.** Hindsight is 20/20. Characters often misunderstand each other throughout this story. What are some of the major misunderstandings or misconceptions that affected the lives of these characters?

**6.** Both Nina and Oliver are looking for the right path for their lives. Each has a hesitation that is brought on by fear. What fears are keeping them from their true paths? Have you ever hesitated to follow your true path because of fear? What was that path and the fear that kept you from seeking it? What did you ultimately do, and would you do anything differently if you had a chance?

**7.** The unique connection between siblings is a powerful part of this story. Despite the tensions within the family, Nina, Lola and Ray have a bond that, although tested, seems unbreakable. Discuss the importance of this familial bond and the role it plays in shaping our ideas of love as well as the length to which we go for others in our lives.

**8.** Nina is experiencing a lemonade year. Everything that can go wrong seems to be going that way. Some of these things are considerable losses. Discuss her ability or inability to reach out for help and to recover from loss. How does that affect her decisions throughout the novel? Are there losses from which you have not recovered? What avenues for help have you sought or rejected that might make a difference to you?

**9.** There is a family secret at the heart of the hard feelings and dysfunction within Nina's childhood family. Do you think Ray, Nina, and Nate were asked to go too far in keeping that secret? What role does truth play in the outcome of this family's life? Nina asks if things would have been better had they all been truthful. When there may be no clear cut path to follow, how do you decide what to do?

**10.** When Nina notices a cross hanging on the wall of Oliver's house, she asks him if he's religious. He answers with the question "Would it bother you if I was?" Is there something about yourself or a loved one that you have hidden or avoided because you thought you would be judged because of it? Discuss the outcome.

**11.** Reconciliation and forgiveness are important themes in this novel. Discuss the scenarios in which the characters have an opportunity to both give and receive forgiveness (Nina with her mother, daughter and/or ex-husband) and the incidents in which a character may not be able to (Ray with his deceased father). Discuss the characters' ability or inability to forgive themselves. Have you ever given or withheld these gifts, or had them given or withheld from you? How has that affected the story of your own life?

**12.** The book ends with hope and the possibility to begin again. Discuss the ways in which Nina, Ray, Lola, Jack and Oliver have a chance to begin again. Based on what you know of these characters, what are your predictions for their futures?

## Author Bio

Amy Willoughby-Burle is a writer and teacher living in Asheville, North Carolina, with her husband and four children. She writes about the mystery and wonder of everyday life. Her contemporary fiction focuses on the themes of second chances, redemption and finding the beauty in the world around us. She is the author of a collection of short stories entitled OUT ACROSS THE NOWHERE and a contributor to the anthology OF MIST AND MAGIC.

## Critical Praise

"When life gives you lemons, read this book. It's a delicious glass of humor, heart, and hope."

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**Publication Date:** April 3, 2018

**Genres:** Fiction, Women's Fiction

**Paperback:** 352 pages

**Publisher:** Shadow Mountain

**ISBN-10:** 1629724114

**ISBN-13:** 9781629724119