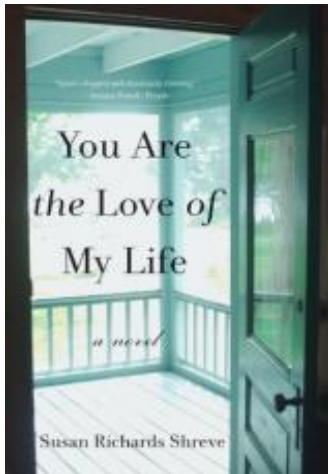


# You Are the Love of My Life

by Susan Richards Shreve

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## About the Book

For fans of Sue Miller, a finely wrought novel of family secrets and the desire for sustaining love.

It is 1973 and Watergate is on everyone's lips. Lucy Painter is a children's book illustrator and a single mother of two. She leaves New York and the married father of her children to live in a tightly knit Washington neighborhood in the house where she grew up and where she discovered her father's suicide. Lucy hopes for a fresh start, but her life is full of secrets: her children know nothing of her father's death or the identity of their own father. As the new neighbors enter their insular lives, her family's safety and stability become threatened.

From a writer whose "unique presentation of human experience makes reading a delight" (Elizabeth Strout), **You Are the Love of My Life** is a story of how shame leads to secrets, secrets to lies, and how lies stand in the way of human connection.

## Discussion Guide

1. What do you make of Lucy's mother's decision to change their last name from Baldwin to Painter? How does this change connect to Lucy's eventual future career as a children's book author and illustrator?
2. Zee admits that "the pleasure she took in the misfortunes of others disturbed her." What does this tell you about Zee as a character? How does this admission affect your perception of her created world of "dear friends" who are so dependent on her?
3. What parallels can you see between Lucy's discovery of her father's suicide and her witnessing August's accident?

4. Why do you think Zee is so ?terrible with secrets? when she keeps such a monumental secret of her own? What does this tell you about her as a character?
5. What do you make of Lucy and Reuben?s relationship? Do you believe Reuben when he tells Lucy that she is the love of his life? How do Elaine and Nell factor into your perception of this complicated situation?
6. What impression of marriage do you get from the husbands and wives in **You Are the Love of My Life**?
7. So many of the residents of Wichita Hills are described in terms of their faltering mental states at one time or another: Lane Sewall?s husband is ?concerned [she?s] losing it?; Zee says of herself, ?I?m not okay, if that?s what you are wondering. . . . I?m sick. I?m sick to death?; Lucy describes August as ?a little crazy, this strange man.? What, if anything, do you think this says about their gravitating toward one another? How do their different stumbling blocks bring them together or drive them apart?
8. Upon learning about Lane?s keeping her cancer a secret, Lucy wonders, ?Is that lying or shielding them [her children] from the truth? Or were those the same thing?? What sort of relationship do the residents of Wichita Hills have to truth? How does that affect their interactions?
9. Lies and deception make up the historical background of **You Are the Love of My Life** as well. How do the events of the Watergate scandal, Viet Nam, and Samuel Baldwin?s suicide interrelate with the lives of those in Wichita Hills?
10. Why do you think Maggie is so drawn in by Zee Mallory? What does Zee offer that Maggie?s mother does not?
11. Ultimately, do you agree with Lucy?s decision about when to reveal the details of her father?s death and Reuben?s true identity to Maggie and Felix? Why or why not?
12. At the novel?s close, we see ?the Mallorys were arriving from Vermont. Their friends, gathering on the Painters? porch that afternoon, speaking in whispers about Zee,? and Lucy with ?the front door flung open to welcome the families of Wichita Hills, her neighbors, her friends, her dear friends.? What do you make of this description? Does the language Lucy uses strike you as reminiscent of Zee? What do you think that means?
13. The book is narrated from three different points of view: Lucy?s, Maggie?s, and Zee?s. Which of them, if any, do you sympathize with most? Why? Is there a narrator whose point of view you had particular trouble connecting with?

## Author Bio

Susan Richards Shreve is the author of 15 novels, a memoir and 30 books for children. She has received a Guggenheim Fellowship and a National Endowment grant, among other honors. A professor of creative writing at George Mason University and former chairman of the PEN/Faulkner Foundation, Shreve lives in Washington, D.C.

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## **You Are the Love of My Life**

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