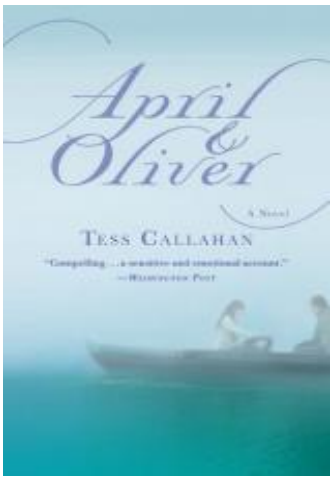
April & Oliver

by Tess Callahan



About the Book

Best friends since childhood, the sexual tension between April and Oliver has always been palpable. Years after being completely inseparable, they become strangers, but the wildly different paths of their lives cross once again with the sudden death of April's brother. Oliver, the responsible, newly engaged law student finds himself drawn more than ever to the reckless, mystifying April --- and cracks begin to appear in his carefully constructed life. Even as Oliver attempts to "save" his childhood friend from her grief, her menacing boyfriend and herself, it soon becomes apparent that Oliver has some secrets of his own --- secrets he hasn't shared with anyone, even his fiancé.

Discussion Guide

1. ?It?s normal for lives to drift apart; April expected it. Even back then, when she and Oliver used to take Buddy down to the creek to catch frogs and let them go, April understood it wouldn?t be forever? (page 18). Do you agree that it?s ?normal? for lives to drift apart? Why might April have had such mature insight at a young age? What is the effect of April and Oliver spending so much time together after five years apart?

2. Why did young Oliver give up the piano and the Juilliard scholarship? How would his life have been different if he hadn?t made that decision, and what would April have done in his position?

3. When they were young and again when they reunite, Oliver has helped and protected April. Why does he continue with what seems to be a futile task? Is April thankful for his presence, resentful, or neither? What would you do in Oliver?s position? April?s?

4. ?Sometimes a lie is more like the truth,? Nana says. ?The truth isn?t always the way it happens? (page 70). What could she be referring to here? What other situations might this statement apply to?

5. April believes, ?But she could never defile Oliver. He was too good. Too pure? (page 83). Why does she have such an exalted opinion of Oliver? Does he have similar feelings about her? Why or why not?

6. During an argument, Oliver experiences an instant in which ?he understands how men can do her harm.? He then muses, ?Wouldn?t she love it if he struck her? Wouldn?t it confirm everything she believes?? (page 90). Is there any truth to his thoughts, or are they merely the result of his anger? If he?s right, why would April invite such abuse?

7. When April recalls her own mistakes, she realizes they don?t matter because ??it?s too late for her. It?s always been too late? (page 101). Is it really ?too late? for her to make different decisions? Is it ever too late for anyone to do so? What would Oliver say to this, and how would April respond to him?

8. April thinks about her relationship with T.J.: ?What she felt was not so much love as relief, because finally someone appeared who was willing to be her rudder. Yes, that was it. She was far better at reacting to situations than creating them? (page 112). Does April fit the passive bill she?s given herself? Why does T.J. provide her with something that Oliver cannot?

9. ?By the age of seventeen, [April] had already determined that sex was just something to get through? (page 158). What function does sex have for April, if not pleasure? For Oliver?

10. ?What Oliver doesn?t understand is that [April] doesn?t fear T.J. because he can?t hurt her. Only Oliver can do that?It hurts not because she is a failure, but because he finally sees so? (pages 182-3). Discuss how April and Oliver hurt one another. Why do no other slights or physical attacks affect either of them as powerfully as they wound one another?

11. Why did Oliver?s mother give her journal to April?

12. Why does Oliver thinking his mother had an affair with April?s father lead him to want to sleep with April?

13. Compare Oliver to his brother Al. Why are their relationships to April so different?

14. In describing the symphony movement that he matches to April, Oliver describes, ?It?s moving, exhilarating, transcendent. The harmony is always changing but the rhythm never does. It unfolds subtly, hypnotically, like a trance. It gives you a sense of something that was already there, like the recognition of something you always knew. It extinguishes time. It doesn?t matter what came before or what will come later; each note holds everything. The music unfurls in a necessary way, like the roll of the tide. It opens and lifts you away with it? (page 272). April disagrees, but is this an apt description of her? What does it reveal about Oliver?s feelings about April?

15. Why does Oliver confront Quincy the night before his wedding, and then April during it? Is he willfully sabotaging his own marriage, is there truly a need for him to clear these old issues up immediately, or is it something else?

16. Will April and Oliver ever finally get together?

Author Bio

A painter, teacher and mother of twins, Tess Callahan has written for *Cottonwood, The Stylus Anthology: 1950-2000, The Boston College Magazine, New York Newsday* and elsewhere through syndication. When not exploring the complex motivations of intriguing characters (in her personal life and in her work), she finds nourishment and sustenance in periodic travels to wild, austere landscapes around the world. Tess has an MFA in Fiction from Bennington College. **April & Oliver** is her first novel.

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Publication Date: June 10, 2010
Paperback: 352 pages
Publisher: Grand Central Publishing
ISBN-10: 0446540609
ISBN-13: 9780446540605