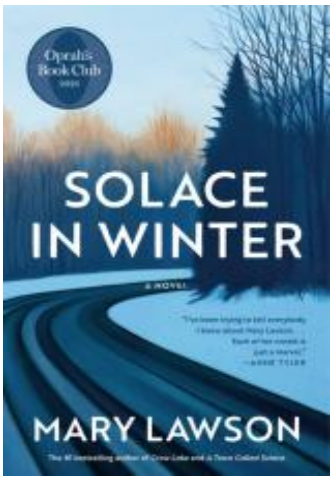
Solace in Winter

by Mary Lawson



About the Book

Winter in the small Canadian town of Solace is a season of hibernation. But this year, the snowfall brings a series of accidental encounters that will shake up the lives --- and loves --- of an old man, a student on the run and an abandoned dog.

It is deep winter, 1969. As the Vietnam War drives young men north across the Canadian border, widower Jack?s quiet life is overturned by two accidents that happen on the bend in the road into town. First comes a dog in a bad way. Next a draft dodger, seriously injured, lying in the snow. Suddenly, Jack?s cabin is busy with a growing cast of characters --- and all the baggage, dreams and desires they?re carrying.

The atmosphere chills when Jack?s daughter, Sally, drops by one day and doesn?t like what she sees. What Sally does next changes everything, for everyone but herself.

This exquisite snow globe of a novel is a refuge, a story of connection and moral complexity set in the beloved world of Mary Lawson?s bestselling, prize-winning CROW LAKE, THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BRIDGE, ROAD ENDS and A TOWN CALLED SOLACE.

Discussion Guide

1. Jack's life changes when he encounters two vulnerable strangers on the road. What motivates him to help them, particularly when doing so disrupts his comfortable routines? Is kindness always a choice, or can it become an obligation once we recognize someone else's suffering? Are there limits to our responsibility toward other people?

2. Solace in winter is a treacherous landscape where children slip through the ice, men are knocked sideways by muskies, and cars hurl off the road into trees. In some respects, intimacy comes easily, as community members like Ellie

and Tomas offer a helping hand to whomever is in need --- yet Jack is alone for a long time, drawn up North by his wife who was desperate for solitude. What can a small 1970s Canadian town teach us about connection and isolation? To what degree do disposition and location shape a person's sense of belonging?

3. How would you describe Jack's relationship with his daughter, Sally? Why might Sally react so strongly to the changes in her father's life? To what extent are her concerns justified?

4. What do we owe people whose choices conflict with our own values? Does the novel offer an answer? How does the novel distinguish between empathy and approval?

5. In the wake of Hannah's death, Jack's cabin becomes a rotating exhibition for her tapestries. The cabin is also haunted by an image from Jack's war photography: a boy he couldn't save. What role does art play in maintaining a person's presence? How might it alter or transform the memory of those in the story who have passed?

6. Grief is not solely for the departed in SOLACE IN WINTER. More often, grief arises at what cannot be: Patrick's love for Chris (Jack sees his "mask of grief") or Chris leaving Lola and Jack behind ("there was a stab of pure grief"). Which unfulfilled desire left the strongest impression on you?

7. Ellie grapples with growing older and the feeling that she may be losing a part of her identity as a woman. Particularly, her sense of being attractive, desirable and seen beyond her role as a mother and Karl's wife. How does her attraction to Chris speak to the tension between motherhood, femininity, aging and maintaining a sense of self?

8. Jack and Chris both struggle to ask for what they need. Though firmly attached to Lola, Jack can't quite tell Tomas outright that he couldn't bear to see her go to another family, while Chris hesitates to ask Patrick for money, even though Patrick drops everything to be at Chris' side. What do you think makes each of them so reluctant, and is this a similarity or a point of distinction between them?

9. How did Chris' draft-dodger storyline affect your understanding of courage, conscience and the consequences of refusing to follow an established path?

10. What role does the harsh Northern Ontario winter play in the novel? Does it function primarily as a physical obstacle, an emotional atmosphere or something more?

11. Does the novel suggest that a single act of kindness can change a life, or that meaningful change requires a series of smaller choices?

12. What does it mean to make room for another person in your life, and what might it cost us to do so? Consider how Jack's experiences challenge the comfort of solitude, the boundaries of family loyalty, and the assumptions we make about people we barely know.

Guide courtesy of Knopf Canada

Author Bio

Mary Lawson was born and brought up in a small farming community in Ontario. She is the author of the national and international bestselling novels CROW LAKE, THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BRIDGE and ROAD ENDS. CROW LAKE was a *New York Times* bestseller and was chosen as a Book of the Year by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, among others. THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BRIDGE was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize. She also is the author of the novels A TOWN CALLED SOLACE and SOLACE IN WINTER. Lawson lives in England but returns to Canada frequently.

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Publication Date: November 10, 2026
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction
Hardcover: 320 pages
Publisher: Knopf Canada
ISBN-10: 1039059899
ISBN-13: 9781039059894