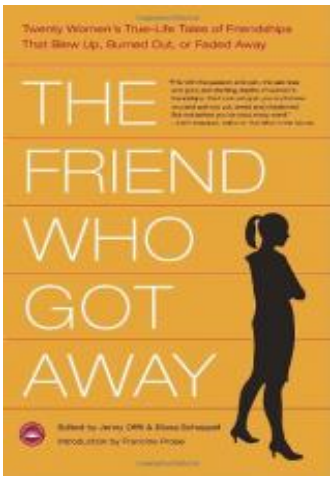
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The Friend Who Got Away

by Jenny Offill and Elissa Schappell



About the Book

Losing a friend can be as painful and as agonizing as a divorce or the end of a love affair, yet it is rarely written about or even discussed. THE FRIEND WHO GOT AWAY is the first book to address this near-universal experience, bringing together the brave, eloquent voices of writers like Francine Prose, Katie Roiphe, Dorothy Allison, Elizabeth Strout, Ann Hood, Diana Abu Jabar, Vivian Gornick, Helen Schulman, and many others. Some write of friends who have drifted away, others of sudden breakups that took them by surprise. Some even celebrate their liberation from unhealthy or destructive relationships. Yet at the heart of each story is the recognition of a loss that will never be forgotten.

From stories about friendships that dissolved when one person revealed a hidden self or moved into a different world, to tales of relationships sabotaged by competition, personal ambition, or careless indifference, THE FRIEND WHO GOT AWAY casts new light on the meaning and nature of women?s friendships. Katie Roiphe writes with regret about the period in her life when even close friends seemed expendable compared to men and sex. Mary Morris reveals how a loan led to the unraveling of a lifelong friendship. Vivian Gornick explores how intellectual differences eroded the bond between once inseparable companions. And two contributors, once best friends, tell both sides of the story that led to their painful breakup.

Written especially for this anthology and touched with humor, sadness, and sometimes anger, these extraordinary pieces simultaneously evoke the uniqueness of each situation and illuminate the universal emotions evoked by the loss of a friend.

Discussion Guide

1. The Friend Who Got Away's epigraph comes from Virginia Woolf who wrote a great deal about the intricacies of human relationships. What does she seem to be saying about the nature of friendship?

2. Why do we assume friendships should be "sturdier" than romantic relationships? What expectations do we bring to a friendship that we don't bring to a romance? Are these realistic? Why or why not?

3. Most of the friendships in the book center on the relationships between women. Could the same book have been written about friendships between men? Are these friendships built on similar or different foundations? Is one more enduring than the other?

4. One of the premises of the book is that these stories about lost friends are incredibly common yet seldom revealed. Why do you think such secrecy surrounds this issue? Is there shame involved when a friendship fails?

5. Many of the writers in this anthology speak to the difficulty of unraveling what led to the demise of their friendships. Why is it so difficult to assess blame and responsibility in these situations? Which essays most clearly address this problem of culpability?

6. In the paired essays "Heather" and "Emily" we get a rare glimpse of the story of a friendship breakup from both points of views. In the other essays, were you able to imagine the absent friend's side of the story as well? Did you ever find yourself empathizing more with the lost friend than the author?

7. In Emily White's "Shelter" and Ann Hood's "How I Lost Her", we never learn why the friends disappear so abruptly. Imagine their side of the story.

8. Jenny Offill's "End Days" and Elissa Schappell's "You'll Be Alright" both describe unlikely friendships. Why might such a friendship be a source of comfort? Jennifer Gilmore's "The Kindness of Strangers" goes even further to suggest that sometimes strangers are able to provide more solace in times of crisis than old friends. Why might this be the case?

9. The old saying "Neither a borrower nor a lender be" seems to apply to the friendship Mary Morris describes in "The Other Face". How does money affect the power dynamic in a relationship? Do you agree with Morris' choice not to return the painting? Why do you think her friend didn't cash the checks?

10. Kate Bernheimer's essay explores the pain and isolation that she felt when her friends were able to bear children and she was not. Why might fertility or the lack thereof be a divisive issue among women?

11. This anthology captures a range of friendships that span from childhood to old age. How have your friendships changed over the years? Was there a "golden age" of friendship?

12. What role does friendship play in your life now? Are your friendships as high a priority as they once were? In your own life do you have "a friend who got away" or a friend you now realize you should have cut loose? Describe what happened.

Author Bio

Jenny Offill is the author of the novels LAST THINGS (a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year and a finalist for the *L.A. Times* First Book Award), DEPT. OF SPECULATION, which was shortlisted for the Folio Prize, the Pen

Faulkner Award and the International Dublin Award, and WEATHER. She lives in upstate New York and teaches at Syracuse University and in the low residency program at Queens University.

Critical Praise

?An intense, intelligent collection of first-person accounts by women who analyze and mourn friendships lost.?

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Publication Date: May 9, 2006

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Broadway

ISBN-10: 0767917197

ISBN-13: 9780767917193