

This Is a Love Story

by Jessica Soffer



About the Book

An intimate and lyrical celebration of great love, great art, and the sacrifices we make for both.

For 50 years, Abe and Jane have been coming to Central Park, as starry-eyed young lovers, as frustrated and exhausted parents, as artists watching their careers take flight. They came alone when they needed to get away from each other, and together when they had something important to discuss. The Park has been their witness for half a century of love. Until now.

Jane is dying, and Abe is recounting their life together as a way of keeping them going: the parts they knew --- their courtship and early marriage, their blossoming creative lives --- and the parts they didn't always want to know --- the determined young student of Abe's looking for a love story of her own, and their son, Max, who believes his mother chose art over parenthood and who has avoided love and intimacy at all costs. Told in various points of view, even in conversation with Central Park itself, these voices weave in and out to paint a portrait as complicated and essential as love itself.

An homage to New York City, to romance and even to loss, *THIS IS A LOVE STORY* tenderly and suspensefully captures deep truths about life and marriage in radiant prose. It is about love that endures despite what life throws at us, or perhaps even because of it.

Discussion Guide

1. For those who know, for those who feel it, the Park is more than just a park. It is evocative, a symbol. Central Park is so integral to the story that it becomes a character in the novel. What did you make of the sections from the Park's point of view? Do you agree that the Park is a symbol? If so, what do you think it represents?

2. The novel is structured around Abe and Jane retelling their lifelong love story at the end of Jane's life. How does terminal illness change Abe and Jane's relationship? How does it affect the ways they tell their story --- to each other and to themselves?
3. "A mother is always and never alone." Discuss Jane's relationship with motherhood. What did you think and feel as you were reading about Jane's early years as a mother? How did those early years affect her relationship with Max, and Max's relationship with Jane?
4. How did you view Alice's character, and her role in the story of Abe and Jane's life and love story? How did her perspective add or change this love story?
5. What did you make of the narrative structure of the book, and the different character viewpoints? Did you have a favorite character? If so, why?
6. There is a lyrical cadence to many parts of the novel. Consider this line: "You remember our love like a river, a rock, a fountain, a rainbow. You remember it as an August evening, the holidays, the first spring day. You remember it as sparkle, or maybe I do. Why not? We had our bumps. You remember it wasn't always easy, but so often it was. How lucky are we? Sometimes, over the top is just enough." Were there any lines that stood out to you as being boldly true when you were reading --- about love, art or sacrifice?
7. Given the lifelong love between Abe and Jane, how do you view Max's approach to romance and partnership? How do you think his love story will continue?
8. The novel addresses love on many levels, including the love of one's own creative passions and artistic sensibility. How did you view Jane's commitment to pursuing her art, versus Abe's commitment to pursuing his? How did each parent's ambition impact the family?
9. Compare your impressions of Abe's art to Jane's. Did you visualize their work while reading? How does their art impact the shape of their relationship?
10. Discuss the title THIS IS A LOVE STORY. How did your idea of a love story change as you read the book? After you finished it?

Author Bio

Jessica Soffer is the author of *THIS IS A LOVE STORY* and *TOMORROW THERE WILL BE APRICOTS*. She grew up in New York City, attended Connecticut College, and earned her MFA at Hunter College. Her work has appeared in *Granta*, *The New York Times*, *Real Simple*, *Saveur*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Vogue* and on NPR's "Selected Shorts." She teaches creative writing to small groups and in the corporate space and lives in Sag Harbor, New York, with her family.

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