

IN THE SHADE OF OLIVE TREES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Much of the story is based on happenstance and serendipity. How does this impact your reading of the novel? Must you suspend your disbelief that fate would hand Julia exactly what she needed, or have you had these kind of experiences in your own life?



As much as a novel can be "setting driven," Italy takes a starring role in the story. How is the setting critical for the characters, and what does it ultimately provide the reader?



Julia worries that her experience is too different from that of the women of Olive Haven because she hasn't suffered their loss, but Harriet later tells her none of the women would trade their pain for hers. What does this reveal about the nature of grief and heartbreak?



Harriet tells Julia: "If we're lucky, we get a handful of people in our lives who help define us. We find them, we become rooted in them, and we are better because of them." Do you agree? Can you identify these people in your own life?



Julia learns a different lesson from each of the women's stories of life and loss. Which story resonated with you the most?



While not a romance, *In the Shade of Olive Trees* is a novel about sharing great love stories. Now's your chance to tell yours!



Aster's story finally pushes Julia toward understanding the complicated nature of her broken heart and Will's betrayal. What do you make of Aster's story? In her shoes, would you have made a different choice to tell the truth?



Margo tells Julia: "Grief is a universal experience. We find it in a host of ways, and learn to cope with our own through the experiences and stories of others." What are some of the ways women at Olive Haven cope with their grief? What are other ways you or those you know have dealt with tragedy or heartache?