

Readers' Guide

The Wednesday Letters

Jason F. Wright

An Introduction to *The Wednesday Letters*

Jack and Laurel Cooper are rare souls who have led quiet but exceptional lives. After a 39-year-marriage during which they raised a family and fulfilled their dream of operating a bed & breakfast in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, the two die in each other's arms. Throughout their time on earth, they opened up their home and hearts and touched countless lives, but they've left behind a complicated legacy that their children must now decipher.

While sorting through her parents' belongings, Samantha discovers a hidden trove of letters that Jack had apparently written to Laurel every Wednesday up until the night they passed. Sam and her brothers, Matthew and Malcolm, eagerly devour them. Like the day-to-day business of marriage itself, their father's letters are sometimes goofy, sometimes serious, and sometimes banal, but each of the three Cooper children is at a crossroads, and reading the letters—and uncovering their parents' shocking secret—transforms them in surprising ways.

Matthew, the eldest son, wears the trappings of success. He is a driven businessman but his home life feels empty. He and his wife, Monica, have not been blessed with children and they are drifting further and further apart. She has chosen not to make the journey from Boston to attend her in-laws' funeral and Matthew is painfully conscience of her absence.

Samantha was an aspiring actress until her ex-husband crushed those dreams. Now, she works as a police officer in Woodstock near Domus Jefferson, her parents' B&B. The single mother of a young daughter, Sam struggles with feelings of bitterness towards her ex while tentatively nurturing the hope that she may again act on the stage. And as her brothers fall into their familiar bickering, Sam finds herself—once again—mediating between them.

Malcolm's return home is the most troubled. Two years ago, the youngest Cooper fled Woodstock as a fugitive after seriously injuring a man in a bar brawl. But the law is the least of Malcolm's worries. Rain, his parents' most valued employee and the love of his life, is engaged to another man. Malcolm is already struggling with sadness, anger, and hope when the letters expose a secret that leaves him reeling.

Interweaving an account of the days approaching the funeral with Jack's guileless letters, *The Wednesday Letters* is as delightful to read as it is inspiring. In his deeply affecting new novel, Jason Wright, author of *Christmas Jars* and *Recovering Charles*,

offers a heart-warming portrait of an unforgettable marriage and a riveting account of one family's journey to forgiveness.

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. Jack's death was expected, whereas Laurel's was a surprise. Do you think one way is preferable to the other? Are there things you can do to help prepare yourself for a loved one's demise?

2. A&P adopts the nickname that others had given to mock her, telling herself, "nicknames mean you matter" (p. 5). Have you ever had a nickname you didn't like? How might you have turned it around to give it a positive meaning?

3. The youngest Cooper child, Malcolm, has been away for two years. Would he have returned to Woodstock earlier if he'd known his father was dying of cancer? Should he have returned sooner?

4. When Malcolm does return home, he discovers a secret his parents kept from him. Have you ever discovered secrets held by someone you loved after he or she had passed on? How did your discovery affect your feelings about that person?

5. Why did Laurel try to keep Malcolm's parentage a secret? Would Jack and Malcolm have been happier if she had?

6. When Sam was 17, she ran away to New York City to pursue her dream of having an acting career. Though she got a small part in a show called "Curtains" she eventually stopped pursuing her dream. How and why did this happen? Is it admirable or disappointing that Samantha puts other's needs ahead of her dreams?

7. When reading her father's letters, Samantha learns that he paid for the part in the show she got. Yet she's not angry about this. Why not? Was this the act of a loving parent or a controlling father? Does learning this secret change Samantha's view of herself?

8. Aside from the Coopers, who is your favorite character and why?

9. Joe is finally able to give up alcohol because the girl he nearly killed forgave him—even visiting him and frequently writing him letters while he was in prison. What is the novel saying about the relationship between forgiveness and self-acceptance? Where else are these themes worked through the novel?

10. Matthew and Monica's marriage is troubled by their childlessness. Would it have lasted if they hadn't been able to adopt a child? What does a child bring to a couple like Matthew and Monica?

11. What does Nathan's inability to trust Rain say about him? Is there such a thing as a healthy skepticism?

12. Discuss Malcolm's development over the course of the novel. How do the letters play a part in his journey to maturity? What is it about letters that gives them such power? When was the last time you wrote a letter?

13. It takes an unusual spirit to forgive your rapist—and even welcome him into your community. Could you—like Jack and Laurel—accept Pastor Doug as a man of God?

14. Does The Wednesday Letters inspire you to start any traditions of your own?