



First You Try Everything EPB

By Jane McCafferty
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Introduction

An engrossing tale of a marriage that's falling apart and a wife who will stop at nothing to keep it together.

From their early days in college, Evvie and Ben were drawn to each other by feelings of isolation stemming from their wounded childhoods, passionate idealism, and zeal for music. Sheltered by their love, they weathered the challenges and trials of the imperfect world around them. But as the years passed, they grew apart. Now Ben has his sights set on a completely different kind of future—alone, or with someone else.

Convinced that Ben cannot live without her, Evvie begins to unravel, as she obsessively devises ways to reclaim the love that she cannot let go of. She gambles on a spectacularly dangerous scheme, one that may ultimately have devastating consequences.

Jane McCafferty has written a highly original, utterly beguiling, and emotionally satisfying novel about marriage. Told from alternating viewpoints, this gripping, psychologically astute, and madcap novel illuminates the power of love to define and transform our lives, for better or for worse.

Questions for Discussion

1. Describe Evvie and Ben. What factors drew them together? What drives them apart? How did their pasts shape the adults they would become? How does it still influence them?
2. Put yourself in each of their places. How did they each see themselves? How would each character describe the other?
3. The novel is told from the couple's alternating viewpoints. How does this affect your view of the characters? Do you feel more sympathy towards one or the other? If so, why? Do you understand the other's point of view?
4. When they were young, Ben and Evvie didn't want to "get trapped" by jobs or responsibilities beyond the things they wanted to do—make art, play music. Why do many young people see work as a trap? Is it? What changed for Ben that he no longer held this view? What about Evvie? Can a person have too much freedom?
5. Was Ben hasty in leaving Evvie? Did she take him and his love and his patience for granted? Is there anything Evvie could have done to save her marriage? How much responsibility do they each bear for their breakup?
6. Would you call Evvie as a lost soul? Why was she this way? Might she have been more grounded if she and Ben had had children?
7. Ben did not believe that falling out of love with Evvie made him a "philandering ass." Yet was he? Would he have left Evvie if he didn't have Lauren? Compare Lauren to Evvie. What attracts Ben to Lauren?
8. One of their friends wonders if Evvie is trying to "hold on to integrity." Do you think this is the case or was she being unrealistic, refusing to accept what was happening?
9. Why did Ben resent Evvie's vulnerability as much as he did? Was she using her love and need for him/her trust in him in a manipulative way? Isn't love about being vulnerable to another person?
10. Ben yearned for "what some Buddhist writer called the great longing for catastrophe." Explain that phrase. Why did he feel this way? Though Evvie said she'd prefer to dodge catastrophe, does she precipitate it?
11. Ben told one of his friends that in the last year of his marriage, "he'd been dying of loneliness." His friend warned him though, that he can't cure that with another woman. "I think I absolutely can cure that with another woman. I happen to be in the process of doing so." Do you think Ben is right? Or is his friend? Do you think the loneliness Ben felt will reappear after a while with Lauren, that it is part of who he is? Or do you think another person can cure loneliness?
12. Do you think Evvie really believes in her heart that the outlandish scheme will work? Why does she confess the truth to Ben after it goes wrong?
13. The book begins in winter and ends in summer several years later. How do the seasons play into events as they unfold?
14. At the novel's end, do you think that they still love each other? Evvie believed Ben was her true love. Was he? How does love that begins so full of promise end so badly? Can they feel the same kind of love with the new people in their lives? Talk about those

relationships. How do they compare to the other and to the one Ben and Evvie shared?

15. What did you take away from reading *First You Try Everything*?

About the Author

Jane McCafferty is the author of the novel *One Heart* and two collections of stories, *Thank You for the Music* and *Director of the World and Other Stories*, which won the Drue Heinz Literature Prize. She is the recipient of an NEA Award, the Great Lakes Colleges Association's New Writers Award, and two Pushcart Prizes. She lives and works in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.