

Summer at the Garden Café

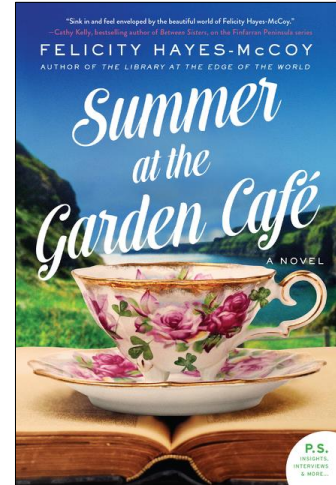
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Introduction

The second in Felicity Hayes-McCoy's Finfarran Peninsula series, and sequel to *The Library at the Edge of the World*—a heartwarming story about secrets between four generations of Irish women, and the healing powers of books, love, and friendship.



The Garden Café, next to Lissbeg Library, is a place where plans are formed, and secrets shared, and where, even in high tourist season, people are never too busy to stop for a sandwich and a cup of tea.

But twenty-one-year-old Jazz—daughter of the town's librarian Hanna Casey—has a secret she can't share. Still recovering from a car accident and reeling from her father's disclosures about his long-time affair, she's taken a job at The Old Forge guesthouse, and begun to develop feelings for a man who's strictly off-limits.

Meanwhile, involved in her own new affair with architect Brian Morton, Hanna is unaware of the turmoil in Jazz's life—until her manipulative ex-husband, Malcom, reappears trying to mend his relationship with their daughter. Rebuffed at every turn, Malcolm must return to London, but his mother, Louisa, is on the case. Unbeknown to the rest of the family, she hatches a plan, finding an unlikely ally in Hanna's mother, the opinionated Mary Casey.

Watching Jazz unravel, Hanna begins to wonder if secrets which Malcolm has forced her to keep may have harmed their beloved daughter more than she'd realized. But then, the Casey women are no strangers to secrets, something Hanna realizes when she discovers a journal, long buried in land she inherited from her great-aunt Maggie. Ultimately, it's the painful lessons of the past that offer a way to the future, but it will take the shared experiences of four generations of women to find a way forward for Hanna and her family.

Questions for Discussion

1. In the first chapter we see Hanna and her house as rooted in the landscape. Do you think that a sense of place is important in the novel? Is there someplace in your own life that makes you feel rooted and happy, as Hanna now does in Finfarran?
2. Jazz knows she's deeply loved by her mother and grandmother. Yet she also feels betrayed because she's discovered how much they've hidden from her about her parents' divorce, and her dad's real character. How does this contribute to her unhappiness as she struggles to recover from her car accident?

3. There are two hand-made books in this novel – Maggie’s handwritten diary which she hid in an old tin box and for which she made a cover using her old treadle sewing machine, and the precious psalter, made by medieval monks, that’s kept locked in a display case in the library—each carries memories of the past. Do you regard one as more valuable than the other? Why or why not? Do you treasure any family letters or journals of your own? Would they be as valuable to you if you just had scanned or typed-up copies?
4. The old horse trough in the middle of Broad Street is an unchanging feature in a small town that’s rapidly being modernized. What holdovers from the past exist in your community? Do you think there’s value in preserving them?
5. Discussions at Lissbeg Library’s book club tend to veer away from its chosen book into tangential subjects. Do you think this is a good or a bad thing? Is this a tendency you recognize from your own experience of book clubs? What advice would you give to Hanna who has the job of keeping the members on track?
6. Ameena Khan’s family are recent arrivals in Finfarran and her mother is shy because she hasn’t felt confident in her spoken English. How does the library help to introduce her to her neighbors? In what ways do we see her become more involved in Lissbeg as a result?
7. Although Ameena is only a teen she feels responsible for helping her mother to make friends. Is this a common role for the children of immigrants? How might it impact on their own freedom fly the nest? Do you think libraries have a role in promoting cross-fertilization of cultures?
8. “A chapter a day was Maggie’s rule and no book could be opened till the day’s jobs were done.” As a child, Hanna broke that rule and sneaked peeks ahead at chapters to come. When she finds Maggie’s diary she imposes that old restriction on herself “as an expiation for those sins of her childhood.” Are there rules from your own childhood that rise up to haunt you in the present? Do you have rules about reading yourself, such as taking your time with a book, or not sneaking a look at the ending?
9. The tensions surrounding Hanna’s divorce from Malcom still ripple through the Turner-Casey family relationships. How does Hanna try to navigate these tensions? Do you think she could or should approach them differently? Although Jazz is in her twenties, her responses to her father’s visit are childish. Do you think this is understandable? Which characters in the book help her learn to grow up?
10. The language Maggie uses, and the story revealed in her diary, give insights into her character as well as the troubled times through which she lived. Do you find her a sympathetic character? Did the revelation in the later chapters of what happened to her family modify or change your opinion of her? Did you empathize with her dilemma when

the priest forced her to leave her widowed mother? Do you think her brother's readiness to blame her for "deserting her duty" to her mother was just typical of the time? Or is it something that might happen today?

11. What do you think of Fury as a character? Would you find his idiosyncrasies attractive or annoying if he were working for you? Are there well-respected tradespeople with a similar role to his in your own community? Do you empathize with his own respect for craftsmanship from the past?
12. "It was six months since they'd been alone together, and now he was here she hardly knew what to say." Both Hanna and Brian have been hurt by former relationships and, having begun a tentative romance, backed off before finding each other again. When they meet at the opening of the psalter exhibition, they're both nervous. Each responds in a characteristic way, both to each other and to Malcolm's interruption of their reunion. How does that interruption move Brian and Hanna's relationship forward?
13. The strongly Irish theme of emigration is explored in *Summer at the Garden Café* from different angles. Maggie was forced to leave in the 1920s. Ameena's family has come to Finfarran for her father's work, which has meant that Saira wasn't there for the last years of her own mother's life. Gunther has fallen in love with Susan and built a life in Ireland, so Holly is growing up at a distance from her German grandparents. Bríd and Aideen worry that, if their business fails, they'll have to leave Lissbeg. Do you have any family stories about emigration or immigration, or simply about moving to live at a distance? How did those relocations affect family relationships? Is there a memory-keeper in your family? How are your stories handed on?
14. "Your whole life you've been a lad who's wanted to fix things for everyone. But the thing about getting married is that it's not all down to you." Do Conor and Aideen's misunderstandings arise simply from lack of team work? Or are they also the result of differences in their characters and backgrounds? Do you think Bríd's tough love helps or hinders their reconciliation? Have you ever found yourself acting as a go-between for friends who have fallen out?
15. "I'll be staying with Mary Casey, so that's quite all right." Everyone is astonished when Louisa moves in with Mary, but Mary recognizes their shared concern for their granddaughter, describing them as behaving like "a couple of hens with one chick." What are the similarities and differences in Louisa and Mary's characters? How do you think Hanna's relationship with each of them will be affected by Louisa's decision to open a business in Lissbeg?
16. The nuns' garden in *The Old Convent Centre* is a focal point in the novel as well as the town, and its café is where, as Conor says, "half the women in the parish hatch plans and share secrets." How does the author use food and gardening to convey a sense of spiritual and emotional, as well as physical, nourishment and support?

17. Maggie's diary is the book's primary example of a "story within a story": while it tells her tale, it illuminates and influences other characters' stories as well. How does Hanna's search for information about the family members she discovers in the diary affect her own relationship with Brian? How does Jazz's response to the diary differ to Hanna's? What do you think might have happened between Jazz and Gunther if Jazz hadn't found and read the pages Maggie hid in the diary's binding?
18. In Ireland's native tradition of storytelling, animals and birds frequently interact with humans, stand for gods or are messengers from the spirit world. In medieval Irish books such as the psalter, they feature in illustrations, adding ironic commentary to the text. How are birds and animals used in *Summer at the Garden Café*? Do you see The Devil and the bird that fixes its eye on Louisa as characters in their own right?
19. "If the whole place had gone up, the Carrick Psalter would have gone with it. They say it was just one man who managed to hold the others off." At the end of the novel, Fury reveals that the man who saved the psalter might have been Hanna's grandad, Maggie's brother. Hanna badly wants that to be so but has to accept that no one will ever really know. Hanna is content to leave the story unfinished and be happy with what she has learned. Would you feel the same? Do you believe some stories from the past should remain private? Can you think of examples of the sorts of family secrets that are best left untold?
20. In "The Story Behind *Summer at the Garden Café*," Felicity writes about Ireland's War of Independence that "the bitter civil war left families broken and traumatized," such that few personal stories were passed down about that time. What do you think we lose by not sharing these stories? How have you, your family, or your community been impacted by conflict? Do you know and share those stories? Why or why not?