

Dear Ann

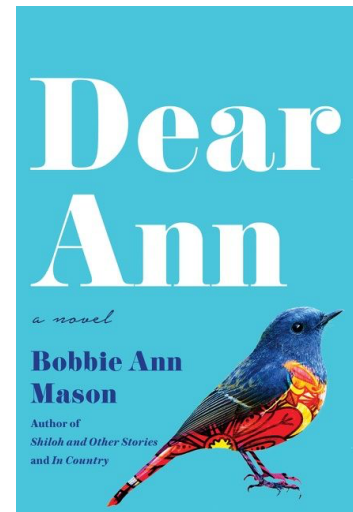
Harper Perennial

By Bobbie Ann Mason

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Introduction

From the acclaimed author of the classics *Shiloh and Other Stories* and *In Country* comes a beautifully crafted and profoundly moving novel which follows a woman as she looks back over her life and her first love.



Ann Workman is smart but naïve, a misfit who's traveled from rural Kentucky to graduate school in the transformative years of the late 1960s. While Ann fervently seeks higher learning, she wants what all girls yearn for—a boyfriend. But not any boy. She wants the “Real Thing,” to be in love with someone who loves her equally.

Then Jimmy appears as if by magic. Although he comes from a very different place, upper-middle class suburban Chicago, he is a misfit too, a rebel who rejects his upbringing and questions everything. Ann and Jimmy bond through music and literature and their own quirkiness, diving headfirst into what seems to be a perfect relationship. But with the Vietnam War looming and the country in turmoil, their future is uncertain.

Many years later, Ann recalls this time of innocence—and her own obsession with Jimmy—as she faces another life crisis. Seeking escape from her problems, she tries to imagine where she might be if she had chosen differently all those years ago. What if she had gone to Stanford University, as her mentor had urged, instead of a small school on the East Coast? Would she have been caught up in the Summer of Love and its subsequent dark turns? Or would her own good sense have saved her from disaster?

Beautifully written and expertly told, *Dear Ann* is the wrenching story of one woman's life and the choices she has made. Bobbie Ann Mason captures at once the excitement of youth and the nostalgia of age, and how consideration of the road not taken—the interplay of memory and imagination—can illuminate, and perhaps overtake, our present.

Questions for Discussion

1. What was your first impression of Ann? Did the way you viewed her change throughout the book?
2. How does the current moment in Ann's life lend itself to reflecting on her past?
3. Why do you think the author chose to tell this story through letters?
4. Do Ann's memories evolve throughout the book? How do our memories change over time?
5. Why do you think Jimmy had such a large effect on Ann?

6. How does the Vietnam War affect the characters and their decisions?
7. How does the book portray first love?
8. What role does the 1960s play in the novel? Do you think the author could have told the same story in a different time period?
9. Do the themes of the book still resonate today?
10. Did you find the ending satisfying? What did you take away from the novel as a whole?