



THE ORCHARD

By Jeffrey Stepakoff

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About the Book: The passionate new novel by the author of FIREWORKS OVER TOCCOA.

Grace Lyndon is a rising ingenue in the world of perfumes and flavors; a stiletto-wearing, work-a-holic in Atlanta, she develops aromas and tastes to enthrall the senses. Dylan Jackson is a widowed single father whose heart and hands have been calloused in the fields of his North Georgia apple farm. When Grace happens to taste an apple picked from Dylan's trees, it changes both their lives forever.

Determined to track down the apple's origin, Grace sets off in the middle of the night where she finds not only a beautiful mountain orchard in the clouds, but the mysterious man who owns it. In Stepakoff's heartbreaking eloquence, their sudden yet undeniable attraction is threatened—leaving readers with a momentous finale that proves Jeffrey Stepakoff is a master craftsman of the heart.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think it was brave or just plain stupid for Grace to climb the big merbau tree in the rainforest in order capture the orchid fragrance? Have you ever done anything with a determination like that?
2. Dylan is convinced that he sees his dead wife in the elevator of the Peachtree Plaza Hotel. Have you ever thought you've seen someone from your past across a crowded space? What did you do? Where you right?
3. Did you know that companies like Southern Compounds and International Fragrance & Flavors exist? Do you think it detracts from your favorite foods to know about all the corporate research and development that goes into making them appealing to you?
4. Have you ever eaten something that is so good you can't stop thinking about it? Ever been haunted by a particular taste, the way Grace was when she bit into that apple?
5. Though Monic is a scientist, she rejects Chaos Theory and firmly believes that there is an order to things, particularly when it comes to love. Where do you stand?
6. Do you seek out organic foods? Do you believe, like Rebecca Jane did, that there's something spiritual about organic farming?
7. When Grace carries the basket of eggs back from the henhouse on her first morning at the farm she sees the tombstones for Dylan's family members, but she does not see one for his wife. Why do you think Rebecca Jane was not buried with the rest of the family?



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8. Dylan is convinced that he can feel his wife in the Orchard, particularly just before harvest. Do you believe in ghosts?
9. Ever been profoundly attracted (or repelled) by the scent of another person?
10. Do you wear a fragrance? Do you prefer one on your partner, or are you more attracted to the unadorned scent of skin?
11. When Herb warned Grace – “Just make sure this is really an apple you’re chasing and not a taco” – what do you think he meant?
12. What do you think about Grace’s decision not to come clean with the exact truth about Agnes Scott? Do you think something like this is grounds for firing? Even if the person is as talented and qualified as Grace Lyndon?
13. Do you think you would enjoy a twenty-four course “molecular gastronomy” meal like the one Grace and Dylan have at Cole Thomas’ restaurant? Or would you prefer the fried chicken picnic they have later in the Orchard?
14. When Grace uses the aroma machine (the MiniVOC) to recreate Dylan’s mother’s pie, he is moved by the memory. Do you agree that smell is the most powerful sense? Have you ever been stirred by a scent? Ever had one suddenly evoke a strong emotion or memory?
15. What are your favorite scents?
16. Do you believe that Grace was right to take a stand on the high fructose corn syrup, or do you think she should have simply given the client what he wanted? Ever been faced with a similar dilemma in your life?
17. Do you think Grace should have given Dylan the information about April immediately, or held off even longer? Have you taken your time giving information when you were afraid of the response?
18. If there was one more scene added to the very end of the book, what do you think it would be?
19. Do you have a favorite type of apple?

Interested in having author Jeffrey Stepakoff join your book group discussion? Visit the book club page on www.JeffreyStepakoff.com to find out how and to learn more about Jeff & his books!

