

READING GROUP GUIDE

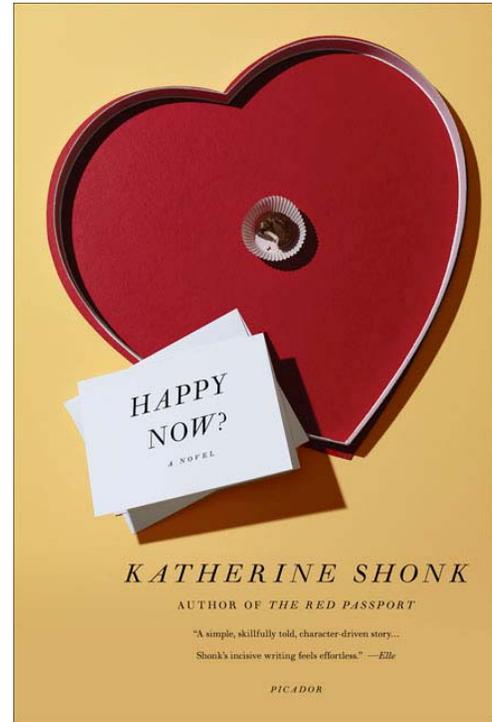
Happy Now?

A Novel

by **Katherine Shonk**

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Happy Now?* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Happy Now?*.

About the Book

When the front door of the coach house swung open, Claire saw her dead husband's cat trotting toward her.

Happy Now? follows Claire Kessler's chaotic and often tragicomic journey through the weeks that follow her husband Jay's suicide---on Valentine's Day. Nomie, Claire's pregnant younger sister, welcomes Claire into her guest house and abandons her own husband in solidarity. Claire's father turns into a concerned stalker, trailing her every movement in his car. Encounters with well-meaning therapists turn horribly awry, and Jay's abandoned cat goes on a hunger strike. All the while, Jay's extensive suicide note (binder, actually) looms on the coffee table,

waiting for Claire to gather the courage to read it. With wit and compassion, Katherine Shonk explores both the possibilities and limitations of human relationships. *Happy Now?* is an uncommonly honest portrayal of love, loss, and letting go.

About the Author

KATHERINE SHONK is the author of *The Red Passport*, a *Chicago Tribune* Best Book of the Year. Her writing has appeared in *Best American Short Stories* and *Tin House*. She works as an editor and writer for Harvard University and lives in Chicago with her husband.

Discussion Questions

1. Ultimately, do you view Jay as a sympathetic character or not? Can his suicide, or any, be excused, or is it always a selfish act?
2. How would you describe Claire's personality? To what extent does it seem like it was incompatible or compatible with Jay's?
3. In retrospect, should Claire have known better than to marry Jay, or were the warning signs not strong enough?
4. Where do you think Claire's fascination with dollhouses—and interiors in general—comes from?
5. What was your reaction to Jay's suicide note? What questions, if any, did it seem to leave unanswered?
6. What do we learn about Jay's family that might offer clues to the source of his depression?
7. Claire's father "stalks" her throughout the book. What is the nature of their relationship, and to what degree does it help or hurt Claire? What is the state of their relationship at the end of the book?
8. Why do you think Jay gave his anniversary painting from Claire to his therapist? What does this action tell you about his character?
9. How did you feel about Jay's therapist? Do you think she bears any responsibility for failing to anticipate Jay's suicide?
10. How did her parents' divorce appear to shape Claire's attitudes toward love and marriage, as well as her choice of Jay as a mate?

11. How does Claire change over the course of the novel? Do her conclusions about Jay and their marriage seem correct, or not?

12. What do you think will happen to Claire after the novel ends? Will she make better choices about men in the future, or is she doomed to repeat past mistakes?

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