

Apples Never Fall by Liane Moriarty – Reading Group Questions

The Delaney family love one another dearly – it's just that sometimes they want to murder each other...

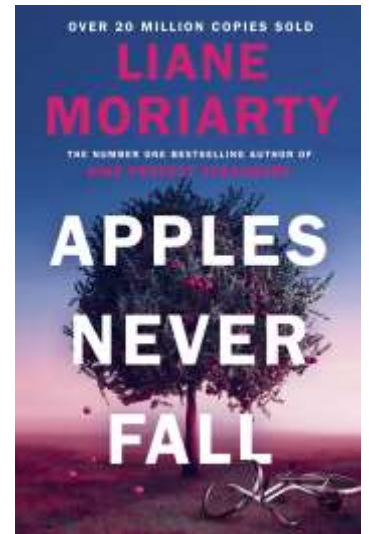
Joy Delaney and husband Stan have done well. Four wonderful grown-up children. A family business to envy. The golden years of retirement ahead of them.

So when Joy Delaney vanishes – no note, no calls, her bike missing – it's natural that tongues will wag.

How did Stan scratch his face? Why no answers from the police? And who was the stranger who entered and suddenly left their lives? What are they all hiding?

But for the Delaney children there is a much more terrifying question: did they ever know their parents at all?

Because the closer the family, the bigger the lie...



Questions

1. The title of the novel is a reference to the adage, 'The apple never falls far from the tree', an expression that is often used to suggest that a child grows up to be similar to its parents, both in behaviour and in physical characteristics. In what way does the expression apply to the Delaney family, and Savannah, Harry Haddad and their parents?
2. What do the marriages and relationships in the novel have in common, and where do they differ? Why do you think each marriage works (or doesn't), and where might each fall down?
3. 'She said, "You don't have to say you're sorry," because he didn't. If they started saying sorry, where would it begin and where would it end?' (page 193) What does Joy mean here? Do you think this attitude shines a light on one of the reasons Joy's and Stan's marriage is ultimately successful?
4. 'When the police interviewed [Caro] she'd told them that her neighbours were a nice ordinary happily married couple. This was absolutely true and absolutely not true. There was no such thing as a nice ordinary happily married couple.' (page 334) What does Caro mean here? Is she right, do you think?
5. Joy felt that much was compromised by trying to run the business and be a mother to four children. At one point she says: 'If her children ever had children they might at least have an inkling of how Joy had staggered beneath the weight of her responsibilities through those difficult years.' (page 349) And later: 'Surely Joy's clever granddaughter would know how to have it all without actually doing it all.' (page 460) This is a story we hear more often than ever

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from women today. Is it really possible to 'have it all', do you think? If so, under what circumstances?

6. 'When [Joy] looked at photos of her children when they were little, she sometimes thought, Did I notice how beautiful they were? Was I actually there? Did I just skim the surface of my entire damned life?' (pages 102–103) Do you relate to what Joy says here?
7. '[Joy] felt fond of Savannah but she didn't adore her in the fierce, complex way she loved her daughters, which meant, paradoxically, that she could spend three weeks with her no problem at all.' (page 458) Does this statement resonate with you? Why or why not?
8. 'For the first time in her sixty-nine years [Joy] felt the fear: the fear every woman knows is always waiting for her, the possibility that lurks and scuttles in the shadows of her mind, even if she's spent her entire life being so tenderly loved and protected by good men.' (page 405) Do you agree that this fear is universal for women? Discuss some of the fears women typically have that men may not have, or may be unaware of.
9. 'It was always possible to plant doubt. Most men carried the guilt of their gender. You just had to apply a tiny flame to the kindling.' (page 332) Savannah uses a story about domestic violence to engender sympathy and pity in Joy and Stan, and then invents a story about sexual harassment to blackmail Troy. What do you think about this? Why do you think this strategy works for Savannah, in both cases, even though neither story is true?
10. 'It happened all the time. Talented kids turned into ordinary grown-ups: butterflies became moths.' (page 307) What do you think of this statement? Do you think it's true? Do you think it's better for children to have had an experience of success and failure the way the Delaney children did with tennis, or do you think it sets them up for disappointment? How has their childhood experience affected the four Delaney children?
11. 'When the children were little they always called it "Daddy's office" even though Joy was the one who handled all the business of the business. Yet they all had to maintain the pretence that because Stan was the man, whatever he was doing was automatically more important and deserved priority over any contribution from the little lady.' (page 395) Similarly, what about the fact that Christina says at one stage that Joy 'helped' to run the tennis school, rather than that she actually co-ran it? A similar attitude is evident with Brooke and Grant, when Brooke offers to give up her practice to help their marriage. Why do you think women often accede professional dominance to men?
12. 'What was the harm in it? Why not rewrite the memory and remember it as a perfect day? What was the actual benefit of accuracy when it came to memories? What would her dear sweet little memoir-writing teacher have to say about that?' (page 165) Do you agree with Joy? Does social media play a part in the reconstruction of memories these days, do you think?

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13. 'She'd never wanted his gratitude, just his acknowledgement. Just once. Because otherwise, what had been the point of her entire life? Of all those lamb chops she'd grilled? Of all that spaghetti bolognese? My God, she despised spaghetti bolognese. Night after night after night, plate after plate after plate. The laundry, the ironing, the mopping, the sweeping, the driving. She'd never resented it at the time but now she resented every moment, every single bloody lamb chop.' (page 403) Do you think this is a common experience for women, especially women around Joy's age? Have things changed? Do you think Stan was aware of this need in Joy for his acknowledgement, and if not, why not?
14. 'For the first time in decades [Joy] stopped. She thought she'd stopped when she and Stan retired, but she hadn't stopped at all. She'd kept on running hopelessly towards some unspecified, unattainable goal.' (page 459) What effect did retirement have on Joy? Do you think this happens often when people retire? Do you think this altered state of being made Joy more susceptible to Savannah's scheme? What was it about the situation with Savannah and the off-grid challenge that really made Joy 'stop'?
15. Do your feelings towards Savannah change throughout the book? Do you think her childhood experiences explain or even justify her behaviour as an adult? How does knowledge of Savannah's childhood trauma colour your view of her actions as an adult?
16. Why do you think Joy continues to feel sympathy for Savannah even when she knows what Savannah has done to her family? What qualities does Savannah have that appeal to Joy?
17. 'But then a university friend got diagnosed with depression and described it to Brooke as a kind of half-paralysis, as if all her muscles had atrophied, and Brooke had a sudden memory of Amy eating cereal in slow motion, swaying slowly like seaweed under water, and she realised she was offering this friend more sympathy and understanding than she'd ever given her own sister. These days she tried hard to see Amy with objective, compassionate eyes, but it was hard, because this was still her big sister, her bossy, charismatic sister, who used to call Brooke her "peasant".' (page 185) Why do you think it is that sometimes we're more compassionate to our friends than our family?
18. '[Amy] said this with the cheerful, childish disdain with which siblings often spoke about each other. Roger had a client who was an extremely well-spoken university lecturer, except for when she talked about her older sister, when she morphed into a freckled, pigtailed kid: "My sister gets everything, Roger."' (page 380) Why do you think sibling rivalry and relationships are so resistant to change? What is your experience with your siblings, if you have any?



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