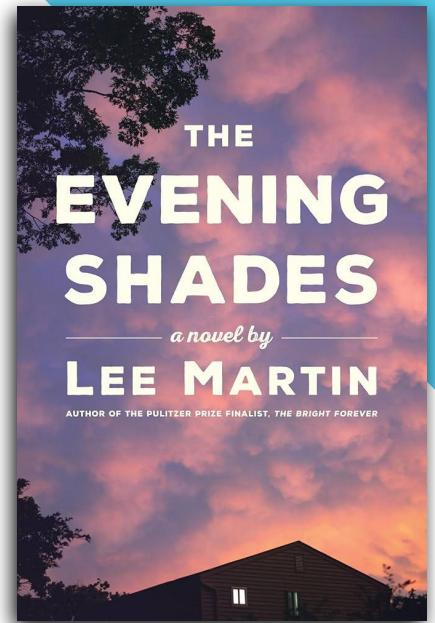


The Evening Shades

Lee Martin

Trade Paperback 9781685891732

eBook 9781685891749



“Lee Martin is a brilliant chronicler of small-town life, and in *The Evening Shades*, set in 1972, he vividly portrays two midwestern communities in the aftermath of a child’s mysterious murder. Nevertheless, Martin’s ultimate concerns are beyond time and place as he delves into the deepest, and often most unsettling, mysteries of all—those of the human heart.” —**Ron Rash, author of *New York Times* bestselling novel, *Serena***

“There is not another American writer living today who better understands our Midwest and the people who live there than Lee Martin. In *The Evening Shades*, Martin explores grief and betrayal, love and hope, loneliness and redemption in small midwestern towns in 1972 when two broken people come together in surprising ways. I simply love this book.”
—**Ann Hood, author of *The Stolen Child***

INTRODUCTION

The highly anticipated follow-up to Pulitzer Prize finalist *The Bright Forever*, *The Evening Shades* tells the story of two lonely people in a small Midwestern town and the dark secrets tormenting them . . .

One afternoon in the autumn of 1972, a lonely widow in Mt. Gilead, Illinois, makes the impromptu decision to rent out a room in her house to a stranger who has come to town. It is risky—she doesn’t know anything about him. But Edith Green can no longer bear a life lived alone. And Henry Dees is haunted by the past he carries with him from another small town, particularly by the death of a little girl that some people think was his fault.

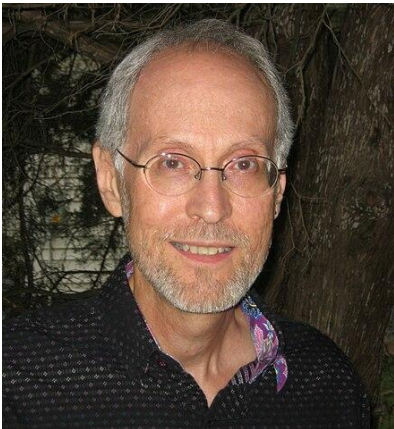
And slowly, Henry and Edith’s suspenseful dance between secrets and trust leads them to start revealing things to each other — and themselves . . .

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *The Evening Shades* calls attention to the beauty of human connection, more specifically, the need for genuine companionship. What are some ways the author conveys this message through the complexity of the relationships within the story?
2. How do Edith Green and Henry Dees compliment one another?
3. What is the significance of the stories different perspectives? How do they impact readers’ relationship with the main characters?

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4. Throughout the story, the author depicts Henry Dees as an honest and vulnerable man. How does the author do this? Does Henry feel like a reliable narrator?
5. The characters within the story are haunted by their past. On page 234, Henry says, "We all think of the what ifs and the might-have-beens. They shadow us the rest of our lives." How does this concept present itself in each character's story? How does this concept relate to the historical context of the book?
6. A central theme in *The Evening Shades* is an individual's urge to blame. How does it interact with shame throughout the story?
7. The author forces readers to feel like outsiders looking in; the "observer" role is prevalent throughout the story. How does the author accomplish this, and why?
8. In the story, secrecy both brings characters together and tears them apart. Does this ultimately benefit them? Harm them?
9. The notion of acceptance, specifically the innate desire to feel loved, is explored throughout the text, as almost every character attempts to seek the approval of others. How is this yearning for acceptance characterized in the novel? Is acceptance something the characters should strive for?
10. Halfway through the book, Edith tells Bertie Squiggs, "Sadness isn't love." What do you think she means by this?
11. The author writes from the point of view of the two towns: Mt. Gilead and Tower Hill. Why do you think he does this? How are the towns' narration similar and different from each other?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lee Martin is the author of five novels, including *The Bright Forever*, a finalist for the 2006 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction. His writing has appeared in numerous publications including *Harper's*, *Ms Magazine*, *The Georgia Review*, and *The Kenyon Review*, and his work has been anthologized in *The Best American Essays*, and *The Best American Mystery Stories*. His books have been widely translated, and won numerous awards, including a Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers award. He teaches in the MFA Program at The Ohio State University.

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