

*"A well-paced whodunit
full of dark secrets and
fascinating intrigue."*

—KIRKUS REVIEWS, STARRED REVIEW

A
DEADLY

Affection

BOOK ONE IN THE
DR. GENEVIEVE SUMMERFORD
MYSTERY SERIES

CUYLER OVERHOLT

Reading Group Guide

1. *A Deadly Affection* takes place during the Progressive Era, a relatively obscure period bookended by the Gilded Age and World War I. Were you familiar with this time period before you read the book? How would you describe it now? Is 1907 New York a place you'd like to visit?
2. Genevieve has been carrying a burden of guilt over her brother's death since she was twelve years old. How has this guilt shaped her life? How does it continue to influence her decisions over the course of the novel? Have you experienced similar feelings of guilt in your own life?
3. Although Genevieve is able to find a male classmate "open to progressive ideas" to help her plumb the mysteries of sexual intercourse, most of her peers would have considered a woman's participation in pre-marital sex shocking and shameful. How have things changed? Does sexual activity before marriage still carry more stigma for women than for men?
4. Considering Genevieve's past with Simon, do you think she is right to distrust him? Did you worry that Simon might be working against her, to exact revenge?
5. Mrs. Summerford has withdrawn from life since her son's death. Do you think she has been a negligent mother to Genevieve by retiring into her own grief? Do you believe she had a choice?

6. What is Katie's role in the family? How has Mrs. Summerford's emotional absence affected her relationship with Genevieve?
7. Genevieve has been raised to respect authority in all its guises: her father, her professors, the police—even the rational, scientific mind. As the story unfolds, how do each of these trusted authorities fail her? How do these failures, in turn, make her grow stronger?
8. According to Professor Mayhew, the female brain is “rather too small for great intellect, but just large enough for conceit.” How do you think you would have reacted to statements like these as a woman in Genevieve's time? Do you believe more subtle prejudice against women's capabilities continues to exist today?
9. Genevieve reacts dramatically to the sight of policemen at the ball chasing the young street beggar. Is it simply a sense of injustice that causes her to jump out of the car to help the boy, or do you think her motives might be more complicated?
10. What do you think it is that attracts Genevieve to Simon? And vice versa?
11. Mr. Summerford believes Genevieve's life will be ruined if she pursues a relationship with a poor immigrant Irishman. Given the class distinctions at the time, is there basis for his concern? Do you believe it might be possible for Genevieve and Simon to find happiness in the future, despite their differences?
12. Lucille Fiske is an ambitious woman in a time when there are few outlets for female ambition. Why do you think Olivia's marriage to the Earl matters so much to her? Is it really because, as Louisa says, a title is “the only thing they haven't got”?
13. Mr. Summerford has had a major influence on Genevieve's confidence

and self-regard. How does the relationship between the two change by the end of the novel? Do you believe Genevieve will be able to live life on her own terms in the future?

14. In light of the fact that there is no cure for Huntington's chorea, do you think Genevieve does the right thing in telling Olivia that she has the disease? Would you want to know, if you were in Olivia's shoes?
15. After discovering that Mrs. Braun is the murderer, Genevieve concludes: "I knew that in her twisted mind, she'd believed she had no choice. With no one to turn to and nowhere to go for help, she'd taken the only path she thought open to her. Her desperate actions had left a trail of innocent victims in their wake; but I supposed that she too had been a victim in a way." Do you agree that Mrs. Braun is a victim? What actions besides murder could she have taken to protect her daughter and herself, without sacrificing their livelihood?
16. Genevieve takes a number of risks in her attempt to prove Eliza is innocent, including breaking into a crime scene, walking the streets alone at midnight, and earning Lucille Fiske's enmity. What do you think motivates her? Do you consider her brave or foolhardy?
17. Although the reality of alternating personalities, or what today would be called dissociative identity disorder, has been debated for more than a hundred years, the illness continues to be included in psychiatric diagnostic manuals. Did you start the book believing that people could have multiple personalities? After reading about Elizabeth's experience, are you more inclined to believe that such a coping mechanism could exist?
18. A historical novelist must walk a thin line between supplying too little and too much historical detail. How well did the author walk the line in this case? Were there things you were curious to learn more about? How seamlessly were the historical details integrated into the story?