

A Summer Morning

Anne Leigh Parrish

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A discontented man chooses his routines over growth in the slow-burning novel A Summer Morning.

In Anne Leigh Parrish's domestic novel *A Summer Morning*, a discontented man faces decisions about his family and love.

Timothy, a manager at Gap, is riddled with self-doubt. He fears disappointing everyone. He lives with his girlfriend Sam—a college student and a talented poet—but she wants a baby, and he's uncertain about becoming a parent. His own divorced parents are reuniting, and he compares himself to his adult siblings, who have all settled down. Restless, he begins to drink. A former fraternity brother of his, Harcourt, discloses a past secret involving a woman who was once Timothy's love interest. Harcourt also invites Timothy to join him in a real estate development project.

The novel is set over the course of one summer in a quiet town; it assumes a languid pace. It includes conversations about people's peripheral relationship doubts, including about Timothy's sister's boyfriend; these distract from its progression. People question each other's intentions, too, leading to a lagging first half. Even Timothy and Sam's relationship seems marked by the comfort of familiarity: they have easy conversations at home, and there are revealing details included, such as that Sam has friendships with Timothy's mother and sister.

The story drifts between unspoken malaise and Sam and Timothy's attempts to revitalize their relationship. While Timothy appreciates his good fortune and the peace that Sam brings into his life, he is an indecisive and hesitant hero. He spends considerable time thinking about the purpose of marriage; when his mother shares her opinions with him (including that he should seek counseling), he reacts with resentment. The book also meanders through references to his upbringing, which Timothy thinks was tough, despite the relative wealth of his stepfather. Though he seems comfortable remaining stagnant, his immaturity leads to narrative drags.

The book's secondary cast is sketched in; many people seem present to reveal facets of Timothy's personality when he's away from Sam. He shares fleeting thoughts about how it would be troublesome to get involved with another woman that underscore his placid indifference to his circumstances. His work as Harcourt's partner offers some hope of redemption: when it comes to meeting building construction standards, he is at his most steadfast. Nonetheless, complications arise: the return of a person of past significance in Timothy's life shifts the focus to his tendency to take others for granted. Some related developments are too abrupt. In the end, there is a sense that as long as these characters continue to make assumptions about each other's needs and fail to examine the effects of their behaviors on others, discontent will continue to reign.

In the novel *A Summer Morning*, longtime romantic partners discover the truth about each other's mismatched ideas concerning their future and themselves.

KAREN RIGBY (April 18, 2023)

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