

Discussion Questions

Table For Two by Amor Towles

1. In most pieces in this collection, a pivotal moment occurs when two characters sit opposite each other at a table to confront a new reality in their lives. Can you pinpoint where this happens in these stories? What is it about this setup that you think lends itself to particularly meaningful conversations? Can you think of a time when your life changed significantly after a conversation at a table for two?
2. Most of these stories take place in New York at the turn of the millennium—a period just before the internet transformed how we connect with one another. How do the means of communication and their limitations at the time impact how the characters respond to their dilemmas? How does the backdrop of New York City play its own role in tying together the characters and their stories?
3. Consider each of the six short stories as a companion to another: “The Line” and “The Ballad of Timothy Touchett”; “Hasta Luego” and “I Will Survive”; and “The Bootlegger” and “The DiDomenico Fragment.” Did you notice any thematic parallels within these pairs? What traits do the protagonists share, and how do their outcomes mirror each other? How do they diverge?
4. “The Line” takes place in Moscow in the 1920s—a vastly different setting from that of the other five short stories. What did you make of the decision to open the collection with this piece? How does Pushkin’s story bring perspective to the ones set in New York?
5. The narrator of “The Bootlegger,” astonished at her husband’s persistence in tracking down the man whom he’d gotten kicked out of Carnegie Hall, comments on “the death-defying acrobatics of the male ego.” Consider the gender dynamics in the relationships throughout this collection. Who takes care of whom? Did any of these relationships call to mind ones you’ve encountered—or been a part of—in your own life?
6. There are several motifs that run throughout the book. Among them are fine art (as in rare book editions, Bach’s cello suites, and paintings of the Annunciation), restaurants and dining, Ivy League social clubs, men in finance, and surveillance (as in Nell’s camera in “I Will Survive,” the phone calls in “Hasta Luego,” and the hidden microphone

in “The Bootlegger”). What role do these motifs play in the thematic composition of the book?

7. In “Eve in Hollywood,” we see the return of Evelyn Ross, the spunky, fiercely independent best friend of Katey Kontent from Towles’s *Rules of Civility*. For those who have read *Rules of Civility*, was this the reinvention of her lifestyle that you had hoped for her? And for those meeting Eve for the first time, how do you imagine Eve fared in New York—and, before that, in Indiana?

8. Explaining her decision to move from New York to Los Angeles, Eve remarks to Charlie, '[B]ack east the fairy tales are a thousand years old, handed down from generation to generation. All that happily-ever-after nonsense. Out here there are fairy tales, but it feels like everyone is making them up as they go along.' What does she mean by this? Consider this collection as a whole—a book that crisscrosses from New York City to Hollywood. How true does Eve’s observation ring to this assortment of stories?

9. Did you have a favorite piece from the collection, and why that one in particular?