

## THE SWEETEST THING – Barbara Freethy - READER'S GUIDE

1. Almost every character struggles with the idea of home, of belonging to a family. Alex, Faith, and Jessie suffer through multiple foster homes or parent figures. In the end, they find makeshift families to love.

Who would you consider your "family" at this moment - the people you go to for support and comfort and who you support in return? How many of them are part of a standard nuclear family? How many are friends or loved ones you've picked up along the way? Why do you think you've come together as you have?

2. Ben proposes to Faith, and while she has never seen him as a husband she can't deny that they are compatible, that she cares for him, and that she loves being part of his family. She wonders what is enough to justify a marriage. She notes, "Just because Ben didn't make her heart race, or her palms sweat, or send a flutter of butterflies into her stomach, didn't make him a bad choice for a husband."

If you are married, did practical reasons - for example, similar life goals - factor into the decision besides love? If you are not married, are your criteria for a partner pragmatic or romantic? Do you think it's realistic to marry someone and expect a lifetime of happiness purely based on an emotional connection?

3. Alex grew up a sickly, weak child with awkward feet. Now, as an adult, he is fit, works out and owns a shoe company. However, no matter how much he exercises, he still feels like a weak, sickly child on the inside.

Has your appearance changed since childhood - for example, have you straightened your teeth, filled out, gotten taller? Do you feel as though how you look now represents who you are? Do you still have insecurities from your childhood you haven't outgrown? If you haven't outgrown them, why do you think they still bother you?

4. The Porter family puts a lot of stock in traditions. They have a weekly dinner, a weekly brunch, and holiday traditions like coloring Easter Eggs. Alex, on the other hand, didn't grow up with any tradition and continues not to have any.

What family traditions do you have from your family? What traditions do other families have that you don't celebrate? Why have you chosen to continue certain traditions and possibly not others? Have you started any new traditions with your family - how did these come about? Why are these important to you?

5. When Ben tries to convince Faith to marry him although she only sees him as a friend, he says, "Love can grow, Faith. It's like a garden. You plant the seeds in the dirt and for a while it looks like nothing, but after a few storms and a few good sunny days, you find a blossoming plant, thriving where there once was nothing."

Do you think this is true? Or do you think you need to be in love at first to stay in love? If you're with someone now, did your love come about slowly? Or was the passion there from the beginning? If you've experienced both kinds of relationships, which did you prefer?

I hope you enjoyed THE SWEETEST THING and that these questions inspire some interesting discussion. Happy Reading!

Barbara Freethy