

# **STRAIGHT UPHILL**

*A Tale of Love and Chocolate*



## **Book Club Guide and Questions**

Jess Wells

## Book Club Guide

Fun ideas for book club meetings: There are few things more fun than a good book and a mug of hot chocolate so why not include chocolate treats in your meetings? Chocolate fondue recipes (with pound cake, strawberries, or banana slices for dipping) are easy to find on the internet.

Chocolate fountains are inexpensive or can be rented from party stores. And after a discussion of the book, why not talk about your favorite chocolate bar during your childhood, and your favorite chocolate now? Are you a fan of milk chocolate, dark chocolate, or white chocolate? What is your favorite inclusion in chocolate, such as orange, caramel, nuts etc.? What is the strangest thing you've seen covered in chocolate or the oddest combination of flavors with chocolate?

## Discussion Questions

1. Were you intrigued by the process of making chocolates in the story? Have you ever worked with chocolate?
2. The title of the book is *Straight Uphill*. How does this title relate to the topic of love?
3. Do any of the couples in the book seem like an unlikely pair?
4. There are many types of love described in the book. Discuss what they are. How many have you experienced?
5. The village in the story is a fictional representation of Coriglia in the Cinque Terre in Italy. What part of the village did you particularly like?
6. In the World War II section, do you think Caterina made the right decision to not use the poison?

7. Do you think there was any hope for Gretchen and Dario? Did you find Dario appealing?
  
8. What did you think of Paolo, the chef's son?
  
9. Is Kate's fear of intimacy understandable? Have you ever felt like running away rather than falling in love?
  
10. The author has a soft spot in her heart for Luca. Are his curmudgeonly nature and rugged good looks appealing? Can you see the draw between Luca and Adelina?
  
11. In the World War I section: what did you think of the life of Anya? Have you ever been faced with having to choose between love and freedom?
  
12. How did Capt. Zedoary change Delfina's life? What does Capt. Zedoary teach us about love?
  
13. In Anya's time, her request was for a life of freedom but in our time, it's sometimes more a question of self-fulfillment, empowerment, being free and being empowered to accomplish something. What do you

think she would do if she lived in our time?

14. The author intended the World War I section to veer into a slightly more fantastical tone, especially at the end with the arrival of the appreciative recipients with their plaques. Did the arrival of the honorees brighten the book? Lift the story?
  
15. What mistakes did Gemma make with her daughters?
  
16. The author intended the section on chocolate in the 1400s to be fun. Did you like this section of the book? Do you feel the women were empowering themselves by taking over the chocolate preparation?
  
17. What did Bettina learn? What did she achieve?
  
18. Do you think that Gretchen made the right decision in the end?
  
19. How do you feel about the widows' park bench?

20. Two of the chocolatiers move in a very languid, almost hypnotic way when working with the chocolate. Have you ever felt that way cooking or doing any kind of hobby?
  
21. Can you describe each of the characters in terms of where they were in the beginning of the story and the end?
  
22. What are some of the most poignant moments in the book?