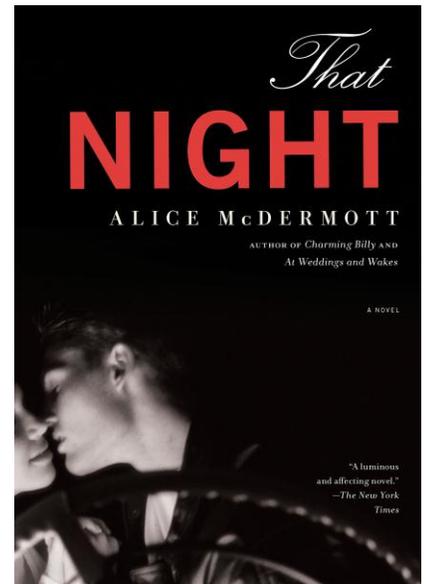


# Reading Group Gold

## That Night

by Alice McDermott

It is high summer, the early 1960s. Sheryl and Rick, two Long Island teenagers, share an intense, all-consuming love. But Sheryl's widowed mother steps between them, and one moonlit night Rick and a gang of hoodlums descend upon her quiet neighborhood. That night, driven by Rick's determination to reclaim Sheryl, the young men provoke a violent confrontation, and as fathers step forward to protect their turf, notions of innocence belonging to both sides of the brawl are fractured forever. Alice McDermott's *That Night* is "a moving and captivating novel, both celebration and elegy...a rare and memorable work" (The Cleveland Plain Dealer).



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### Questions

1. What was the effect of the narrator's voice on your reading of these events? How might the novel have unfolded if it had been told from Rick's point of view?
2. In what way is Rick and Sheryl's story timeless? What other love stories, ancient or contemporary, did their dilemma bring to mind? How did your parents react to your first dates?
3. How did Rick and Sheryl cope with their fractured families? How much did their home lives influence their attraction to one another?
4. Is Rick's reaction to the loss of Sheryl typical of young men but not young women? How might Sheryl have reacted if Rick had been the one who was sent away?
5. How does *That Night* compare to your impressions or memories of 1960s suburbia? What shifts in American culture are captured in this novel?
6. In what ways could Rick's anguish serve as a metaphor for the nation at large during that time period?
7. What might have become of Sheryl and Rick's relationship if she had not become pregnant? Would it have lasted into marriage, as she predicted? If not, who would have been the one to call for a break-up?

8. What do Sheryl's nonchalant words regarding death indicate about her true frame of mind? How is her attitude toward death intertwined with her approach to sex? What does the narrator mean on page 75 when she says that Rick "would not have been able to resist the heady combination of love and sex and death, even if he could never fully understand it"?
9. How are the economic lines drawn in the community featured in *That Night*? Which families have more social power? Who looks down on whom?
10. What ironies exist in the fact that the narrator's mother is desperate to have a child? How does the narrator's experience of family life compare to that of the other kids in the neighborhood?
11. How does Sheryl respond to Pam? Which one of them has greater control? Would you have been able to trust Pam?
12. What was the lasting aftermath of that night? As the narrator's family home is being sold, how does Rick seem to be affected by the memory of Sheryl? How did that night compare to the later years the characters would go on to experience?
13. How did you react to the novel's closing scene and its image of Sheryl's newborn son? Did your perception of her change from the beginning of the book to that moment?
14. What themes regarding family are woven through many of Alice McDermott's novels? What makes the families in *That Night* distinct from those in her other works?



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