Discussion Guide



Loneliness & Company
Charlee Dyroff

Bloomsbury Publishing
2024
288 pages
ISBN: 978-16398732081

Loneliness and Isolation

Summary

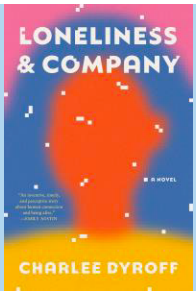
Lee's future is set-a top student and professor-favorite, she's destined to land a job at a prestigious Big Five corporation. So when, upon graduating, she's assigned to an unknown company in the dead city of New York instead, her life is completely upended. In this new role, Lee's task is to gather enough research to train an AI how to be a friend. In doing so, Lee must decide what she's willing to give up for success and, along the way, learn what it means to be a true friend.

Questions

1. Throughout the novel, Lee refers to her parents by their first names, Greg and Cindy, often reflecting on how she wants to be different from them. Does this signify something about their relationship? How would you describe Lee's feelings about her parents?
2. When she finally learns about the project that the Company who hired her is working on, Lee thinks to herself, "If you don't name something, can you identify it? If you never learn an emotion, can you feel it?" What does this novel suggest are the repercussions of not having the word to describe an emotion like loneliness?
3. Lee runs and jogs throughout the novel. She goes on a running date, runs to get exercise, to explore her new city, but also as an escape from the confusion of her mind. Have you ever used physical activity as a distraction from your thoughts like Lee does?
4. When Janet sees her former mentor's name unexpectedly, it affects her physically, like a punch in the chest. Has reading someone's name ever made you feel this way? Why do you think she reacted so strongly to just seeing his name?
5. When Lee agrees to wear the watch tracking her every emotion and bodily process, it makes her feel uneasy. How would you feel if your watch could track so much of you, not just your heart rate and blood oxygen level, but your very thoughts on how you are experiencing the world?
6. How is Lee's world the same as our own? How is it different? Do you see our world becoming more like Lee's?
7. Do you agree that the project shouldn't have gone forward, even when it was getting so close to being able to offer a solution to loneliness? Do you think people could benefit from feeling like they have someone to talk to, even if that person isn't real?

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8. Why do you think the watch made Lee go so far out of her comfort zone and do crazy things she had never done before? Do you think our devices make us do things we might not otherwise do if we weren't being tracked?
9. Why do you think Lee decided to open an old-fashioned restaurant instead of following her old dream of working for one of the Big Five Companies? Did the ending surprise you?
10. Do you think Lee is less lonely at the end of the novel than she was at the beginning? What about the other characters working on the project, Chris, Janet, and Toru?

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