

FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX
DISCUSSION GUIDE

SOMEDAY THIS PAIN WILL BE USEFUL TO YOU

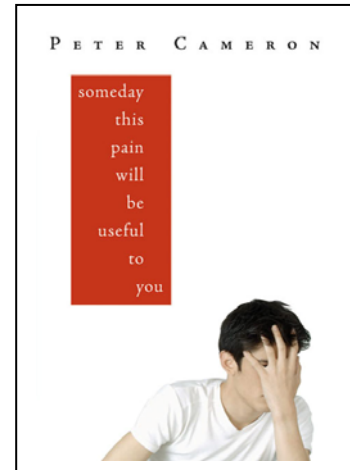
by Peter Cameron

Reading Level

Grades 9 up

★“James makes a memorable protagonist, touching in his inability to connect with the world but always entertaining in his first person account of his New York environment, his fractured family, his disastrous trip to the nation’s capital, and his ongoing bouts with psychoanalysis.” —**Starred, *Booklist***

“Peter Cameron has written a compelling and hopeful tale . . . about a teen you’ve really got to meet.” —**Richie’s Picks**



About the Novel

Eighteen-year-old James Sveck should be planning for his freshman year at Brown. Instead, he’s searching Internet real estate listings, looking for a sanctuary—a nice farmhouse in Kansas, perhaps. Although James lives in twenty-first-century Manhattan, he’s most at home in the faraway worlds of filmmaker Eric Rohmer, novelist Anthony Trollope, and his favorite writer, the obscure and tragic Denton Welch. James’s sense of dislocation is exacerbated by his willfully self-absorbed parents, a disdainful sister, and his cryptic psychologist. Further complicating matters are James’s conflicted feelings for a worldly, handsome male colleague at the art gallery his mother owns.

Peter Cameron has created a bildungsroman that—as *Booklist* said in its starred review—“dramatizes the ambivalences and uncertainties of adolescence in ways that both teen and adult readers will savor and remember.”

Discussion Questions

1. Reflect on the opening quotations. Do they set a tone for the book? How does the Denton Welch quotation expand upon the one from Ovid?
2. James believes adults have the ability to deceive themselves (p. 4). Does James include himself among adults? Why or why not? Does he deceive himself? Is James a reliable narrator?
3. When James is relating emotionally charged scenes, he often digresses or makes observations that seem to be only loosely connected to the subject at hand. What purpose do these digressions/observations serve? What do they reveal about James? What pathos do they add to the scenes? Consider the scene on page 7: James’s mother has come home from her honeymoon early and alone, demanding a glass of water. As James watches her drink, he’s reminded that birds with their heads tilted back, beaks open, will drown in a rainstorm. Find and discuss other examples.
4. James is always looking at houses on-line. What do you think he is seeking?

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5. Why doesn't James want to go to college? How does the "horrible experience" (p. 39) in Washington, D.C. affect his decision? Why does it take so long for James to describe this experience? What is it about Nareem's invitation that propels him to run (pp. 116–117)?
6. Search online for images of the Thomas Cole paintings described on pages 129–131. Discuss James's reaction to them.
7. James likes his coworker, John Webster, very much. Why, then, does James post a false profile on Gent4Gent to entice John? John is hurt and angry and confronts James. How does this episode help James define the man he wants to become?
8. James indicates that one of his favorite people is his grandmother Nanette. Why? Examine his description of her and her house. Is his perception of Nanette influencing his dream of a home in Kansas? What realization about college does James have while sitting in her kitchen?



About the Author

Peter Cameron's fiction has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, and *Grand Street*. He is the author of the adult novels *The City of Your Final Destination*, *Andorra*, and *The Weekend*. Merchant Ivory Productions is currently preparing a film version of *The City of Your Final Destination*, to be directed by James Ivory from a screenplay written by Ruth Praver Jhabvala. In addition, Cameron's play *A Thing of the Past* was read at the Lincoln Center Theater by a cast including Estelle Parsons and Marian Seldes. Cameron has also taught courses at Columbia University, Yale University, Sarah Lawrence College, and Oberlin College. He lives in New York City.

For more information on Peter Cameron:
Web site:

www.fsgkidsbooks.com

Includes additional information about this novel.

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ISBN-10: 0-374-30989-2 • ISBN-13: 978-0-374-30989-3

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