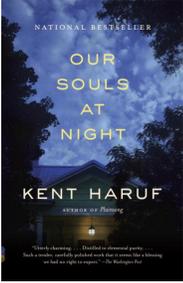


Books by the Stack



***Our Souls at Night* by Kent Haruf**

In Holt, Colorado, widower Louis Waters is initially thrown when the widowed Addie Moore suggests that they spend time together, in bed, to stave off loneliness, but soon they are exchanging the confidences and memories of lives now empty of family, and their hopes for the imminent future.

Why you'll like it: *Love story. Character-driven. Leisurely paced. Bittersweet.*

About the Author: Kent Haruf was born in Pueblo, Colorado. He received a BA from Nebraska Wesleyan University and an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa. His first novel, *The Tie That Binds* won a Whiting Writers' Prize. His other works included *Where You Once Belonged*, *Plainsong*, *Benediction*, and *Our Souls at Night*. He spent 30 years teaching English and writing at several universities including Southern Illinois University and Nebraska Wesleyan University. He died at the age of 71. (Bowker Author Biography)

Questions for Discussion

1. What does the title mean?
2. The novel begins with the word "and": "And then there was the day when Addie Moore made a call on Louis Waters." What do you imagine came before it?
3. Kent Haruf was known for using simple, spare language to create stories of great depth. How does the modest action in *Our Souls at Night* open onto larger insights about getting older?
4. It takes a considerable amount of courage for a woman of Addie's generation to invite a man she hardly knows to sleep in her bed. What do you think propelled her to do it?
5. When Louis comes over for the first time, he knocks on her back door in the name of discretion. Addie says, "I made up my mind I'm not going to pay attention to what people think. I've done that too long – all my life. I'm not going to live that way anymore. The alley makes it seem we're doing something wrong or something disgraceful, to be ashamed of" (8). How does her attitude influence Louis's?
6. Both Louis and Addie have to contend with gossip about their relationship. Who handles it better?
7. What does Addie's friendship with Ruth show us about Addie's character?
8. Addie and Louis both had troubled marriages, but stayed married until their partners died. How does that sense of propriety, of loyalty, influence their relationship with each other?
9. In describing his affair, Louis says, "I think I regret hurting Tamara more than I do hurting my wife. I failed my spirit or something (42). What does he mean by this?
10. Why did Addie refuse to move after Connie's death? How did this decision color Gene's reaction to his mother's late-in-life love affair?
11. On page 52, Louis describes his relationship with Addie to his daughter, "It's some of kind of decision to be free. Even at our ages." Why does he feel freer with Addie than he does alone? How does his behavior

become more uninhibited as the novel progresses?

12. How does Jamie's arrival deepen the connection between Addie and Louis?

13. When Louis confesses that he wanted to be a poet, what effect does it have on Addie's opinion of him? How does that influence their relationship with Jamie?

14. Addie and Louis have regrets about the way they raised their children. How does that influence their relationship with Jamie?

15. Why did Addie buy new clothes for her trips to Denver that she never wears in Holt? What signal does it send to the reader?

16. On page 145, Addie mentions the Denver Center for the Performing Arts production of *Benediction*, based on the author's own novel. Addie and Louis discuss the fact that it's set in a Holt, the fictional town in which they live. Why do you think Haruf slipped this into the story?

17. At the end of that conversation, Addie says "Who would have thought at this time in our lives that we'd still have something like this. That it turns out we're not finished with changes and excitements. And not all dried up in body and spirit" (147). What point is Haruf making?

18. Jamie's arrival ultimately leads to grave consequences. What is Gene afraid of?

19. Several times during the novel, Addie is described as being brave, but she gives in to Gene's demands. Is this a brave act? What is she protecting?

20 How would you describe the ending – as heartbreaking, hopeful, or something else?

(Questions from the publisher)



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