



1. The single most significant theme in the book is illustrated with one sentence: “It’s a wretched thing to feel like an imposter.” Is there a universal truth to that? Most people carry secrets—do those secrets “in some fundamental way” change people, as with Susannah?
2. If so, is that necessarily a bad thing? Is it better to leave history in the past; are some things better left unsaid? Or is there a sort of slow poison in keeping a secret, something that can eat away at a person until the balance is shifted and the harm that it does to the person keeping it outweighs the good of protecting someone else?
3. How do you feel about Susannah’s secret, and the fact that she kept it for so long? Should she have told Wyatt (i.e., does honesty always trump any impetus to withhold the truth, even if the withholding is done with the best intentions?).
4. Helen’s insistence on keeping her daughter’s pregnancy a secret impacted the rest of Susannah’s life. Do you believe that Susannah owed her mother her silence on the matter? Or do you see Helen as meddling and mistaken? Do you think it is typical for a mother to exert such influence over her daughter? Natural? Acceptable? Did Helen ruin her daughter’s life or did she save it?
5. People have been known to give up everything for love. Falling in love with the wrong person can devastate families, friendships, and lives. A second overarching theme of the book is the terrible helplessness of those situations. We see this illustrated most powerfully in the character of Chap, who must risk losing his relationship with a brother whom he loves profoundly. Did you recognize Chap’s untenable situation and the depth of the pain it caused him? Do you think he should have let Susannah go, denied their love, and

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put his brother first? What might the repercussions of that decision have been?

6. We also see it illustrated in the character of Joanna, who briefly considers leaving everything—her children, her husband, her entire life—for Daniel. How would you compare the relationship of Joanna and Daniel to that of Susannah and Chap? How about that of Joanna and Frank compared to Susannah and Wyatt?
7. Joanna struggles with feelings of loneliness, powerlessness, and identity that fuel her resentment for her husband. In a home occupied by two other strong women, she feels marginalized. Can you relate to Joanna's frustration, to her gravitation to Daniel in her need to be seen, to be important to someone? Do you think she was justified in her feelings, or do see her as confused, misguided, or even self-centered?
8. How did you feel about Joanna's friendship with Daniel? Is this a commonly recognizable phenomenon—the convenient cloak of friendship used to sanction a relationship which may, in reality, have a chemistry that isn't necessarily appropriate?
9. How did you feel about Frank as the book went on? Did you see him as neglectful and deserving of Joanna's resentment, or did you feel empathy and/or pity for him?
10. Susannah makes a discovery that is described by these excerpts:
11. She floated in Chap's arms like a feather in a stream, with a strange, transcendental feeling of utter fulfillment, made more bewildering by the fact that she hadn't realized it had been missing before.



12. Her feelings for Chap were so novel, so powerful, that she couldn't help but wonder: If not for him, would she ever have known?
13. Do you believe that a person may never meet the love of his or her life and not even know it? Can we be just as happy not knowing that we are missing something?
14. Wyatt's love for both Susannah and his brother, Chap, is deep and abiding—enough that he can forgive them for loving each other, and go forward without ever revealing that he knew about the relationship. Should Wyatt have told his wife what he knew, relieving her of the guilt? Or can you relate to his fear that the relationship would survive neither the enormity of the truth; that revealing his knowledge might “eat us alive”?
15. The story begins quietly, constructing a careful history to establish a relationship between the reader and the characters in order to recognize those characters familiarly and to understand the deep relationships that the two families have. Did you find that the measured pace—the deliberate foundation that the author layered into the first chapters—had the effect of providing extra emotional impact for the denouement and the last chapters? How did the foreshadowing impact your response to the story? Did you find it compelling or did you feel it gave too much away?
16. The author originally intended to end the book at Chapter Fifteen, without the epilogue. Did you find the epilogue a necessary explanation for the way the final chapter ended, or could you infer the meaning?

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