



A  
Reading  
Group  
Guide

1. Discuss the opening lines of the novel: “Whenever I hear of someone else’s tragedy...I find myself reconstructing those final ordinary moments. Moments that make up our lives. Moments that were blissfully taken for granted—and that likely would have been forgotten altogether but for what followed. The *before* snapshots.” Have you had an event in your life with clear before and after snapshots? What were those snapshots for you?
2. *Heart of the Matter* is told from two points of view. How does this technique affect our view of the characters and their actions? Why do you think the author chose to write in the third person for Valerie and the first person for Tessa?
3. In what ways are Valerie and Tessa different? In what ways are they similar? With whom do you sympathize and identify more? Did you find yourself taking sides as their stories unfolded?
4. We never hear Nick’s point of view, other than what he shares with Tessa and Valerie. What is your perception of Nick? As a husband and father? As a surgeon? Do you think your feelings would have changed had he been given a voice?
5. Valerie has closed herself off from personal relationships, both casual and romantic, claiming to only have time for her son and her career as an attorney. How does meeting Nick change her? Does it affirm what she’s always suspected? What do you think she’ll be like moving forward?
6. In contrast to Valerie, Tessa seems to fit in perfectly in their social circle. Yet she, too, grapples with some of the social issues. In what ways is she different from the women around her?
7. How do money and materialism play a part in this novel? Social standing? Education?
8. What did you think of Romy? Of April? Do you know similar people? Do you think their actions were misunderstood? How would you have reacted to Romy had you been in Valerie’s shoes?
9. Do you think Tessa made the right decision to give up her career to become a stay-at-home mother? Do you think the decision contributed to problems in her marriage? If so, why?
10. Are her mother’s misgivings about Tessa’s decision founded? How are her mother’s views colored by her own past?



11. How was Tessa's reaction to Nick's transgressions shaped by the experience of her mother? Her friends? Her brother's seemingly perfect marriage? Who do you think has the more enviable life—Tessa or Cate?
12. Why did Nick allow himself to have a relationship with Valerie? Do you believe it was specific to Valerie or was there something missing in his marriage? Do you believe he was in love with Valerie? Was he telling the truth in the final chapter of the book?
13. Why do you think Tessa chose to contact Valerie? Would you have made this decision? Why do you think Valerie lied to Tessa when confronted? What would you have done?
14. Do you think Valerie is a good mother? How much do you think Charlie factored into her decisions in this story? How much does she let Lion, and her past, influence her decisions?
15. Compare and contrast the mother-daughter relationships in this book. What makes these relationships so complex?
16. Why do you think women judge each other so much when it comes to personal decisions about work, motherhood, and relationships?
17. Do you think some affairs are more forgivable than others? What would you find easier to forgive—an affair of the heart or a one-night stand?
18. At the end of the book, Tessa has a decision to make. Do you feel she made the right one? What would you have done? What do you see as the “heart of the matter” in this story? How is trust distinct from forgiveness?
19. Do you think people can change? Do you subscribe to the notion “once a cheater, always a cheater”?
20. Fast-forward ten years. What do you see happening to each of these characters? Do you think they are happy? Why or why not? Will Nick and Valerie's affair continue to affect the lives of these characters?

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