

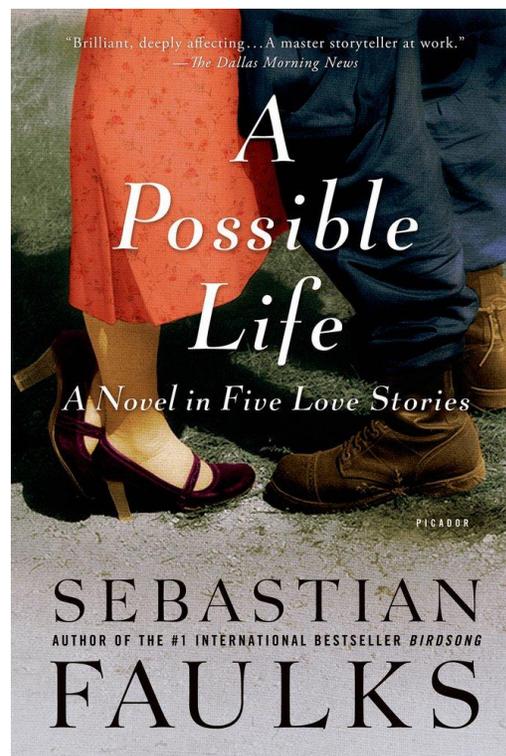
PICADOR

Reading Group Gold

A Possible Life

by Sebastian Faulks

1. How was Geoffrey changed after he returned home from the war? What accounted for this change? How was he changed in the very end of his story? What is meant by his feeling that a “rearrangement of particles had taken place within him?” Are we able to change the basic structure of who we are?
2. Billy is able to change his circumstances and achieve success through sheer work and determination, yet life has a way of confounding some of his plans. He says, “the more I live, the less I seem to understand.” How does his worldview evolve throughout his life? Is life something that can be fully grasped or understood at any single point in our lives?
3. What do you think determines how and why we become the people that we do? Do you think that our lives are dictated by fate, or is it the choices we make that change the course of our lives? What are some examples from the lives in these five stories that support your belief?
4. The stories in the novel connect across time and space, yet characters within each story grapple with a yearning for connection with others. Do you think that the events and circumstances of the time are what affect human condition and emotion? Or is this desire for companionship something that is innate within all of us, no matter the circumstances?
5. In the story of Elena, Bruno speaks of his and Elena’s differing approaches to life. He sees life as a mix between “the flame and the facts,” in which the flame always comes first. Bruno is willing to live dual lives, with more than one love. Elena, on the other hand, wants a world in which each of us gets only one life—only one love. Explain how these two approaches are demonstrated in their relationship. Do you think that there are two types of people—the Elenas and the Brunos?
6. Jeanne believed that Brother Bernard had the saving power of Jesus, yet she chooses to run away from him and her life at the monastery. Why does she turn back from the very thing she seems to be seeking? Do you think Jeanne was able to find what she was searching for in the end? Or did she find a life that was different yet as satisfying? Are we able to reclaim our lives once we turn away from a seemingly important path?
7. What leads to Anya’s breakdown? Why does she leave the United States when everything seems to be perfect in her career and romantic life? What do her songs represent to her? To Jack Wyatt? And what do they represent within this novel?



8. The five narratives that make up this novel are interconnected to the stories that come before and after. What are the different details and/or thematic elements that flow between the stories? How effective are the stories in functioning as a complete work?
9. What was your reaction to the ending of each story? Did you find that these stories ended on a hopeful note, or were you disappointed with the way things turned out? Sebastian Faulks has said that he is a romantic. How does his romanticism affect the outcomes in this book?
10. The novel plays with the idea that each of the five stories contain possible lives that can transcend time, place, and character. Even within each life, there is the possibility of alternate lives. Do you think that there is one life that claims each person, or can anyone be the main character in a sequence of possible lives?

About the Author

Sebastian Faulks is the author of ten novels. They include the UK number one bestseller *A Week in December*; *Human Traces*; *On Green Dolphin Street*; *Charlotte Gray*, which was made into a film starring Cate Blanchett; and the classic *Birdsong*, which has sold more than three million copies and was recently adapted for television. In 2008, he was invited to write a James Bond novel, *Devil May Care*, to mark the centenary of Ian Fleming. In between books he wrote and presented the four-part television series *Faulks on Fiction* for the BBC. He lives in London with his wife and their three children.

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