



1. *The Next* is not simply a novel about the relationship between ex-lovers, but also one about the relationships between mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, siblings, and dogs and their human companions. Which characters and relationships did you connect with the most as you were reading? How do we see these various relationships develop and change as the novel progresses?
2. What are some instances where we see the important role that music has played in the lives and relationships of the characters in this novel? Does music play a similarly important role in your own life? What are some specific songs that come to mind as significant to you?
3. What role does social media play in this novel? How does it result in both the rise and fall of characters?
4. What are the differences and similarities in the ways that Anna and Jules express and process their grief? On page 137, Anna's grief is described as "the wrong kind of grief." What does this mean? How do they both work through this to a different sort of grief?
5. On page 282, Anna's behavior toward Jules is described with this observation: "She had acted out precisely the behaviors she felt most aggrieved by, as humans do." What is meant by this? Do we see other characters doing the same thing elsewhere in the novel? Why do you think it is that people often do this?
6. What does Ned get from his relationship with Trudi that he does not get from Joanna? What does he get from his relationship with Joanna that he does not get from Trudi? How do you think he should have handled the discovery of Trudi's pregnancy?

## Discussion Questions



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7. On page 173, Ned's relationship with women is described as a fear of being consumed: "Or maybe she would consume him, just like he had always secretly worried that she would—that any woman would, that all women would..."
8. Where does this fear stem from? Why does Ned feel the need to establish the "Ned-zone of plausible deniability"? Do you think he has changed at all by the end of the novel?
9. What do you imagine the future to hold for Ned? What about for Anna and Laney?
10. What was your reaction to the depiction of the waiting room Joanna goes to after she dies, and the depiction of her as a ghostly presence (and the other ghostly presences around her)? Is this how you would imagine it, or would you envision the ghostly world in a different way?
11. On page 182, Joanna rejects the idea that her lesson and her path to a *Beaches* ending is to "Feel it all, feel it all, leave it all behind. Love it and let it go." What is it that ultimately brings her peace and enables her to move on?