



FLATIRON
BOOKS

The Insomniacs

Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *The Insomniacs*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *The Insomniacs*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. “The world of a nine-year-old is free and open—or at least I’d felt that way on our cul-de-sac—and then, bam, I saw everything as a landscape of divisions like tiles in a mosaic” (15). How has her father leaving affected Ingrid’s childhood and how she has grown up? What impact has it had on her relationships with her neighbors and friends?
2. Looking at a photo of herself after her parent’s divorce and at the beginning of her diving career, Ingrid thinks, “I was on the verge of losing something I loved. Another thing I love. When I dove, it was the last place I could still hear my dad’s voice” (48). What connection is Ingrid looking for in diving and what might she find—or not—in the sport she shares with her father?
3. Elsa trusts Ingrid to stay out of trouble and take care of herself, in contrast to Kevin, who keeps a close eye on Van. Is it better to allow free reign or be overprotective? What does it say about who these characters are?
4. “I liked the idea of hiding the real me,” Ingrid thinks. “There was a lot of respect to be had when you came off as invulnerable” (86). Do you agree or disagree? Why might Ingrid feel this way? What does it mean to be invulnerable?
5. When Ingrid and Van see each other at school after nights of staying up together, she thinks, “It was the moment when we decided if our relationship at school would change. I looked away. I had to, because I didn’t want to know that he might look away first” (101). In her relationships, Ingrid is frequently the one to pull back and push away. Why might she do this?
6. “At the time, I didn’t know I wouldn’t see my dad for another three years and counting. The only power I had was to let Mike fill his shoes” (112). Over the years, Coach Mike has clearly become a father figure for Ingrid. What does she mean when she talks about the “only power” she had? Why might that be significant?
7. “Sometimes I thought of the word ‘lonely’ when I observed Van but it was hard to imagine. He was always surrounded by people” (115). Why might Ingrid think Van seems like a lonely person? How does that contrast with Ingrid’s own aloneness/loneliness?
8. When Ingrid realizes that her mother was working extra shifts to cover her medical bills, she thinks, “I knew my mom would never want me to feel ashamed but I had trouble looking at her after that. I felt less guilty about lying at the doctor. I didn’t want her to worry and it was my job to get back to diving. Especially when she made so many sacrifices for me to do it”

(139). What does this say about the pressure Ingrid feels to succeed? What burden might she be taking on and is that fair?

9. Following Heidi's death, Ingrid returns home only to "[turn] away from [her] mom and back to Lisa and Van, unable to stop watching how open they were with their grief and unable to understand why [she] was jealous" (199). Why is Ingrid jealous? Why is she unable to be open with her own grief? What does it mean that she turns away from her mother?
10. Talking to Van about her accident, Ingrid shares, "I trusted myself and then got hurt. I think what's shaken me the most is that I didn't see it coming. I hate not seeing things coming" (217). What other things has Ingrid not seen coming? What is it about vulnerability and an unknown future that scares her so much?
11. "*This is what we do: We don't look back.* ... Moving forward was something I'd mastered. I'd gotten sloppy with Van. He was the past" (247). Has Ingrid truly mastered moving forward? What does it mean to not look back at your past and is that helpful or not?
12. After seeing the tension between Van and Ingrid, Izzie pushes for answers but Ingrid can't bring herself to share. "I loved Izzie so much but I didn't trust that she wouldn't mention a word to other people. It was mortifying" (253). Why is Ingrid so worried and what is she scared of? Why can't she trust Izzie?
13. Thinking back on her accident, Ingrid considers, "When I saw their interaction seconds before the accident, I knew for sure—some secret part of me must have understood. But my mind wouldn't comprehend it; I hadn't wanted to believe it" (267). Why did Ingrid struggle to accept what she knew inside? Have you ever been in a situation where you fought with a similar conflict?
14. Van tells Ingrid that the day her father left, he told Van to take care of her. What might this mean to Ingrid? Does it change anything?
15. Coach Mike tells Ingrid that "pain is weakness leaving the body" (291). What do you think about this motto? What does it say about pain and weakness?
16. How has Coach Mike informed how Ingrid saw herself in the world? What impact has he had on the person she has become? What will it mean for Ingrid to move forward without him?
17. "No matter what I achieved in this sport, I understood that my dad was gone and never coming back. Most likely, I wouldn't know if he was proud of me or if he even thought about me. There was no fighting it or outrunning it; it was just sad" (309). What does it mean for Ingrid to come to this conclusion? Where does Ingrid stand with her father in the end?
18. About to take her first dive after the accident, Ingrid thinks, "I was diving from a different part of myself. ... I knew if I dove, I could possibly get hurt, I could disappoint myself, my life could change course from where it had been headed. But it would be much worse to turn around and be eaten alive in that particular way that happens when you stayed on the sidelines" (310). Do you agree or disagree? What has spurred this new confidence in Ingrid? How is she reclaiming diving for herself?
19. "For a long time, it had seemed like I was winning. But the fearless me had been on eggshells, the most scared person I knew" (310). How does this contrast with the exterior that Ingrid has always portrayed? What does it mean to appear fearless while scared inside?

20. How has Ingrid's view of the cul-de-sac changed after her accident?
21. From Ingrid to Van's family, Coach Mike to Max and Wilson, and even the neighbors who disappeared and left everything behind—in *The Insomniacs*, things are seldom what they seem. What does the story say about outward appearances and what may be going on inside?