



The Pilot's Wife

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Discussion Questions

1. Does Shreve's use of flashbacks to Jack and Kathryn's marriage reveal the changes occurring between Jack and Kathryn? In what way did Jack and Kathryn each contribute to the marital problems? How did they each react to the difficulties?
2. Who betrayed whom in this novel? Can you ever love someone who has betrayed you?
3. When Kathryn throws her wedding ring into the ocean, she thinks to herself: "To be relieved of love is to give up a terrible burden." Do you agree?
4. Regarding Jack's religion or lack of it, he appeared to be quite divided. Was he assuming religious beliefs just to please the women he was with? How does his religious division give us clues to his character?
5. How do the memories and thoughts Jack and Kathryn each have about their respective mothers influence their views of marriage?
6. The theme of disaster is central to the story. Not just the physical disaster of the crash, or even the disaster to the family that Jack's death produces; but the disaster that unfolds as Kathryn learns the truth of Jack's double life and many secrets. How does the passage from the bottom of page 12 relate to the disasters? "And she thought then ... such a thing of beauty." Could this passage also be used at the end of the book? Is there beauty in disaster?
7. What devices does Shreve use to make her novel such a compelling read? Consider the flashbacks, the action, the style of language and word choice, and character painting.
8. Why do you think Jack couldn't be honest with Kathryn about his mother and his life with Muire? Was it because he loved Kathryn? Or was it because he didn't want to repeat his mother's actions and subject his child to what he went through? In what ways do Kathryn and Jack repeat their respective mother's mistakes?
9. Muire revealed the whole truth to Kathryn about Jack's secret life. How did this confession help Kathryn find the answers to her questions about how "real" her marriage was? Who is the "real wife" (p. 265)? What constitutes a real wife? Do we continue to think that Kathryn is the real wife, because this is her story, or is Muire because she accepts the truth about Kathryn?
10. As the story progresses Kathryn gradually pieces together mysteries of her husband's life from the facts that come to light following Jack's death. At the same time she is trying to understand the pieces of her own life. Does Kathryn and Jack's house, originally inhabited by nuns retreating from the world, play a significant part in this story? In what way was the house that Kathryn and Jack lived in for 11 years a metaphor for their relationship? Discuss the significance of Kathryn's discovery of the site of the Sisters' Chapel at the end of the book.
11. At what point in the story did you figure out that Jack was having an affair? Were you suspicious when Kathryn found the receipt for the bathrobe, or the note in his pocket? Did you want to believe Kathryn's suspicions?
12. Discuss the differences between Kathryn's relationship to Jack and Mattie's to him. Which relationship seemed more honest? Which relationship seemed stronger? As a mother, is Kathryn obligated, at some future time, to share full knowledge of Jack with Mattie?
13. Do you think *The Pilot's Wife* would make a good film? If so, why? Who would you cast as the major characters in the film version? Why?