



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE BOOK OF SUSAN

from AUTHOR
MELANIE K. HUTSELL



I SUSAN

1. How does the setting in East Tennessee as described by Susan conform to your expectations? Are there aspects of her description that surprise you, and if so, what are they? How do you think these details will matter?
2. What are your initial impressions of Lorraine? Do Susan's reservations about her influence those impressions? How do Susan's misgivings affect your perception of Susan herself? Is there a point at which you begin to share Susan's suspicions? Why or why not?
3. How are Susan's profession and career goals important to the story? How would you describe her handling of the relationship between her career and her life at home?
4. What do you gain from hearing Samuel tell how he and Susan met? How does this story enhance your understanding of Susan and of Samuel and their relationship? What details of their marriage do you find most notable?
5. How would you characterize Susan's beliefs about God? How has her familiarity with both Mamaw's and Anna Maria Magdalena Muller's religious experiences affected her? How do her beliefs change during this part of the story?
6. When do you first begin to question Susan's understanding of what she observes? Does your concern extend to everything she recounts or only to certain things?



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7. Susan says about Lorraine, “Her smile is open and free. I don’t like it. It is a fearful thing to see.” Why might a free and open smile appear “fearful” to Susan? What does this say about what kind of person she is?
8. How would you describe Susan’s relationship with Ian? How does it compare with Lorraine’s friendship with him, and why might this be a source of tension for Susan?
9. Susan is shown on several occasions doing alarming, disturbing, or frightening things. Does seeing her actions from her point of view make them more understandable or less? What might these moments look like from the point of view of someone else in the same scene?

II SUSAN

1. This section of the novel begins with a scene in Annika’s office. How does this scene compare with the one in Dr. Rickwell’s office early in the first section? In what ways might these similarities and differences offer clues to the direction Susan’s life is going now?
2. Susan says, “I was mystified by my behavior. It came out of me, and there was nothing else for me to do.” To what extent do you think Susan is in control of her actions? To what extent is she responsible for them?
3. Why do you think the pastor from Susan’s church may not have responded to her calls? Have you ever encountered a situation when someone you were relying on didn’t come through for you when you needed them? How did that make you feel? How did that change you?
4. Susan says, “Bipolar was a thing I had seen on TV. In the eyes of actors playing stalkers and workplace shooters.” How do you think the representation of bipolar disorder in the larger culture affects people’s perception of the illness?



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5. How are Susan's beliefs about God in this part of the book shaped by: her experience with the church, her dislocation from her family and home, her insight into her illness, the help she receives from friends?
6. Why do you suppose Susan chooses to go to Clemtown when Samuel offers her another choice? What does this decision say about her? How does living in Clemtown change her?
7. When Hal Stafford gives Susan a lift in his truck, she remembers the homeless man that she helped in the first section of the book. What do you think this signifies?
8. How would you describe the way Susan feels about Hal? What do you think the future of their friendship is like?
9. What are the points of similarity between Susan's book and Anna Maria Magdalena's journal? In what ways do they differ? How would you compare Susan's alteration in her life's goals with the change in her book's purpose?
10. During the course of the novel, the phrase "declare new ways" has meant different things at different times to Susan. Have you ever had a favorite quote or slogan that took on special significance for you? Share a time when it became particularly meaningful to you in a whole new way, or perhaps a time when it gave way to a new saying that replaced it.
11. Do you believe Susan will return to teaching? Why or why not?
12. Do you think Susan's vision comes from God or is a symptom of her illness? \Why do you think so? What would it mean if the origin of the vision was the opposite instead?



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