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Winter Garden Writing Prompts

After reading the novel, find a quiet space in which you can write undisturbed. Be aware that these writing prompts may require you to dig deeper than you wish to go in one sitting. Take your time. Set an intention to allow your truth to flow through you onto the page to help you see clearly, the various aspects of your life and that of your family's. Ask yourself what you might learn by working with these questions and how you might Find the Answers and closure to your own secrets, stories, and past.

Use your journal to record your thoughts to post-reading questions and writing prompts posed in this handout. Some of the questions posed here are also included in the Reading Guide Questions handout. I duplicate a few because your perception and answers have likely changed now that you read the book and have had time to process it.

The end of the novel contains a Reading Guide with questions Kristin created. Use those in your journal in addition to the questions posed here.

1. Some of the primary themes and layers in this book are: love, loss, war, trauma, hope, survival, rescue, fairy tales, escape, creating a new life, releasing the past or hiding from it, questions and answers, reconciliation, awareness, closure, and peace. Explain what you learned about each of these themes and how they connect to areas in your life.
2. Have you ever wondered, what would I do if I discovered a family member had a secret past? How would uncovering that secret change your perception of them, yourself, your family?
 - a. Have you uncovered a secret past? How did that change your perception of everyone in the family? How did that change your life?
3. How does someone carrying the heavy burden of a secret affect him, the family, future generations, when it is not revealed?
 - a. Describe how your family has been affected by a heavy burden. Write about how this affected your life.

- b. What lessons did you learn from how the family handled the burden or secret? Are you aware of other choices they had and what were they?
4. The living and the dead can't always keep their secrets. Have you ever asked yourself why we keep letters, photos, diaries, and other documents or books that hold our secrets? I asked this question in the Reading Guide Questions handout. After reading the book, did your thoughts on this change? If so, how?
 - a. I have debated this recently. I have journaled on and off most of my life. In the last several years my journals contain a lot of me processing and releasing the past (and past life stuff). Moving through a lot of emotions, especially anger. Not only at others but myself. Do I really want my kids to know the dark times I went through? Will it help them see me, others, and themselves in a new light in the future? Will it heal something inside them? **Have you ever asked these questions about the things journals and personal things you keep? How do you plan to handle this situation?**
5. Kristin Hannah wanted a story that was in the “now” and fed off the past and how people were changed by it. Do you think she accomplished this? Describe why you feel this way.
6. Do you think Anya, her husband, their daughters had PTSD? Explain why or why not.
7. Inherited trauma is defined as trauma that is transferred from the first generation of trauma survivors to the second and further generations of offspring of the survivors via complex post-traumatic stress disorder mechanisms. Do you see signs of this in Anya's family? Explain your thoughts.
 - a. Inherited trauma affects every family in some way. Identify the inherited trauma in your family and write about how it affects you.
 - b. If you have children or grandchildren, how did the inherited trauma affect them?
8. How much and in what ways does our childhood perception of our parents define who we become?
9. How much can we change about ourselves knowing who are parents really are or were?
10. Now, take those two questions and apply them to your grandparents.
 - a. How much does our childhood perception of our grandparents define who we become?

- b. How much can we change about ourselves knowing who are grandparents really are or were?
- 11. The book is written about a mother and the complex relationship (or lack of a relationship) with two daughters. Is it possible for any woman to know her own story until she knows her mother's? Explain how you think knowing your mother's story helps you know who you as her daughter are.
 - a. If you are a son, explain how knowing your mother's story helps you understand who you are.
 - b. Is it possible for any man to know his own story until he knows his father's? If you are a daughter, explain how knowing your father's story helps you understand who you are.
- 12. Describe your thoughts on the father in the story. How did he try to keep the family glued together?
 - a. In what specific ways did he accomplish this?
 - b. Now look at your own family. Did one of your parents, aunts or uncles, or grandparents provide the glue that kept the family together? What happened when they died?
- 13. Explain the relationship Meredith had with her husband, and Nina had with Danny. In what ways were they similar to the relationship their parents had?
 - a. Do you recognize the detachment, love, need to forget or remember, need to hide within all the relationships?
 - b. How do the relationships heal by the end of the novel?
- 14. Explain how Anya's insistence her daughters listen and ask no questions about the fairy tale helped them understand the larger story. Do you think this helped them process what they were hearing? Why or why not?
 - a. Have there been times in your life when *listening* was more important than asking questions? Describe these and what you learned.
- 15. Describe how Meredith's perspective of her mother changes as she discovers more of the past.
 - a. Do you think Meredith could have understood the story as a child?

- b. How did time play a role in Meredith's understanding and change in perception toward her mother and the family?
16. Near the end of the Anya's fairy tale, she is faced with a choice to live or die. What did she choose? Do you think she felt survivor's guilt? Explain why or why not.
- a. How did this change the way her daughter's saw her?
 - b. How did this change the way they saw themselves?
 - c. Has anyone in your family lived with survivor's guilt? Explain who it was and how it affected their life and the family life.
17. Travel is featured in this novel. Have you ever traveled to walk in your family member's or military service member's footsteps?
- a. When did you do this?
 - b. Where did you go?
 - c. Why did you choose this?
 - d. What answers did you find? What closure? What lessons did you learn?
 - e. How did travel ultimately change who you are and the choices you make in life?
18. Explain how Anya and her daughters found answers and closure by the end of the novel. Explain who else showed up to help them find closure.
- a. Explore the times in your life when you found answers and closure to something and who or what showed up to help you obtain that.
19. Look back on your life and see if there are places where stories were used to help tell the truths about a situation. Write about these stories and what you learned or healed by listening to them.
20. Write about the ways this book changed your life and what lessons you learned or inspiration you discovered.