

Reading Club Notes

'Endlessly mysterious. Sally Hepworth is a born storyteller'

TRENT DALTON

SALLY HEPWORTH

The Soulmate

A marriage
to die for



'Could not stop reading'
HOLLY WAINWRIGHT

Loyalty and relationships

‘The pair of them pride themselves on loyalty, as if it’s all they could possibly need for a good marriage. They forget the most important thing about loyalty: sometimes it’s warranted ... sometimes it’s not.’ (page 80)

‘But Gabe and I have always agreed on our non-negotiable. Loyalty.’ (page 56)

1. Do you think Gabe and Pippa’s loyalty was a strength of their relationship, or ultimately its downfall?
2. Pippa and Gabe’s non-negotiable is loyalty. Amanda’s is fidelity. Which is more important to you in a relationship, loyalty or fidelity?
3. Do you have non-negotiables in your own relationship? What are they? Have you articulated them with your partner, or are they implied?
4. Did you find the way Max and Amanda negotiated the terms of their relationship a bit clinical, or did you view it as an honest and practical way to enter a marriage?
5. Do you think it was fair for Max to stipulate, from the outset, that he would not have children with Amanda? Do you think she – or he – ever regretted that decision?
6. Do you think Gabe and Pip separating was best for both of them, or just for Pippa?

‘Goes to show how dangerous it can be, thinking that you know someone.’ (page 176)

7. Every relationship is, to some extent, a leap of faith. What do you think it was about Gabe – or about Pippa – that made her so willing to overlook the red flags in Gabe’s behaviour?

Independence

‘How could I not share it with Gabe? He is my husband. For God’s sake, Gabe is me.’ (page 221)

8. Do you think this is a sign of a healthy closeness in Gabe and Pippa’s relationship, or an unhealthy lack of individual identity?
9. By the end of the novel, Pippa realises that she can stand on her own two feet. Do you think she could ever have achieved that if she had stayed with Gabe? Would it have come at a price?

Forgiveness

'But could I leave him? It felt impossible. He was the air I breathed. As difficult as life could be with him, it had to be better than life without him. Didn't it?' (page 236)

10. Unable to comprehend the idea of a life without Gabe, Pippa is willing to stand by him at all costs. Do you think Pippa's decision to tolerate his actions and behaviour is driven by loyalty, or fear?
11. If you were Pippa, at what point would you have drawn the line with Gabe?
11. Amanda stands by Max despite his shady business practices. What do you think it is that drives her willingness to overlook his actions?

Soulmates

'But you stopped, and I thought, well, it must be a sign.' He smiled. 'Do you believe in signs?' 'Yes,' I said. 'I didn't believe in signs.' (page 29)

12. Do you think Gabe genuinely saw the rain stopping as a sign, or do you think he was just a smooth talker? Do you believe in signs?
13. Do you believe in the idea of a soulmate?
14. Do you believe Gabe and Pippa were, in fact, soulmates? What leads you to believe this, if so? What about Max and Amanda?
15. Amanda didn't truly fall in love with Max until well into their marriage, and when that happened, she was terrified by the vulnerability it brought. How do you think their relationship would have differed had she been in love with him from the start?

How The Past Shapes Us

'Unfortunately, as so many of us do, I turned into my mother.' (page 34)

'I often wonder if choosing Gabe was a direct result of my upbringing. Some people choose the safe guy, the stable guy, if they've had an upbringing filled with uncertainty. My family was so stable, maybe it made me yearn for instability?' (page 51)

16. Amanda shaped her life around avoiding her mother's fate. Do you think that limited her relationship with Max, or helped define it?

17. Often, the wounds of the past determine the decisions we make in the future. Do you believe it's possible for people to rewrite their own script? If so, what does it take to do that?
18. To what extent do you believe Pippa's decision to marry Gabe was the result of her upbringing?
19. Max devoted much of his efforts to suicide prevention and mental health support, only to ultimately commit suicide himself. To what extent do you think his suicide was influenced by his past, and to what extent was it influenced by the loss of his wife, and the investigation into his business dealings?

Mental Health and Neurodivergence

20. Some of Gabe's actions were clearly driven by his undiagnosed bipolar disorder. Would you excuse all of his actions for this reason, or would you hold him personally accountable for some of them?

Family

To society, there is nothing purer than a family with small children. (page 87)

'There always seems to be one family member or another here at any given time.' (page 186)

21. Pippa's family show their concern about Pippa's marriage, and her wellbeing, by being increasingly present in her life. However, they don't articulate their concerns until it's almost too late. Do you think they should have spoken up sooner? What do you think influenced their decision to stay silent?

Other

22. After her death, Amanda is able to watch subsequent events play out, and also to see the truth of what had happened previously. Would you want this omniscience, after your death? Do you believe it is possible?

Gabe is entirely unflappable. He's your classic run towards a burning building kind of guy ... I am a helper. In times of crisis, I am a creator of meal rosters, a procurer of goods, a collector of donations, dispenser of information. (page 2)

23. Do you identify more with Gabe's response to a crisis, or with Pippa's? Are you a hero or a helper? What other ways do people respond in times of crisis? Which type of responder do you wish you were?