



A NOVEL

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### **Chapter One:**

1. How is Euphrosyne's new room at her grandparents' different from her old room? Who do you think is responsible for the difference, Euphrosyne or her grandmother? How do the changes reflect Euphrosyne's new identity as Hillary?
2. What are some reasons that finding empty shoes on St. Nicholas Day might be particularly hard for Euphrosyne? Why is she mad at herself when she finds them empty? Have you ever gone through something like this, and if so, how did it affect you?
3. What are some details about Dr. Snead that suggest he's not just looking to help Euphrosyne cope with her grief? Are there certain things he says that you agree with, or would agree with in another context? Why?

### **Chapter Two:**

1. Dr. Snead claims that the new government isn't really anti-Christian, just anti-prejudice, and that removing religion is just a prevention of violence triggered by Christian intolerance. What are some of the problems with his argument? Is he entirely wrong?
2. Why does Euphrosyne feel the need to rescue what she can of the Nativity set?
3. Is Mimi right to give Euphrosyne directions to the bookstore downtown? What would you have done in her place, and why?

### **Chapter Three:**

1. After meeting Father Innocent, Euphrosyne struggles with anger and confusion over why God saved some people from death and not others. Her appointment with Dr. Snead leaves her feeling numb, but seeing the snow and stars that night seems to help her. Why do you think that is, and have you experienced anything similar?
2. How do some aspects of Orthodoxy show up on Winter Holiday? Do you think that some things can become Orthodox without their maker's intention or full understanding? If so, what are some examples?
3. Aside from missing her family, why doesn't Euphrosyne like the new Winter Holiday? How is Winter Holiday like Dr. Snead's version of God?

### **Chapter Four:**

1. What are some signs that Euphrosyne's grandma really does care about her and want the best for her?
2. How is liturgy different for Euphrosyne after everything that has happened? Do you think the absence from church had any hidden benefits for her?
3. What are Grandpa's reasons for getting angry with Euphrosyne? How would he see his actions as justified, and do you think Grandma would agree?

### **Chapter Five:**

1. How does Euphrosyne's attitude change after her grandpa hits her? Why does she cuss for the first time in Dr. Snead's office, and why does she regret it?
2. Was Mimi right to rescue Euphrosyne from her grandparents' house? Do you think she may have had any

other motivations (conscious or unconscious) for taking Euphrosyne? What do you think would have happened if she had left Euphrosyne there?

3. Who are the bright people Euphrosyne sees in the liturgy? Why do you think the man with messy hair gives her an apple?

### **Chapter Six:**

1. Describe the inside of the Department of Religious Tolerance. How is it different from the church trailer? What makes it so frightening for Euphrosyne?
2. How are Dr. Wilcott's tactics for arguing against Christianity different from Dr. Snead's? Why do you think they take different approaches?
3. What is Euphrosyne's moment of *déjà vu* at the end of the chapter?

### **Chapter Seven:**

1. After Euphrosyne is shot, she finds herself back at her old home. Why do you think her soul returns there, even though her family is gone?
2. When she visits Mimi and Father Innocent, Euphrosyne sees scars and bright lines on their souls. What might these symbolize in real life? How do they relate back to the Evlogitaria for the Dead at the beginning of the chapter?
3. What does Father Innocent mean when he says that there were two icons? Why doesn't he think it was a coincidence that Euphrosyne died the way she did?
4. How will Euphrosyne's death change the world she left behind?



BOOKS THAT STAY WITH US

*an article by Georgia Briggs*

THERE ARE STORIES WE READ that leave lasting imprints on our brains. They stick with us all of our lives, stronger for some of us than our own memories. Not all words have this effect. I have probably forgotten ninety percent of what I've read in my short lifetime, but a few core books, a few fragments of story, have become so important to me that they now form a crucial part of who I am.

The fact that our brains latch on to stories isn't surprising. We are lingual beings, called into existence by the divine Logos and molded from dust into repositories of experience and memory. What fascinates me is the way some tales become universally absorbed, while others become intrinsic parts of only a few individuals.

Some books are beloved by everyone. C.S. Lewis believed that the reason for this was that the best art reflects Heaven. The stories resonate with us because something in us recognizes their truth and beauty. In his book *The Great Divorce*, a citizen of Heaven reasons with an artist who has gone astray, "When you painted on earth—at least in your earlier days—it was because you caught glimpses of Heaven in the earthly landscape.

The success of your painting was that it enabled others to see the glimpses too.”

This is, of course, a Christian perspective, and some would argue bitterly against a universal truth or an immutable beauty. Many movies and books written nowadays glorify the idea that beauty is entirely in the eye of the beholder. Whatever the individual likes is beautiful, even if no one else in the world agrees with him. Every person is unique, and therefore there are as many types of beauty as there are people.

The problem with this is simply that the evidence points otherwise; there are some things that everyone just loves. We have bestsellers. We have famous works of art. We have thousands of people dressing up in cloaks and pointy hats waiting in line at Barnes and Noble for the newest Harry Potter release. Although we are unique, we are all human and created in the image, the *ikon*, of God. We share DNA whether we like it or not, and in smaller circles we share languages, cultures, and the earth on which we live. We may brag that no one is the same—and it’s true that no one is exactly the same—but the fact remains that we are cut from the same cloth, and that shows up in our art and literature. We are drawn to similar things. We are drawn to truth and beauty.

This all makes sense from a Christian perspective.



It's natural that stories revealing truth speak to us as part of God's creation. What is more surprising is that within the vast body of work revealing truth, God goes even farther and uses specific pieces of art and literature to shape us as individuals and call us to Him. Maybe I focus on this aspect because I'm a Westerner and prone to consider the individual rather than the group, or maybe it's just part of my human limitation. I see the world through my own eyes and no one else's. The omnipotent and omnipresent God has the sole capability of seeing us simultaneously as individuals and as a group.

Anyway, it's amazing to me that God has used literature in my life specifically. Some books I read, like *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Harry Potter*, I know to be universally beloved, and my affection for these works has provided me with a strange and precious connection with others. Other books I read were special to me, but not to everyone. Most people I met who read these stories enjoyed them, but the words didn't resonate as deeply with them as they did with me. A few books that come to mind are *Till We Have Faces* by C.S. Lewis, *Deerskin* and *The Hero and the Crown* by Robin McKinley, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, and *I Capture the Castle* by Dodie Smith. These particular stories rang true for me, partly because of my personality and partly because of the things I was going through at the time. I have met a

few people who connect with them the same way I do, but not many.

Over the years I've realized that each one of these special books contained elements of God's calling for me. My church, my patron saint, my struggles with health, and even my marriage were foreshadowed in these books. Perhaps that's why they struck me so deeply when I first read them. God was planting a desire in my heart for the good things He had planned for me.

What books have been the most meaningful to you? Are they popular or obscure? How have they changed you or your life?

—from the author's blog post

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