



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR WIFE 22 BY MELANIE GIDEON

1. Consider the epigraph by E. M. Forster: “Only connect.” How did this inform your interpretation of the novel before and after reading? What is the significance of this quote in a book that so often satirizes our reliance on technology in achieving immediate and constant connectivity?
2. What do you make of the structure of the novel unraveling in part through Alice’s narrative and elsewhere through Google searches, Facebook status updates, and email and text messages? Did you find this made for an organic reading experience, considering how much social media is enmeshed in our daily lives? What did this mode of storytelling reveal about the characters that you might not have otherwise learned? How about the effect of seeing the answers to the marriage survey without first having read the questions? When you arrived at the appendix, did you then match any of the inquiries to their respective responses? Did you find anything surprising?
3. Of her marriage, Alice says that she and William are “floating around on the surface of our lives like kids in a pool propped up on those Styrofoam noodles.” She longs for a deeper connection to her husband, yet struggles to move beyond the monotonies apparent in everyday life. Why, then, does she find it so natural to be candid with Researcher 101? Do you think it’s that much easier to confess truths about ourselves under a veil of anonymity?
4. Researcher 101 writes,

Waiting is a dying art. The world moves at a split-second speed now and I happen to think that’s a great shame, as we seem to have lost the deeper pleasures of leaving and returning.

Do you agree that our access to people and information comes at the expense of developing meaningful connections over time, through patience and dedication? Is it possible to cultivate this kind of slow-budding relationship in a digital age, or are we too hardwired for instant gratification?

5. Alice’s answer to the question of what she used to do—“run, dive, pitch a tent, bake bread, build bonfires”—is much at odds with what she does now—“make lunches, suggest to family they are capable of making better choices; alert children to BO.” Why is it that Alice, in William’s words, insists on keeping herself from the things she loves? How does she go about reclaiming these pieces of her former self throughout the novel, and in what ways do you think she’s transformed by the end?
6. Alice struggles with crossing the threshold into her tipping point year, when she will turn the same age her mother was when she died. She sees this as having to say goodbye; as facing the fact that her mother will never age, never meet William, never watch Zoe and Peter grow. When, if ever, does she begin to perceive this milestone as not so much leaving something behind, but moving into a new future?
7. At one point, Alice recognizes that she “can be overbearing and intense” when it comes to parenting. In what ways do you think her relationships with Zoe and Peter have been affected by her mother’s untimely death? How does Alice’s realization that she has more than just her children enable her to take responsibility for her own life?





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8. Much of the novel deals with Alice’s feelings of displacement, of wandering off the trail and trying to find the lamppost. But whenever she strays, William is always the one to remain on course and bring her back home. Why do you think that in an attempt to save their marriage, he finds it necessary to search for Alice behind a guise and not “in real life?”
9. A principal theme of the novel deals with relationships between mothers and daughters, particularly between Alice and her mother, Zoe, Bunny and the Mumble Bumbles. What do the Mumble Bumbles teach Alice about what being a parent means and how does this uniquely constituted group function in her life in general? Did you detect any instances in which Alice was invited to assume the role of a daughter, and how does she apply the lessons learned therein to her relationship with Zoe?
10. How does Gideon use humor to address the challenges inherent in love, marriage, parenthood, friendship and life?
11. Alice admits that she hopes for a richer life with William—“rich in the ability to feel things as they’re happening, to not constantly be thinking of the next thing.” Do you think she’s achieved this after all?

Questions issued by the publisher.



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