



The End of the Point

By Elizabeth Graver
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Questions for Discussion

1. *The End of the Point* begins with an epigraph from William Starr Dana's *Plants and Their Children*. How does this quote set the tone for the novel? How does it reflect the story's themes?
2. The novel is told through three main points of view—Bea's, Helen's, and Charlie's—over a period of more than fifty years. What does each perspective and timeframe bring to the story? What would the book lose or gain if the author had set it in one era and/or followed a single character's perspective?
3. What is Bea's relationship to various members of the Porter family? How does it evolve over time? Discuss Bea's bond with her charge, Jane. Is she too close to Jane—closer than Jane's biological mother? Do you think such a deep and close bond between nanny and child could exist in the United States today?

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4. Bea has an offer of marriage from Smitty, the soldier she meets at Ashaunt during World War II. Why does she turn him down? Do you think this is ultimately the right choice for her? Though she spends most of her life in America with the Porters, she eventually returns to her native Scotland. Why?
5. Helen, who comes of age in the 1940's and 50's, is torn between a number of ambitions and drives. How do the circumstances she was born into inform who she is? What do you view as her strengths and weaknesses as a sister, wife, intellectual, and mother?
6. The Porters are a wealthy American family. What privileges does their wealth afford them? How might their money be detrimental to themselves or others?
7. Many major events and trends of the twentieth century—World War II, the Vietnam War, women's liberation, psychoanalysis, environmentalism, land development—are portrayed in the story. How are these wider contexts made visceral through the characters' experiences? How do these wider movements affect the characters' relationship to Ashaunt?
8. When he is older, Charlie remembers that his mother accused him of courting suffering. Did he? What about Helen herself? Bea? How do the three of them change over the course of the story?
9. Would you characterize the three protagonists as idealists? Why or why not?
10. What other authors or books might you place in the same literary "family" as *The End of the Point*, and why?
11. Author Gish Jen writes, "In this globalized age, with everyone talking about migration, here comes Elizabeth Graver to remind us of just what place can mean. The attachment in this book . . . transcends time and personality. It is deep, extraordinarily ordinary, and finally provocative." What might be "provocative" about the book's evocation of place? What sorts of questions does the novel prompt us to ask about how we live our 21st-century lives? Is there a place in your own life that you feel a great attachment to?
12. Discuss the novel's fine scene. Why end here?