

Breakwater Bay

William Morrow Paperbacks

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ISBN: 9780062319142

Introduction

An abandoned baby, a glorious old Newport mansion, and awakening romance swirl the glittering waters of Breakwater Bay . . .

Preservationist Meri Hollis loves her latest project, restoring one of Newport's forgotten Gilded Age mansions. And with summer approaching, she'll be able to spend more time with her grandmother on the Rhode Island shore. She has a great job, a loving family, and she's pretty sure her boyfriend is going to propose on her thirtieth birthday.

But everything Meri believes about family, happiness, truth, and love is shattered when her family's darkest secret is exposed.

Thirty years before, Meri's neighbor and friend, Alden Corrigan, took his father's dinghy out to fish. In a sudden storm, he rushed to help a woman stranded on the breakwater. She was just a girl . . . a very pregnant girl who disappeared soon after they reached safety—but not before she left behind a special gift.

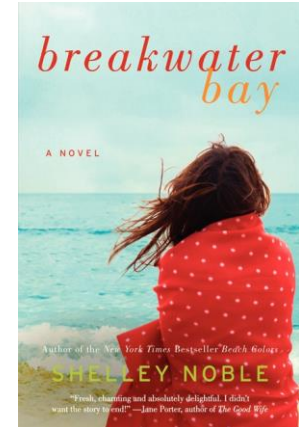
Now that the truth is out, life will change for everyone in Breakwater Bay, and Meri and Alden will have to make decisions that could ensure their future together . . . or separate them for good.

Questions for Discussion

1. Meri is expecting an engagement ring for her thirtieth birthday; instead she finds out that she was adopted. Her initial response was a total emotional breakdown. Do you think you would react in the same way under the same circumstances? Why did she feel that others would change their opinion of her because of the adoption? Do you agree?

2. Do you think Therese and Laura Calder did the right thing by keeping Riley's baby? Or should they have turned her over to social services? Was it a selfish act or an act of love? Can it be both? What do you think you would have done in their place?

3. When I first thought about what would happen to an abandoned baby in twentieth-century Rhode Island (or anywhere in the States) I wondered if the idea was too far-fetched. So I researched instances of this happening and how this kind of situation might slip through the cracks. I was astounded by the things I learned. Would you think this was possible in this day and age?



4. Do you think Meri was obligated to tell the story of her birth? How much do you think other people have a right to know about your own personal history? She knew she had to tell Peter for the sake of any children they might have and the possible medical repercussions. But what about the others? And what about the authorities?
5. Alden was just a boy when he saved Riley from the breakers. Laura is afraid that it may have marked him for life. Do you agree? He promised to take care of Meri and he did. Did this make him more of a prisoner to his promise or did it grow out of love for Meri?
6. Do you think this promise colored Alden's life, his artwork, or his marriage? And for better or worse?
7. Peter doesn't make too many appearances in the novel. Many stories involve an ex-boyfriend or husband who was bad, or a failure, or died, but sometimes people just change or grow apart. It might not be as dramatic as catching a cheating boyfriend with your best friend, but do you think the final breakup can be just as hurtful as the other? Is the sense of loss heightened or dulled when a person has to come to a decision without an inciting incident.
8. When do you think Meri began to question her relationship to Peter? Realize she didn't want to marry him? Did her decision have more to do with Peter, with Alden, or with herself?
9. Therese has watched Alden and Meri grow up together and grow into adulthood. Do you think she knows they should be together? Or do you think she just wants them to be together? When we see two people we think should be together or not be together, how much do our own feelings about relationships come into play?
10. I like to have different generations in my stories because, depending on your age and experience, the same events can affect you so differently. How do you think Therese, Nora, and Meri are affected by the events in the novel? How did each of them react when faced with important decisions?
11. Alden didn't fight for shared custody of his children. Meri tells Nora that she thinks it's because he didn't want them to grow up without a mother like he did. Do you think this is all of the truth or were there other reasons he let them go?
12. Nora and her brother, Lucas, seem very different from each other. Is this just in personalities and external displays of emotion or is there something fundamentally different about them? How do they each handle the divorce and growing up in a home with a stepfather and new stepsiblings? How do they feel about their father?
13. When Nora runs away back to Newport was she being a selfish, spoiled teenager or did she have a valid reason? Do you think Alden should have sent her back to her mother and stepfather and tried to work out a compromise later, or was he right to insist on keeping her with him? How do you think Lucas will feel about this?

14. Meri knows she doesn't want to move to California to be with Peter, but when Carlyn asks if she would move to Manhattan to be with Alden she says she doesn't know. What do you think she would do if put to the test? What do you think would be the right decision for her?

15. Meri doesn't realize until late in the book that she may love Alden, that she does love Alden. Can love hit a person unawares like that? And what about Alden? He's loved her all his life, though that love has transformed over the years. Do you think he was patiently waiting for her to discover him? Or was he accepting of whatever it was going to be? What do you think about the way he thought about her? Can platonic love turn to romantic love?

16. What do you think the future holds for Meri and Alden? Will they stay together? Get married? If they do, how will they adapt to having a teenage girl living with them from the beginning? Will it be hard on the relationship? Where will they live?

17. Meri and Alden both have demanding professions. Do you think their relationship will ultimately suffer because of this, or will they have to compromise down the road? Do you think they can compromise without resenting the loss?

18. At the end of the story, we see Therese and Nora about to bake a pie, and Meri and Alden about to embark on a new kind of relationship. Three generations together. Most of us have families spread from state to state and sometimes in other countries. How important is it for families to have a place they can call home? What do you think the future will hold for Corrigan House and Calde