

All That We Carried: A Novel

by Erin Bartels

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Olivia and Melanie behave like a lot of sisters: they know how to push each other's buttons but they also show how deeply they love each other despite the grudges they hold. Do you have a sibling or close friend like that? What are the ways you have hurt each other? How have you lifted each other up?

2. Olivia and Melanie tried to ignore the hurt the other caused them for years. How do you think their lives might be different if they had simply talked through their problems rather than running away from them? Have you ever tried to pretend a disagreement with a loved one didn't exist so you could avoid confrontation? What was the result? Can you think of a better way to handle something like that in the future?

3. Olivia and Melanie are on a path toward forgiving each other and forgiving themselves. Forgiving other people for the ways they have hurt you, whether deliberate or accidental, is difficult. Do you find it easier to forgive strangers or casual acquaintances than to forgive close friends or family members? Why? And what about forgiving yourself? Is that easier or harder than forgiving others? Why do you think that is?

4. The sisters run into Josh, a fisherman and avid hiker, who helps to set them on the right path in more ways than one. Do you think meeting him so far off the trail was an accident? Fate? Divine intervention? Where do you see the workings of divine design or a plan in your life? Do you believe in such things? Or do you believe more in the power of coincidence and chance?

5. Throughout the book, the sisters confront their beliefs about how the universe works, the afterlife, whether there is a God and, if there is, what kind of God there is. What are your beliefs about spiritual things? Why do you think you have the particular beliefs you do? Have you ever spent time and effort considering other viewpoints and belief systems? If so, did that strengthen your beliefs or cause you to doubt them?

6. This story unfolds in a wilderness, a place of great beauty where dangers abound. Though Olivia takes many precautions, the sisters still run into trouble. Are you someone who is generally prepared for any possible scenario? Or do difficulties often take you by surprise? When have you felt lost in the wilderness? Who did you rely on to help you find your way out?