



After Her EPB

By Joyce Maynard
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Questions for Discussion

1. The book begins with Rachel and Patty pretending to be dead. What significance does this have for the rest of the story? What are some of the other instances of foreshadowing in the Prologue? Discuss the significance of the title "After Her."
2. One of the central elements of the novel is the bond between sisters Rachel and Patty. How have they come to rely so thoroughly upon each other? What significance lies in the fact that Patty must speak through Rachel? How does the relationship change as they get older?
3. Rachel loves making up stories and has an active imagination. On page 3 of the Prologue, she tells us, "This is how I remember it. I could be wrong. I had a big imagination when I was young. I was good at making up stories, and my stories were so good I even believed them myself sometimes." Were there stories Rachel made up that she believed wholeheartedly even though they weren't true? Identify some of the ways that Rachel's imagination gets her into trouble and some of the ways in which it benefits her.
4. Rachel's parents divorce when she and Patty are young. Describe how that divorce affects their childhood and how it influences their respective relationships with their father and mother.
5. On page 95, Rachel and Patty are discussing Mr. Armitage and their "investigation" of him. Rachel says, "Some people have a secret dark side. They wouldn't call it a dark side if there wasn't a bright side too." Do you think this is an accurate observation of people in general? Was Rachel ultimately right about Mr. Armitage and his dark side?
6. Because her father is the head detective on the Sunset Strangler case, Rachel finds herself on the fast track to popularity. How does she handle this change in social status? How does it affect her relationship with Patty? Why do you think Rachel continues these relationships even though she concedes that Alison is likely just using her for information about the Sunset Strangler case and that Teddy is probably not a nice person?
7. Rachel's mother is depressed and spends very little time parenting her girls, often leaving them to their own devices. Discuss how this freedom influences their characters as they grow for better or worse.
8. Mount Tamalpais plays an important role in the story as Rachel's and Patty's playground and the site of several of the Sunset Strangler's murders. Discuss some of the symbolic and figurative roles that the mountain played.
9. "My Sharona" becomes the soundtrack of the summer of 1979, the Sunset Strangler case, and the novel as a whole. How does the author utilize the song and its lyrics, and what meaning do they take on for Rachel?
10. After receiving her father's notes on the Sunset Strangler, Rachel takes up the cause of catching the real Sunset Strangler. Why do you think she does this? Was it a good idea? Would you have done the same thing? Why or why not?
11. Patty's sudden death in Somalia comes as a tragic shock to both Rachel and the reader. How does Rachel cope with the loss of her best friend and sister? Is it similar to the manner in which she grieved for her father?
12. Rachel and Patty adored their father, Detective Anthony Torricelli. In what ways do you think Rachel's opinions of and experiences with her father affected her adult relationships with men?
13. What is Rachel's reaction when she discovers the existence of her half-sister, Gina? In your opinion, what spurs her resistance to Gina's friendly advances, and what changes after her final confrontation with the Sunset Strangler?
14. In the end, Rachel believes that children outgrow their imaginations. Do you think this is true? Do you believe we lose our ability to feel things as deeply as we do when we are young teenagers? Support your opinion using examples from the novel.