



## The Orphans of Race Point

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### Introduction

When a horrific act of violence shatters the peaceful October night in Provincetown, Massachusetts, the fates of nine-year-olds Gus Silva and Hallie Costa become inextricably entwined. Told in alternating voices, *The Orphans of Race Point* traces their relationship over the next three decades as they try to come to terms with the past. What begins as a childhood friendship evolves into something stronger, but when a terrible tragedy exhumes the ghosts they thought they'd put to rest, their dreams are abruptly destroyed.

Hallie and Gus move forward to build separate lives, but Gus's hard-won peace is threatened when he meets a troubled woman who awakens memories of the childhood he has worked so hard to forget. Although helping her offers him a chance at the redemption he desperately desires, it will come at a devastating price. Turning around an unthinkable betrayal, this epic, all-consuming novel explores how far we will go for love, even if it means sacrificing everything—and in doing so, celebrates our capacity for faith, forgiveness, and hope.

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### Questions for Discussion

1. In the opening chapter of the novel, Hallie experiences an almost mystical connection with Gus at the hour when he suffers a life-altering tragedy. Yet, she never tells anyone what happened to her that night—not even Gus. Why do you think she keeps her secret? How are the bonds we form as children different from those we make later on?
2. Nick lives by something he calls *cortesia*, which means courtesy in Portuguese. In what way is his interpretation different from simple politeness? How does it shape who his daughter, and to some extent, even Gus, becomes? If you had to choose one guiding principle for your life, what would it be?
3. Gus and Hallie grow up in an unusually tight-knit Portuguese community in which extended family, neighbors, and cultural tradition play a significant role. How does that shape their identity and sustain them in difficult times? In what ways is life diminished when we lose that?
4. The sea itself is a character in this novel, obsessing some, influencing all. Wolf spends his life trying to capture the ever-changing waters at Race Point on canvas, but never feels satisfied with the results. How do the other characters relate to the ocean? How does geography shape us all?
5. In a pivotal scene in the graveyard, Gus tells Hallie the secrets he never told anyone. She accepts most of it, but there are some things she doesn't understand until much later. What are they, and how do they affect her dreams for the future?
6. There are many orphans in this novel, some literally parentless, others emotionally bereft. Discuss the different ways they deal with their loneliness and loss. Why do some characters thrive, while others are destroyed by their sense of isolation?
7. Talk about the role of spirituality in the story. Gus has committed his life to traditional religion, and Hallie finds solace and awe in nature. Yet, their values are very similar and they share an abiding respect. How important is this in the novel? In our world?
8. After Gus is approached by a desperate Ava, his desire to help causes him to make a series of reckless choices. Why is he willing to take such risks for a stranger? Is it his personality, his history, or a combination of both?
9. Gus takes two "sacred" items to prison with him: a copy of *David Copperfield* and the photograph of a child he never met. Why are those things so important to him? Why does he give one back, but refuse to return the other?
10. Were you surprised by Hallie's marriage, or did it make sense in a way? Do you think its fate would have been different if she hadn't received the devastating call from Neil when she did?
11. How does the introduction of Mila as a first person narrator in the final third of the story change the narrative? In what way does she change Gus's life in their very first meeting? What is it about his presence that causes her to admit her vulnerability?
12. Following years of devastating and life-threatening abuse from their husbands, both Maria and Ava come to believe they are powerless to protect themselves and their children. How are their situations similar? How are they different?
13. Talk about the various "chosen families" that appear in the novel. Are they different from those formed by blood? If so, how? Do you believe they will endure?
14. After Nick's death, Hallie deeply regrets the time she didn't spend with her father. Is this a universal theme? How does she come to terms with it? How does Nick's presence continue to be felt when he is gone?

15. This is a long novel with many significant characters. Apart from the three protagonists, was there one who particularly resonated with you? Why?

16. At the end of the novel, Gus and Hallie feel as if they've never truly known their childhood friend, Neil. Did he change? If so, why? What were the signs throughout the story that he was not who they thought he was? Why did they choose to ignore them?

17. How does Hallie's concept of love evolve from the beginning of the story to the end?