



*All These Beautiful Strangers,*  
by Elizabeth Klehfoth

**Discussion Questions**

What is the motivation of the As at Knollwood Prep? Is it a typical club? How much is based on tradition? Loyalty? Exclusivity? Sense of privilege? Group mentality?

How are the As responsible for Jake Griffin's death? Who is most at fault?

Margot tells Charlie, "That's the thing about truth: nobody wants to tell it. Not even you. Nobody tells the whole truth and comes away unscathed." Is Margot right? Does she get proven wrong?

How do the secrets shared by various characters (Alistair and his friends, Charlie and her friends, etc.) bind them together? Charlie says "We held each other's secrets. It was a bond that could make us, just as surely as it was a bond that could destroy us all." What does she mean? How is that evident in the novel?

Consider the book's title in light of this quote by Charlie: "If my investigation into my mother's past had taught me anything, it was that no one can really understand the whole of a person. In many ways, my mother, my father—the people I was closest to, the people who meant the most to me—were strangers. Beautiful strangers." Why does Grace call them "beautiful"? How does she come to feel about each of her parents by the end of the novel, after finding out the truths of their pasts?

Discuss the novel's central two mysteries: Grace is plagued by guilt and uncertainty over Jake's death, in the same way that Charlie is plagued by her mother's disappearance. How are the mysteries and the way they impact Grace and Charlie similar?

Photos become a theme throughout the novel. Consider all the photos and the way they shape characters' views of each other, drive the story, and deepen some mysteries.

Why does Charlie choose to go into documentary filmmaking when she gets to college?

How has Charlie's belief that she was abandoned by her mother shaped her personality? How does it affect the choices she makes and the way she relates to people? Why is it so crucial that she find out whether her mother left of her own free will or was the victim of foul play?

How does Charlie feel, deep down, about her family pedigree? Are there parts of it she rejects? Parts she uses to her advantage?

Why does Charlie try so hard to join the As, even when she knows some of their behavior is wrong?

Why does Charlie like playing poker? Why is she so good at it? And why does she say she prefers hanging out with guys instead of girls?

Charlie isn't always self-aware when it comes to way she treats others. Name a few moments when other people try to show her a more accurate view of herself. Is her guidance counselor correct when she says Charlie doesn't connect with people and exploits others for her own gain?

We know less about Grace than any other character, partly because we only have her story in the past, not the present. What do we know about her upbringing, her personality, her relationships? What do we know about her apart from her role as Alistair's wife/Grace's mother? Does the author make her a shadowy, vague character on purpose?

Do we ever really know our parents? Charlie wonders whether she knew her mother: "It struck me then that I hadn't known her at all, really. . . . she wasn't a person but my mother. . . . But my mother had been a person before she had been my mother. A person with her own friends, her own likes and dislikes, her own memories and adventures and heartaches. She had lived a whole life before I came along." (p 94-95)

Compare Grace's epitaph ("What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared with what lies within us.") with Alistair's senior yearbook quote ("Never look behind. What's done is done. Be wise and look ahead.").

What does Charlie mean in the prologue when she says her father built the wall around the lake house to keep them in, rather than to keep everyone else out?

How does Alistair's story of the rosebush explain the kind of person he's become? And the kind of person Teddy has become?

Alistair struggles with the idea of conscience. Does he have one, or not? How is he different from Margot, or is he?

Do you excuse Alistair's faults/crimes/acts of violence? Why?

What impression of Grace does Alistair form based on the photo Jake had in his school room of her with ice cream on her face? Why does this photo attract him to her?

What does Grace initially see in Alistair? What is different about her relationship with Alistair and her relationship with Teddy? Did either man really love her?