
Readers' Group Discussion Questions

WARNING! Read no further if you want to be surprised by the plot. And of course you do.

1. “No one else’s behavior makes any sense,” Sarah concludes in the first line of the novel. How does this “revelation,” as she calls it, help her accept both friends and strangers and slip easily into another culture? When you travel to another region or country, do you enjoy the differences you find? Do you believe that your behavior always makes sense?
2. “I’ve found my native land,” says Sarah, and yet her ancestors aren’t Greek. What is it about Pharos that draws her there? Have you ever felt a strong pull to another culture? If so, how do you explain it?
3. “You’re still interested in men aren’t you?” Alex asks Sarah, who’s just broken up with her business partner/boyfriend Julian. “Of course,” she answers, “they’re fifty percent of my hunting grounds.” Did that suddenly change your feelings about Sarah? Can you identify with Sarah even though you may not share her philosophy?
4. Early in the novel Theo asks Sarah to direct the islanders’ summer play. “I have many good reasons for saying no,” she tells us. “OK, yes,” she tells Theo. Is Sarah brave or just foolish? Do you ever tell yourself one thing and then do the opposite? When was the last time you took on a challenge and stuck with it even after it became much harder than you expected?
5. Sarah describes Pharos as “the hammock” (versus “the cradle”) of civilization, and doesn’t mind that telegrams lie around for days before getting delivered. How do Costas, Theo, Tula, and the other Pharians illustrate and validate her observation? Is Pharos the Greece you’ve always dreamed of? What are the values that are threatened by modern technology?

6. “If your ex-lovers don’t become your friends, you’re dancing on a dark stage,” says Sarah. Do you think that’s poetry, or wisdom? What does this tell us about Sarah’s capacity for love? Do you think this idea may be more difficult for men to accept than women?
7. “Life on Pharos is intoxicating in its simplicity,” says Sarah. She then becomes completely entangled in the life of the islanders. And then she falls in love. Is simplicity an impossible ideal for someone as complex as Sarah? When you take a vacation do you try to slip out of your hectic lifestyle, or do you just move it to a more exotic place? If you decided to simplify your life, what would that look like?
8. Sarah’s entirely comfortable in her own skin and never apologizes for herself. “You love who you love,” she tells Monika. Why does Monika, who has only been with men, allow herself to fall for Sarah? Why do you think same-sex relationships are becoming more acceptable? Do labels like heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual freeze people’s imagination and inhibit their ability to discover who they are?
9. Sarah sees a parallel between Shakespeare’s famous statement “It’s all one” and the classic yogic mantra “I am That.” Are these ideas meaningful to you? Do you believe in the interconnectedness of all things? Are you thinking of giving *Ham sa* a try?
10. Alex thinks Sarah’s attitude toward fate makes her a passive bystander. Sarah replies that acknowledging karma includes accepting that some things are beyond your control: “It’s my boat [my life] and I have to sail it. I’m heading somewhere. But I try to remember I’m not the wind, I’m not the current, I’m just the sailor.” How does this philosophy play out in her romances and friendships? What is your own understanding of karma?

11. "A wet nose, pink ears, a tail..." says Alex when she brings home a stray dog. Sarah isn't thrilled. "Al Fresco" she names the dog, "as in lives outside." How important is humor in their friendship? Is Sarah's sense of humor always genuine or is it sometimes a tactic for avoiding real communication? When times are tough are you more likely to rent a funny Woody Allen movie or reach for the Valium?

12. "And I feel my landing gear bang into place," is the last line of the novel. What is the transformation in Sarah during these months in Pharos? Has this novel shifted your way of thinking about love, friendship, sexuality, spirituality? Are you willing to try your first glass of retsina?