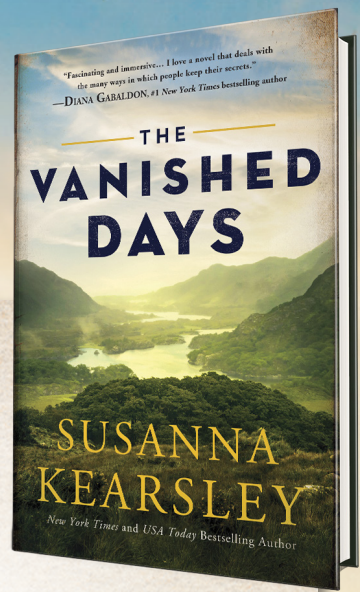


THE VANISHED DAYS

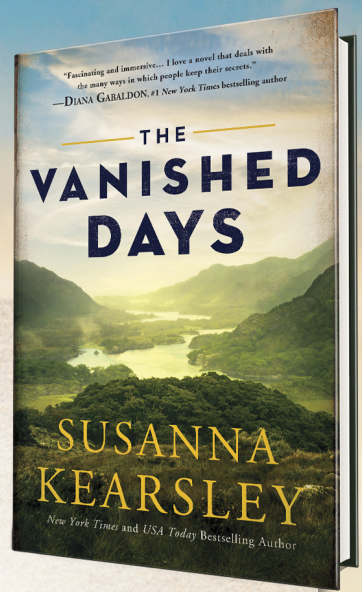
READING GROUP GUIDE



1. Did you see the twist coming? Do you think the author played fair with her readers? Were there any particular clues that you spotted?
2. The Oxford Reference Dictionary defines an unreliable narrator as one “who cannot be relied on either to tell the truth or in the case of self-reflexive narrators to know the truth.” The term was coined by American literary theorist Wayne C. Booth in 1961, but unreliable narrators have been around for centuries. The unreliable narrator of Agatha Christie’s *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, published in 1926, insists that he “faithfully recorded” the facts that are “All true, you see.” In *The Vanished Days*, Adam tells us, “If you’ve read this closely you will find I’ve sought to tell the truth.” Did he? How do you feel about unreliable narrators? Do you have any favorite examples, in books or films?
3. In many dual-time stories, we have the benefit of a present-day narrator to interpret the past for us and explain what certain terms mean, but in this one, because both story lines are historical, we don’t have that luxury. Did you have any trouble following the history because of this?
4. Do you think historical fiction is a valid and useful way to learn about history? Did you learn anything from this novel that you didn’t know before about Scotland’s (or America’s) history?
5. There’s a family tree at the beginning of this book. Did you find that helpful in keeping everyone sorted out? Does knowing how closely related some characters are to one another make the story more interesting for you? Have you traced any of your own family tree?
6. Did it surprise you on reading the author’s note about the characters to learn how many of the characters were real people? Does it change the way you look at a story to know that the characters actually lived?
7. In this novel, there are a few strong connections between older characters and younger ones. Did you have any favorite moments or scenes involving this? Do you have any cross-generational relationships in your own life that are especially important to you or that played an important part in making you who you are today?

THE VANISHED DAYS

READING GROUP GUIDE



8. Families—both the ones we're born into and the ones we create for ourselves—play a central part in this story. What different kinds of families did you find in this novel, and how do you feel they influenced the main characters?
9. The Browne family is not what you would call respectable, yet there are moments of great love and tenderness in their house. What is it that makes most of them—especially Barbara—sympathetic characters?
10. Henry says of his brother Matthew: “Matthew was whatever ye had need of him to be, except dependable.” Is that a fair judgment, do you think? Did you notice an incident that changed this aspect of Matthew’s character or a moment that shows us he has changed?
11. Violet represents everything Adam says he came home for—“a wife to build a future with” who’d be accepted by his friends the Turnbells and who’d give him the social connections he needed to finally gain peace and security. Yet when it’s clear she could be his for the asking, he doesn’t ask. “I’d been handed what I’d thought I’d wanted,” Adam says, “and found it did not suit me after all.” Have you ever been in a similar situation, where what you thought you wanted turned out not to be the thing you needed?
12. Why do you think Adam and Lily chose America as the place to start their new life together? What did it offer them that Scotland at that time did not?
13. Captain Gordon talks about the days we have lived that are behind us and will never come again and says to Adam, “It’s a shame that we cannot reclaim those vanished days, and try to live them better.” Adam, by the book’s end, claims he wouldn’t want to change his vanished days and tells us, “I’d not be the man I am if I had not lived every hour of them.” Which one of them do you agree with, and why? Is there any part of your own life that you’d like to live over again?