

Book Club Discussion Starters

SUMMER OF SECRETS by Nikola Scott

About the book

August 1939

At peaceful Summerhill, orphaned Maddy hides from the world and the rumours of war. Then her sister Georgina returns from a long trip with a new friend, the handsome Victor. Maddy fears that Victor is not all he seems, but she has no idea just what kind of danger has come into their lives.

Today

Chloe is newly pregnant. This should be a joyful time, but she is fearful for the future, despite her husband's devotion. When chance takes her to Summerhill, she's drawn into the mystery of what happened there decades before. And the past reaches out to touch her in ways that could change everything...

Questions for discussion

1. The beautiful landscape of the Cornish coast was one of the first seeds of the story. How does that setting influence and underscore some of the main themes and characters of the novel?
2. Maddy initially comes across as quite reserved, naïve and removed from reality. Would you still describe her as a strong character? What is it that then forces her to change, and how does she grow and develop across the arc of the story?
3. Did you feel sympathetic towards William and his spontaneous, desperate decision to escape a to him untenable situation? What would you have done in his position?
4. Given the class divide in 1930s England, do you think it's plausible that Maddy and William end up together and if yes, why?
5. In the maze Victor accuses Maddy of having engineered the situation by her own previous behaviour towards him. How did you feel about his words and his rationale? Looking back at their previous interaction was there a kernel of truth in it, or is that a classic way for a controlling personality to manipulate the other?
6. What character traits of the young Maddy can we still see in the old Madeleine when we revisit her through Chloe's eyes?

7. One thing that is so difficult to understand about domestic abuse and coercive control is how impossible it seems for the person suffering in the midst of it to disengage, to push back or to leave. Looking at Chloe, especially given how capable she comes across in the flashbacks to her earlier life, why does she not leave her husband earlier?
8. What is the catalyst for Chloe's change?
9. Given their history, did the ending and the last confrontation between Chloe and Aidan on the terrace resonate with you? Did you secretly hope for a more dramatic outcome or for Chloe to have acted more drastically in any way, even if that might have been morally ambiguous?
10. Part of what ties past and present together is the complex structure of character & thematic parallels. What are the most striking of these parallels and did they work in creating a tightly woven whole?
11. The story is about love in all its forms, but it is also, perhaps more so, a story about letting go, even in the face of love. What instances of detachment can you identify among the characters and why are they necessary for the characters to undergo?
12. How does the historical background of Maddy's story play into the development of the characters' personalities?

About the author

Nikola Scott was born and raised in Germany and studied at university there. Having been obsessed with books from a young age, Nikola moved to New York City to begin her first job in book publishing – a career in which she could fully indulge her love of fiction. She spent ten years working in publishing in New York and then in London, editing other people's books, before she decided to take the leap into becoming a full-time writer herself. She now lives in Frankfurt with her husband and two sons.

Her previous novels include *The Life I Stole* as well as the internationally bestselling *My Mother's Shadow* and *The Orchard Girls*, all of which have been translated widely around the world.

For more news and behind-the-scenes information, join Nikola's monthly newsletter on www.nikolascott.com!

Nikola is also on Instagram and Facebook at *@NikolaScottAuthor*.

