

discussion questions

1. The novel opens with Paulette beginning her day. How does the author establish her character? What do we learn about Paulette and her wishes for the future, her thoughts about Denton, and about herself?
2. Compare what we know about Denton and Garfield, and their treatment of Paulette. Can you explain the way Paulette acts towards each man? Does your opinion of Paulette change because of her different treatment of them?
3. The idea of home is important to Paulette, and throughout the novel we are shown different homes, different living spaces. Discuss the way Paulette orders her home and what it reveals about her. Compare that with the other homes we see—Maggie's or Frank Bowen's, or what we know of Garfield's home, and how they reflect their owners.
4. Discuss Paulette's evolving relationship with Frank Bowen, or "Shirt & Tie," as she calls him. Paulette is understandably upset with him, but how does her treatment of him evolve over the course of the novel? Does your opinion of him change as we learn more about his past?
5. Paulette makes very clear to Frank's grandson Nellie that she is not his "Mum." However, in that same scene she thinks to herself, "it's like the two of them know each other from some other time, like they have found each other again." What does she mean by this, and how does this sentiment manifest throughout the novel?
6. How does the island of St. Kitts influence Paulette? What stays with her about the island and her childhood? What does she mean when she says, "No one would recognize the girl she left behind in her bedroom at the foot of the hill"?



ST. MARTIN'S PRESS



discussion questions

7. In Chapter 26, Paulette and Bird go over to Nellie's house and discover him in a surprising situation. Do you understand what he's doing and why? What do you think about the advice that Paulette gives him?
8. When Garfield announces that he's moving to the U.S. and taking Bird with him Paulette blames Nellie and Frank for Garfield's decision. Do you agree with her? Do you think she's fair in her treatment of Frank throughout the novel?
9. What does Paulette learn when she goes to visit Bird and Garfield in Texas? Discuss her experience in the restaurant, where she's "sitting at the table and sitting above the table at the same time." What does she mean? How do you feel about the way she's treated by Bird here?
10. What role does Paulette's neighbor Maggie play in the story? Do you think Maggie is right to voice her opinion of Bird at the end of the novel? Do you agree with her?
11. At one point, Paulette remembers a sermon she heard in church on St. Kitts. "Sometimes, says the minister, you're looking in one direction and life catches you from behind." How much of Paulette's life is an example of life catching her from behind, and how does the way she reacts improve her lot or make her more miserable?
12. By the end of the novel, Paulette remembers early advice she received: "Granny would say, 'Let what comes, come, and let what goes, go. No use fighting it.'" Would you say this is the message of the novel? Do you think Paulette followed this advice in her own life?



ST. MARTIN'S PRESS

