

The Light of Paris

by Eleanor Brown

Madeleine is trapped—by her family’s expectations, by her controlling husband, and by her own fears—in an unhappy marriage and a life she never wanted. But when she discovers the journals her grandmother kept while living in 1920s Paris, Madeleine is inspired to change her life – rediscovering the person she once was, and the woman she wants to be.

1. The city of Paris becomes a character in its own right throughout the novel. What is the significance of Paris to the story itself? What does it mean to Margie when she lives there and to Madeleine as she reads about it?
2. What are the family patterns that are carried through the three generations of women—Margie, Simone, and Madeleine? How are they similar and how are they different?
3. Madeleine has a difficult relationship with her mother, Simone. Did you feel sympathy for Simone at any point? Have you experienced a mother-daughter dynamic like this in your own life?
4. How are Margie and Madeleine’s relationships with their mothers similar? How are they different? Do you think the habit of parents placing expectations on their children is a breakable pattern?
5. Madeleine and Margie want independent lives, but both have been very sheltered. In what ways are they prepared or unprepared for the realities that face them?
6. The story takes place during two different time periods: 1924 and 1999. What do those years have in common, and how do they affect the story?
7. Madeleine escapes to her home town of Magnolia in the same way that Margie escapes to Paris. Do these two cities have anything in common? How are they different? Do they impact Madeleine and Margie in similar or different ways?
8. Margie wants to write, Madeleine to paint. How does their art affect both their lives and what happens in the story?
9. Did Margie make the right choice? What were the consequences of her decision?
10. At the end of the novel, Madeleine gets a studio to paint in—a room of her own. What is the significance of this space for Madeleine? How does it affect her character?
11. How have circumstances for women changed between the different time periods of Margie and Madeleine’s stories? In what way are they the same?