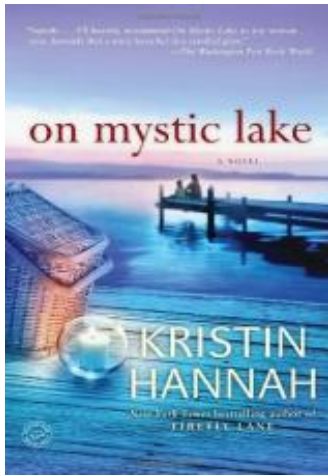


# On Mystic Lake

by Kristin Hannah

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## About the Book

Annie Colwater's husband has just confessed that he's in love with a younger woman. Devastated, Annie retreats to the small town where she grew up. There, she is reunited with her first love, Nick Delacroix, a recent widower who is unable to cope with his silent, emotionally scarred young daughter. Together, the three of them begin to heal. But just when Annie believes she's been given a second chance at happiness, her world is turned upside down again, and she is forced to make a choice that no woman in love should ever have to make. . . .

## Discussion Guide

- 1. On Mystic Lake** opens with two scenes of leaving -- Natalie fleeing California for England, and Blake quitting his marriage. How do these two acts set the tone for the rest of the book? How is it significant that Annie has little agency, or choice, in these decisions?
- At the beginning of the novel, how is Annie, in effect, trapped by her own image? How has she fashioned that persona, and how is it the creation of her husband, Blake?
- Why do you think Kristin Hannah tells the story through several narrative points of view, including those of Annie, Blake, Nick, and Izzy? What does this add to your understanding of the novel? Is there one character that you consider to be the true voice of **On Mystic Lake**?
- After Blake asks for a divorce, Annie admits that she's put her family's needs above her own. What events in her past have spurred her to do so? How has she been rewarded for her selflessness, and how has it been damaging to her development?
- Annie and Nick are both linked by loss in their families. How does learning to live alone -- and discovering yourself

in the process -- constitute a theme of the book? In your opinion, who is the most successful at forging his or her own identity? Why?

**6.** Why didn't Kathy and Annie keep in touch after high school? Do you think that Annie felt guilty about losing contact? Why or why not?

**7.** Why do you think Nick chooses to date and marry Kathy, in lieu of Annie? How does this decision affect the dynamic of the "gruesome threesome"? Ultimately, do you think Nick made the correct choice? Based on his memories of Kathy, do you think he truly loved his wife? Why or why not?

**8.** How does Annie react when she learns of Kathy's suicide? What do you think drove Kathy to end her life? How has it affected Nick and, most notably, Izzy?

**9.** Why is taking care of Nick and Izzy so important to Annie? What tools does she use to appeal to Izzy, and to make the child feel cherished and cared for? What is it about Annie that appeals to Izzy, and vice versa? How does Annie's relationship with Natalie parallel the rapport she enjoys with Izzy?

**10.** The relationships between fathers and daughters are integral to the development of both parties in **On Mystic Lake**. Compare and contrast the relationships of Hank and Annie, Blake and Natalie, and Nick and Izzy. What does each daughter want from her father? As the story unfolds, do the fathers change to become more receptive to their daughters' needs, and if so, how? In your opinion, who has the greatest chance to establish and maintain a successful father-daughter relationship?

**11.** What does the compass symbolize to Annie? Why does she stop wearing it around her neck, and why does she begin to wear it again later? Why does she give it to Izzy?

**12.** "It doesn't matter," Annie says to Nick about her love for him. At that point, why doesn't she believe that her passion for Nick can guide her life? How is she a pragmatist, and how is she a romantic? Ultimately, what compels her to change her mind and leave Blake?

**13.** Kathy didn't want to "live in the darkness." How do each of the characters in the book deal with grief, depression, and loneliness? What coping mechanisms do they use to cope and grow?

**14.** What shakes Nick into seeking help for his drinking problem? How does his drinking mirror his mother's? In what ways is he a product of the nature versus nurture argument?

**15.** Why does Izzy stop talking? What compels her to speak again, and how is Annie instrumental in drawing Izzy out? Why is she wary of speaking to Nick, and how do the two slowly rebuild a rapport? How does Annie facilitate mending the breach between father and daughter?

**16.** "Our lives are mapped out long before we know enough to ask the right questions," says Nick. What questions do you think Nick would like to ask? In what ways are Nick and Annie trapped by having to do what is expected of them? Ultimately, how do they exercise free will over their own lives? How do the other characters in the novel do the same?

17. Annie's known in various ways -- including Annie Bourne, Annalise Colwater, Mrs. Blake Colwater, mother, wife. How does each name or designation constitute a different identity? At the end of the book, has she embraced one or the other of these identities, or has she developed a new one? How does she incorporate each of these identities into a newly forged character?

18. What compels Blake to end his affair with Suzannah and call Annie? Why doesn't she immediately return to him and to her marriage? How does he view her as a prize to be won? Does he exhibit love toward her? How?

19. How does Annie's relationship with her daughter change once Natalie goes to England? In which ways does Natalie look up to and admire Annie? With what aspects of her mother's character does Natalie find fault? Do you think Natalie's personality is at all similar to her father's? How?

20. How does Annie's pregnancy represent a turning point for her? Why does she return to Blake after she realizes she's carrying his child? Why doesn't she remain with Nick?

21. How does Nick help Annie grapple with her fear and concern about the premature baby? How do his actions contrast with Blake's behavior? Why doesn't Annie's husband connect with children?

22. How do you think Annie would act and feel after signing her divorce papers? How is this character different than the one we meet at the beginning of the book? Why does Annie feel buoyant at the end of the book?

23. Do you believe that at the end of the story Annie will have a joyous reunion with Nick and Izzy? Do you think she'll open that bookstore in Mystic? Why or why not?

## Author Bio

Kristin Hannah is the award-winning and bestselling author of more than 20 novels, including the international blockbuster, *THE NIGHTINGALE*, which was named Goodreads Best Historical Fiction novel for 2015 and won the coveted People's Choice award for best fiction in the same year. Additionally, it was a selection of the Reese Witherspoon Book Club in 2023. It was named a Best Book of the Year by Amazon, iTunes, BuzzFeed, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Paste* and *The Week*. In 2018, *THE GREAT ALONE* became an instant *New York Times* #1 bestseller and was named the Best Historical Novel of the Year by Goodreads.

*THE FOUR WINDS* was published in February 2021 and immediately hit #1 on the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today* and Indie bookstores' bestseller lists. Additionally, it was selected as a book club pick by the both "Today" and the Book of the Month club, which named it the best book of 2021.

*THE NIGHTINGALE* is currently in production at Tri Star, with Dakota and Elle Fanning set to star. Tri Star has also optioned *THE GREAT ALONE*, and it is in development. *FIREFLY LANE*, her beloved novel about two best friends, was the #1 Netflix series around the world, in the week it came out. The popular TV show starred Katherine Heigl and Sarah Chalke, and season two concluded the series in April 2023.

A former attorney, Kristin lives in the Pacific Northwest.

## Critical Praise

"MARVELOUS . . . A TOUCHING LOVE STORY . . . You know a book is a winner when you devour it in one evening and hope there's a sequel. . . . This page-turner has enough twists and turns to keep the reader up until the wee hours of the morning."--- *USA Today*"Superb . . . I'll heartily recommend **On Mystic Lake** to any woman . . . who demands that a story leave her in a satisfied glow."--- *The Washington Post Book World*"An extremely satisfying, insightful, and emotional tale. Fans of La Vyrle Spencer will certainly enjoy this moving book."--- *Booklist*"The phrase 'page-turner' is redefined. . . . A clean, deep thrust into the reader's heart . . . Unfolds tenderly and with suspense . . . In Hannah's world, nothing can be taken for granted and triumph must be earned, with hard work, truthful reckoning, and tears."--- *Publishers Weekly*

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