

## Book Club Questions

1. The novel is told in three interwoven voices—Marian, Opal, and Evelyn. Whose perspective did you find most compelling, and why? Did your loyalty shift as the book progressed?

2. Marian repeatedly faces the choice between following the rules of her profession and following her conscience. At Hyde Park, she lost her job for not standing up to Dr. Hayes. At the Elizabeth Sullivan Home, she eventually does stand up. What changed in her, and was she right to act when she did?

3. Jim McCullen signs the adoption order for Opal's baby believing it is the right medical decision, even though the process was handled badly. Do you agree with his reasoning? Can a right outcome justify a wrong process?

4. Evelyn's grief over her own lost child shapes every choice she makes. By the end of the novel, has she become Bea's true mother, or is she still occupying a role that belongs to someone else? Does the answer matter?

5. Opal is described throughout the novel as "backward" or "mentally deficient"—language true to the period but uncomfortable for modern readers. How does the novel push back against those labels through what Opal actually does and feels? Did your view of Opal change as you read?

6. The Elizabeth Sullivan Home for Destitute and Degenerate Women operates as both refuge and predator—sheltering women while quietly profiting from them. What does the novel suggest about institutions that hold this kind of dual purpose? Are there modern parallels?

7. Class divides every relationship in the book—Marian and Jim, Evelyn and Marshall, Opal and the Porters. How does economic power translate into power over other people's bodies and choices? Which character is most damaged by class, and which is most protected?

8. Opal carries a bag of paper fortunes she cannot read. Marian reads them to her. Evelyn writes letters to Dr. Venkeman she cannot send. Documents in the file decide Opal's baby's future. How does the novel use paper—letters, fortunes, records, scrapbooks—to explore who has the power to write a woman's fate?

9. The Epilogue presents Opal making a choice about Bonnie that is both heartbreaking and clear-eyed. Do you believe she made the right decision? Could she have made any other?

10. Lillian, Marian's mother, lives "vicariously" through her scrapbooks until her illness forces Marian to confront her own version of the same avoidance. What is the novel saying about the difference between watching life and living it?

11. Several characters in the novel—Ole Bridge, Hazel, Tim—appear briefly but shape the story significantly. Which minor character lingered with you most after finishing the book?

12. By the end of *Paper Fortunes*, do you believe the novel offers a hopeful resolution, a tragic one, or something more ambiguous? What does the book's ending suggest about whether the futures we are given can truly be rewritten?