

# WILD HOPE

JOAN THOMAS

## BOOK CLUB GUIDE

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1. *Wild Hope* takes us into the lives of three characters in their mid-thirties. What's at stake in the novel for Isla, for Jake, and for Reg? Are the challenges they face unique to their generation?
2. When Jake first meets Isla, he recalls this line from his university psych class: "Show me a normal person and I will cure them." How do you understand this line? Do you think Isla needs to be cured? If so, in what respect? How does she change in the course of the novel?
3. Seven chapters of *Wild Hope* take you into Jake's point-of-view, and you soon know a lot about him that Isla does not know. How well does Isla understand Jake? Do you think they could have made a go of it?

Does Jake lose your sympathy at any point in the novel? If he were to see a psychologist, what issues do you think they would explore?

4. What are Jake's artistic goals? Which of his art projects (accomplished or just envisioned) appeals to you most? Can art change the conversation? If you think it can, talk about a work of art that moved you and shifted (whether slightly or profoundly) your view of the world.
5. On page 224, Isla muses, "I question whether people like Bevaqua are all that different from you and me. It's kind of a human trait, isn't it? To want to push things to greater and greater heights." What do you think? Is Reg simply acting, with more vigour than most people, on a universal human drive? Or is his ruthless acquisitiveness a pathology? If so, what's the source of it? Why do societies tolerate ludicrous levels of wealth in the hands of the one-percent? Where do you see the currently widening gap between rich and poor going in the future?

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6. Talk about the role these characters play in the novel: Kurt Altenbach, Quinn O’Neil, and the unnamed audio artist.
7. The title of the 15th century culinary book that inspired Isla includes the phrase “on right living.” Do our concepts of “right living” change over time? What about our definitions of excellence and success? Are they reshaped by the social conditions of each era? Have the parents portrayed in *Wild Hope* illuminated a way forward for their adult children? How do you currently define “right living,” and is your definition changing?
8. “People knew we were in freefall, but they never let on. . . . folks were being driven crazy by terrors so awful they could never acknowledge them. . . . nobody talked about climate change.” (page 81). Is there a gap, as Jake thinks, between our private fears for the future and our social discourse? If you agree with Jake, why do you think this silence exists, and what is its effect?
9. The first time we meet Isla, she says that she feels “like my ordinary life has morphed into a crime drama.” In fact, *Wild Hope* eventually becomes a mystery with its “apparatus of suspects and motives and weapons and clues.” As you read the final third of the novel, what were your expectations for how this mystery would be solved, and how closely were they met? How do you feel about the conclusion of the novel?
10. Riding up to Bevaqua’s lodge (page 226), Isla uses the phrase “wild hope” regarding Jake’s disappearance. Does the title of this book have any wider meaning for you? Do you see glimmers of hope at the end of the novel, and if so, where does that hope lie?