

Last Light Over Carolina

Discussion Points

1. In chapter one, we see Bud Morrison making his way through a typical morning on the McClellanville docks. What does this scene tell you about his relationships with family and friends, and about the citizens of McClellanville?
2. Bud and Carolina live in one of the old, grand homes of McClellanville. What does White Gables mean to Carolina, and to Bud? Discuss the significance of living in a home-or in a town-where generations of your family before you have lived. How does this fact both buoy and drag down the inhabitants of White Gables and of the town?
3. On pages 89-90, Lizzy's friend and employer, Nancy, gives her relationship advice and reminds her that shrimping families stick together. "It's our way," she says. Where else does this clannish sentiment appear throughout the novel? Identify the moments in which it is expressed or thought and discuss how it relates to the situation at hand. How do you feel about it as an explanation for certain behavior or opinions?
4. This novel explores the challenges of a long term marriage. Joseph Campbell wrote:

Marriage is not a love affair. A love affair is a totally different thing. A marriage is a commitment to that which you are. That person is literally your other half. And you and the other are one. A love affair isn't that. That is a relationship of pleasure, and when it gets to be unpleasurable, it's off. But a marriage is a life commitment, and a life commitment means the prime concern of your life. If marriage is not the prime concern, you are not married."

Discuss this quote in context of Bud and Carolina's marriage, and in long term marriages in general.

5. Carolina's father makes clear he disapproved of her marriage to Bud. Compare and contrast Mr. Brailsford's reaction with Bud's feelings about Josh and Lizzy. Do you agree or disagree with Bud's decision to fire Josh after the fiasco in Florida? How do you feel about Lizzy's and Carolina's accusation, that he is in part to blame for ruining Josh and Lizzy's marriage? In what ways might this be true or untrue?
6. Themes of love and hope run through the novel. Identify some of the ways in which these emotions play a role in the character's lives and influence the decisions they make. How does love play a role in forgiveness? Compare and contrast the theories various characters, such as Carolina and Lizzy, have on love.
7. In part, an old community with a long standing sense of tradition brings with it fixed values that in time become old fashioned and maybe even inappropriate. Identify the ways in which women's roles are defined in McClellanville. How do the women meet or defy the expectations of their community? How do you see male/female conflict or collaboration at work in the novel?

8. Carolina tells Bud that she chooses to be a shrimper just as she chose to return to McClellanville, believing she knows the lifestyle she's signing up for by becoming Bud's wife. How did her choices turn out? Do you think she was deluding herself all along? Was she simply young? Or did things change? Or is it as Mr. Dunnan suggests-that it isn't change itself, but "it's all in how we face it." (p.151)

9. On page 114, Bud proudly informs Mr. Brailsford that the shrimpers have "an exclusive club" of their own with their own code. Based on the author's portrayal of this community, what would you say some of the rules of this code are? Do these rules have a pragmatic purpose? Discuss in terms of how the community of shrimpers respond to Bud being "overdue" at the docks.

10. Carolina marks the beginning of her marriage's slow decline as the years Bud began building the *Miss Carolina*. Why? What changes between them during this time? What happens-besides Bud's accident-that finally helps them find their way back to one another?

11. What "old resentment" (p 4) keeps Bud from kissing Carolina goodbye the morning he leaves for work? In what he believes to be his final moments on Earth, what does he finally admit to himself about that regretted morning choice?

12. We see Bud struggling to maintain consciousness on page 292, shouting out to the *Miss Carolina* about the unfairness of his situation. But though he begins by talking to the vessel, he ends by saying, "I loved you, Carolina. And you betrayed me." Do you think he is still talking to the boat, or to his wife Carolina? Explain why Bud feels he has been betrayed. Do you agree or disagree? Who else betrays or is betrayed in the novel?

13. Bud journeys through several emotional stages as he approaches the possibility of death. Dr. Kubler-Ross describes these stages of grief as: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. Discuss Bud's process, as well as his enlightenment at the story's end concerning his relationship with his wife, his family, life.

14. Near the conclusion of the novel, we see the inhabitants of McClellanville celebrate the Blessing of the Fleet, a ritual the author describes as "based on the belief that all people were called upon by God to be good to one another and responsible stewards of the earth." (p 361). Yet the shrimpers of McClellanville express hostility toward the Department of Natural Resources, a group devoted to conservation efforts in the region. Discuss why shrimpers and DNR and other government officials sometimes clash.

15. As deeply as their love and shared history connects them, Bud and Carolina still see things very differently. What effect does the presentation of both their perspectives have on the story? How does it affect your reading experience? Why do you think the author also chose to include sections from Lizzy's point of view? Discuss the points of connection between perspectives and how they do or do not line up.

16. Mr. Dunnan tells Lizzy that sometimes change is just a second chance. Who gets a second chance in this novel and who doesn't? How do these opportunities change or fail to change people's lives?