

# HEAVY CREAM

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. Discuss Gerry's relationship with her mother. How does their life on the road shape Gerry's sense of what love, safety, and caretaking are supposed to look like?
2. Bonnie, Nell, and Finley are very different characters from one another, but they share the task of caring for Gerry when Helene disappears. In what ways do the three women provide for Gerry, and what expectations does each place on her?
3. We don't learn Gerry's name until Chapter 5, when she introduces herself to Finley. Until then, she is known only by her mother's nickname, "Jellybean." What did you make of this withholding and the evolution of Geraldine's name?
4. Did you read Gerry as an innocent observer, a survivor, a social climber, a performer, or something else? How did your interpretation of Gerry change over the course of the novel?
5. Helene reappears with little fanfare after months of silence, but she does not reassume her role as Gerry's mother. Is this a choice you find fault with, or do you believe it is for the best? Could the story have ended any other way?
6. What does the novel suggest about "rescue"? Can rescuing someone become a way of possessing them?
7. Gerry is repeatedly encouraged, directly or indirectly, to become different versions of herself for different people. At what moments does she seem most authentically herself?
8. How did you feel about Helene by the end of the novel? Does the novel seem to condemn Helene for her absence, or does she grant her character a certain grace? Do you agree with this verdict? Or does the novel ask something more complicated from the reader?
9. At the end of the novel, there is a single chapter told from Helene's perspective. What did having access to her interiority provide that Gerry's point of view could not? Did it change your feelings about either character?
10. The words "Heavy Cream" are mentioned only once in the first chapter, when Gerry and her mother whip cream into Chantilly. What do you think the title suggests, and why might Sarah Blakley-Cartwright have wanted to draw attention to it?