

Discussion Questions

- 1) At the beginning of the book, Lydia is attracted to Admiral Fontaine, but she never pursues him because she thinks he is above her. Have you ever felt this way in a relationship? Is it possible to develop a healthy relationship when there are stark differences in class, upbringing, and educational backgrounds?
- 2) Lydia's parents loved her, but were they *good* parents? Love is a requirement for any good parent, but what other qualities are necessary to provide a child with a strong foundation?
- 3) Opium was a legal drug in the nineteenth century, and it did not carry the stigma it does today. Does the legal status of a drug change the way people perceive the dangers of use? Is there less shame in becoming addicted to a legal drug rather than an illegal one?
- 4) Lydia and Bane bend the law when they slip inside the Custom House to look for the opium smuggler. What is the difference between things that are illegal and immoral? Are there ever times when a Christian should ignore a law in order to work toward a higher purpose?
- 5) Bane's childhood in the Professor's mansion taught him the safest way to live was through cool detachment from emotion. Lydia's obsessive need for order is a reaction to her early years of instability. Do you have any quirks that are echoes of something that happened in your childhood?
- 6) Despite her terrible childhood, Lydia is an optimistic person. Psychologists credit a sense of resilience to people who are able to maintain optimistic attitudes through times of trauma. On the flip side, many people are pessimistic despite a slew of good fortune. Is it possible to change this orientation, or is it simply the way we are wired?
- 7) Lydia never actually forgives the admiral for his harsh treatment of her. As a Christian, is she obligated to do so?
- 8) Bane manipulates people like the admiral, the granite mine owner, and even Lydia in order to advance his crusade against opium. Is it ever ethically acceptable to manipulate people for a higher cause? Do you predict his manipulative ways will continue in the future?