

## Reading Guide – Tangled Beginnings (Book 2 of Gift of Whispering Pines)

(SPOILER ALERT)

Themes and related questions:

### **Ability to Trust Again after Betrayal**

- Will was a serial cheater. Jess put up with it for years before finally kicking him out in book 1 *Whispering Pines*. Now she struggles with trust issues. In almost all other aspects of her life, Jess is a strong woman, but she let Will use her for years. Why do you suppose she stayed with him for so long?

### **Moral/Ethical Dilemmas**

- Will asks Jess to take Harper because there is no one else and he knows she's a good mom. Is Will sincere or is he trying to manipulate her into agreeing to take his baby?
- Jess never imagined she'd find herself visiting anyone, let alone her ex-husband, in prison. How do you think she felt during those trips? How would you feel?

### **Parenting and Family**

- *Tangled Beginnings* picked back up on the strong theme of the importance of family that was first introduced in *Whispering Pines*. It explores what family means, even if that family isn't biological. Could you relate to the ties that bind this family together?
- Family sometimes means personal sacrifices. Jess is nearly an empty nester and ready for a fresh start. Can she still have that while raising someone else's child? A child born out of an illicit affair between her then-husband and his lover?
- This family rallies together. When Celia's reputation is called into question, they pull together to prove her innocence. How would you feel if someone made accusations against a respected member of your family? Would it still concern you, even if that person were no longer living?
- Later in the story, Jess panics when she can't find Lauren and Harper. Have you ever lost track of a child? It can happen in an instant. Have you experienced a similar wave of terror when a child disappeared, even if only for a moment?

### **Love, Romance, and Second Chances**

- Jess has little time for romance and her sham of a marriage has turned her sour towards romance. Seth is rude, cares little for the business end of his architectural salvage shop, and little more than an irritant to Jess. His one redeeming quality is his undying loyalty to Celia, Jess's aunt. Plus, he's younger than Jess. When does this all start to change? Would the age difference bother you if you were in Jess's shoes?

- Jess tends to have a jealous streak, maybe stemming from her ex's wandering ways. Do you think it will ruin her relationship with Seth? Their story will continue in future books.
- Tiffany, Harper's mother, flits in and out of the story, completely unreliable and unstable. At times her actions are completely self-serving. At any point do you feel any empathy for Tiffany? Do you think she loves her baby?

### **Importance of Place in our Lives**

- Jess insists on spending New Years Eve alone, out at Whispering Pines, with only her sister's dog to keep her company. The resort is desolate in the dead of winter and there's a storm rolling in. Why do you think Jess wanted to spend her holiday there?
- The resort at Whispering Pines continues to serve as an integral part of Jess's efforts to rebuild her life after Will's many betrayals. It's where Jess chooses to live, despite having a perfectly nice, now empty home that she could have moved back into. Why do you think Jess chose Whispering Pines instead? Does her nearness to her sister have anything to do with her decision?

### **Charity vs. Greed**

- Celia lived her life in the services of others. Many examples are given throughout the story. Sometimes others try to take advantage of generous people. Do you think Celia fought back hard enough when this happened to her? Has anyone tried to take advantage of you and your good deeds?
- Why do you think Celia allowed herself to be the scapegoat, years earlier, when her friend's granddaughter stole from a client?

### **Symbolism and Signs**

- Tangled Beginnings is littered with symbolism and signs. Lauren gives Jess the arrowhead she finds in the water at the end of their dock at Whispering Pines, promising her better luck. There are old rumors that the grounds on which the resort sits were once sacred to the natives that lived there. Jess dreams of a young Indian maiden on the lake shore, and then of an Indian brave. Red cardinals are often believed to be a visitor from the spirit world. When Jess is struggling to find answers, Lauren gets lost in the woods, and Matt is looking for the girls, a persistent little red cardinal seems to be offering up clues. Do you believe, even just a little, in these types of things? Did Jess believe?
- Celia's old journal allows us a glimpse into her world, decades ago. History often repeats itself, and her written word helped solve a mystery, long after her own death. What are the risks we face nowadays, when so much of our communication is electronic vs. pen and paper?

