

# *If Sylvie Had Nine Lives*

by Leona Theis

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## Discussion Guide for Book Groups

1. *If Sylvie Had Nine Lives* chronicles a woman's nine possible lives across several decades. She has her struggles and her flaws. Some of her personality traits come forward or recede from one life to the next. Do you think a person has an immutable self, or do we change depending on circumstance?
2. Of all the possible lives in the book, is there one you think of as the "real" one? Was there a life where you identified with Sylvie more than you did in her other lives?
3. As you read, did you find yourself thinking about alternate paths you might have taken in your own life? What were the turning points?
4. The turning points that slip Sylvie from one life to the next are sometimes accidents of timing and circumstance, sometimes intentional, and sometimes a blend of both. A sneeze, a pinch on the butt, a chance cup of coffee with a friend that sets her thinking. How much do you think life turns on accident and how much on conscious decisions?
5. Maps inside the book show Sylvie's lifelines branching like a delta. Some people read the book straight through, not much concerned about where they are on the maps, while others flip back to search out the turning points that sent Sylvie this way or that. Some have read the book a second time in a different order, grouping the chapters according to whether Sylvie is single, with Jack, or with Erik. What was your approach?
6. In the final chapter, Blueberry Hill, Syl thinks about her own insatiability—and the insatiability of human beings in general—and links it to some of the problems that define the present moment, including the climate crisis. Do you think this particular version of Sylvie (in Blueberry Hill) will find successful ways to deal with this tendency in her own life?
7. If you could ask the author one question, what would it be?



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