About the Author

Karen Swan is the Sunday Times top three bestselling author and her novels sell all over the world. She writes two books each year – one for the summer period and one for the Christmas season. Previous summer titles include The Spanish Promise, The Hidden Beach and The Secret Path and for winter, Christmas at Tiffany’s, The Christmas Secret and Together by Christmas.

Photo: Alicia Clarke

Discussion Questions

Front cover: Look at the front cover illustration. In what time period do you think the story is set?

Chapter 1: In this chapter, the reader is introduced to Effie. How would you describe her character? What clues in the text support your views.

Chapter 2: Why does Effie’s stomach ‘swoop’? Have you ever experienced a similar feeling?

Chapter 3: Effie describes the book The Songbirds of Scotland as belonging ‘to a life she would never know.’ What do you think she means by this? How does she feel about where she lives?

Chapter 4: Sholto and Effie have a moment of not speaking. Have you ever been in a situation where you have been lost for words?

Chapter 5: What is happening between Sholto and Effie in this chapter? Can you predict what may happen between them?

Chapter 6: What is Effie frightened of?

Chapter 7: What does Flora mean when she says ‘This rarely ends well for girls like us’? At this point in the book, do you agree with her view?
Chapter 8: Why does Sholto not want Effie to call him ‘sir’?

Chapter 9: In this chapter, Effie and Sholto kiss. Can you predict what will happen as a result of this plot development?

Chapter 10: Why does Effie’s father believe she has brought shame on the family?

Chapter 11: Put yourself in Effie’s position. How do you think she is feeling about the news shared with the islanders?

Chapter 12: Why do you think Mathieson forced Effie to become his wife?

Chapter 13: Why do you think the island dogs were being drowned? How does this make you feel?

Chapter 14: Effie and her father arrive on the mainland. By the end of this chapter, ‘her heart is beating fast’. Why do you think that is?

Chapter 15: What does this chapter reveal about Effie’s money situation?

Chapter 16: What differences does this chapter reveal about the different expectations of men and women?

Chapter 17: Think about the offer made to Effie by the Earl of Dumfries. Does this surprise you?

Chapter 18: In whose ‘household’ does Effie think she is living?

Chapter 19: Mathieson is missing. What do you think may have happened to him? Are there any clues in this chapter to suspect Effie’s involvement?

Chapter 20: Effie and Sholto meet for the first time since her arrival on the mainland. How do you think both characters are feeling in this particular situation?
Chapter 21: Why is Effie ‘a person of interest’ in the disappearance of Mathieson? What do you think Mr Weir knows about Effie’s relationship with Mathieson?

Chapter 22: Effie is invited to dinner. How does Sholto’s reaction to this make Effie feel?

Chapter 23: Effie recounts the last time she saw Mathieson. What do you think may have happened to cause his death?

Chapter 24: What has Effie ‘lost’? What has she ‘got back’? What could she ‘never have’?

Chapter 25: What clues are given in the text to show that Effie and Felton are becoming close?

Chapter 26: What secrets are revealed in this chapter? Why does Effie believe herself to be in ‘a room full of pretenders’?

Chapter 27: What did Effie do to Mathieson before she left the island?

Chapter 28: What are your thoughts on the final chapter? Is it a fitting ending to the story?

Final thoughts on The Last Summer:

- Did the story develop as you expected?
- What did you think of the two main characters, Effie and Sholto?
- What was your favourite part of the book, and why?
- What are the differences between the islanders and the mainlanders? How different are their lives and relationships?