

Book Club Guide

A Life Once Dreamed

BY RACHEL FORDHAM



INCLUDES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS,
AUTHOR Q&A, GAMES & MORE!





Contents

GAMES.....	3
PLAYLIST.....	4
AUTHOR Q&A.....	5-6
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.....	7
QUIZ.....	8-9
RECIPE.....	10
CRAFT.....	11
WHAT TO READ NEXT.....	12-13
ABOUT THE AUTHOR.....	14
FOSTER CARE RESOURCES.....	15
ABOUT REVELL.....	16

A LIFE ONCE DREAMED BY RACHEL FORDHAM

A schoolteacher in the Dakota Territory must face her past—and her shameful secret—when a familiar doctor arrives in town and threatens to unlock the heart she’s guarded so tightly.



Games

It never hurts to start a book group off with a laugh. For this game, you will need to cut out the following names from *A Life Once Dreamed* and then, without letting the members of the group see, put one on each member's back. As you mingle together, give each other clues about whose name they have without actually saying the name.

JAMES

AGNES

SAM

HANNAH

JOSHUA

RUBY

TOMMY

GOLDIE

OLD MCHENRY

MINNIE

LEM

MAYOR CLINT

ROSE CLINT

GOING TO THE MOON

Agnes teaches some of her schoolchildren to play "I'm going to the moon." It's a game she used to play with James when they were children, and now it's your turn to play.

The leader of the round will think of a commonality, and everyone else has to try to guess it. For example:

Leader: "I'm going to the moon and taking a puppy."

First player: "I'm going to the moon and taking a bike."

Leader: "You can't go."

Second player: "I'm going to the moon and taking a froggy."

Leader: "You can go."

The game continues until someone puts together what the key is to being able to go. In this example, the commonality is items with double letters. The possibilities are endless: items starting with the same letter, items of the same color, items that rhyme, and so on.



Playlist

Someone You Used to Know - Collin Raye

James arrives in town only to find Agnes with a whole new life.

Billion - Matt Kearney

For James, it doesn't matter how many women there are in the world; Agnes is the one for him.

Wanted - Hunter Hayes

James wanted their reunion to be one full of answers but also love.

Beautiful Things - Gungor

There are moments when their broken relationship seems unfixable, but we have a Father above that can make beautiful things from the dust.

Better Days - Goo Goo Dolls

Deep down, both Agnes and James want something better ahead.

I Get to Be the One - JJ Heller

Agnes loves Freddie deeply from the start and cherishes every little thing he does.

Abide with Me - Audrey Assad

Agnes sings "Abide with Me" while rocking the very sick Freddie.

This Is Home - Switchfoot

Home - Phillip Phillips

James begins to believe that a future with both Agnes and Freddie could be possible.

Looking Out for Me - Adam Hambrick

Bless This Broken Road - Rascal Flatts

It was a long road back together, but looking back it's easy to believe the road was exactly what was best for both James and Agnes.

Higher Love - Charming Horses

Learning to Fly - Hills x Hills

Love is a beautiful journey!



Author Q&A

Can you tell us where the inspiration for this novel came from?

I watched the old movie *Blossoms in the Dust*, about Edna Gladney, and became slightly obsessed with her story. I read many articles about her and found the campaign to end the stigma of illegitimacy incredibly fascinating. My time period is earlier than when her work was, so she's not featured in my story, but it was her life that led me to wanting to build a story around the stigma of illegitimacy.

Illegitimacy is rarely talked about in our current times. Can you tell us about any current stigmas you've witnessed?

Unfortunately, there are still so many times when we judge others based on things completely out of their control. One issue that is incredibly close to my heart is children who have suffered abuse or neglect. I have been a foster parent for several years and have had the opportunity to take in multiple children who have suffered from abuse or neglect. In that time, as I've come to love and adore these children, I have also witnessed the reception they get when others find out that they are foster kids or that they have delays or struggles from their trauma. It's a common occurrence for people to treat these children different from my other children. (I should also add that there are so many people who go above and beyond to help these kids, so it is not everyone.) So many children are born into homes where drug abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect have affected their lives, but that abuse is not who they are. Just like Agnes was not less because of how she came into the world, neither are these children who are born into challenging homes. Many readers won't understand the severity of Agnes's "label," but I hope this story will challenge them to think about the people around them whom they label, and maybe they'll fight against those stigmas like James learned to do.

Your books often cover serious topics, but there is always a hopeful ending and usually a few laughs throughout. Is there a reason for this?

My life is very different from my characters' lives. I don't live in the 1800s, and I don't dress like them or even talk like them, but I have come to believe that so much of what we all feel (regardless of the era) has always been felt. The backdrop is different, but these characters, though fictional, represent all of us. We all have hard things happen in our lives—I know I have. I want my books to show real struggles, which is why I don't shy away from pain and loss. I think we can learn as we journey with characters into the murky waters of life. When my son was diagnosed with ALD, it was a hard time for our family, but learning to find the joyful moments helped us get through it. When our first long-term foster daughter left our home, the grief was so deep and real, and laughing when our toddlers did something cute helped. When I'm writing and I'm traveling through hard life problems with my characters, I try to give them the same hope I have come to depend on in my life and to offer them a few good laughs just like we all need.



Author Q&A

(continued)

Both of your previous novels take place in the fictional town of Azure Springs, Iowa. Why did you choose the Dakota territories as the setting for your latest book?

I'll always be fond of Azure Springs, Iowa, and would love to set a million books there. For *A Life Once Dreamed* I needed a setting that was a sharp contrast to Buffalo, New York, where the book begins. I wanted a place that would still be rugged and, in many ways, isolated for my heroine to start her new life in. Penance became that town. It's full of heart and endearing characters, but it's also a land that challenges the main characters and causes them to learn a new way to live and to look at life. I hope everyone will love this rustic town like I do.

What type of research was required for your book?

There were many small things that required research—climate, vegetation, industry of the Dakotas. Rules of etiquette in small rural towns and the life of a teacher were all read up on. But the issue that required the most digging around was illegitimacy and adoption laws of that era.

Do you have a favorite character from this story?

I'm actually really fond of this whole cast. If I had to pick a favorite, I think I'd say Tommy, one of Agnes's schoolchildren, because he's the perfect comic relief and you never know what will come out of his mouth.

***A Life Once Dreamed* offers readers a wonderful romantic tale that includes elements of hope and healing. What do you hope readers will take away from this story?**

Like always, I hope readers end the book with a happy sigh and all the good feelings that rush over you when you've been swept away in an engaging tale. Then I hope they pause and think about what they read and realize they were more than merely entertained. I'd love to know that readers left this story more aware of those around them. Illegitimacy may have lost its stigma but there are still so many times when we are quick to judge someone based on factors out of their control. In addition, I hope readers will think about how sometimes the roads we travel in this life take us far away from what we were seeking but somehow take us exactly where we are meant to be.

What are you working on next?

My 2021 book already has me giddy with excitement. This new book takes readers on a journey with a main character with a colorful past (years spent in a women's reformatory), who works in a brand-new career field (dental assistant) and who can't help but think that if she can clear her name she might have a shot at a real future.



Discussion Questions

1. For six years Agnes has lived in Penance. Despite her love of the townspeople, she still feels unsettled about the past. Have you ever tried to leave something behind and struggled to let go?
2. James and Agnes have a less-than-happy reunion. Could it have been handled differently? Was it fair for Agnes to deny him the answers he sought?
3. Hannah has recently suffered the loss of her daughter. She desperately wants an explanation of the cause of her daughter's death. How have you dealt with grief in your own life?
4. James doesn't plan to stay in Penance. At first, he sees the town's flaws, but with time his feelings change. Have you ever judged a place wrong initially?
5. Sam was jilted years ago and decides it's time to find someone new. If circumstances had been different, could he have had a successful relationship with Agnes?
6. Agnes feels a deep connection to Freddie from the start. Is it believable that love could grow so quickly? Have you ever experienced this?
7. Freddie is often scorned because of circumstances he has no control over. Have you ever judged someone based on one fact, only to change your opinion when you've gotten to know them?
8. Agnes and James share a history but have been apart for six years. What does it take for relationships to pick back up again after long absences? Do you have friendships or romantic interests that stay strong despite time and distance?
9. James is accepting of Agnes's secret when she finally tells him. Do you think his reaction would have been the same had he known sooner?
10. Penance is a common term and the name of the town. Would James and Agnes have ever truly gotten their happily ever after if they'd not gone through their season of "penance"?



Quiz

“WHO SAID IT?” QUIZ

1. “Is being independent the same as being a spinster?”
 - a. Clara Belkins
 - b. Tommy Smith
 - c. Lem
2. “You’re very brave. You came all the way across the country without any family.”
 - a. Clara
 - b. Ruby
 - c. Hannah
3. “Maybe a Penance bride will do the trick.”
 - a. Mayor Clint
 - b. Minnie
 - c. Hannah
4. “Weren’t you the one who gave us all a lecture on welcoming newcomers, being kind to everyone? Better eat the cake you served and go welcome him. You wanted a doctor here as bad as the rest of us.”
 - a. Hannah
 - b. Rose Clint
 - c. Minnie
5. “It’s like God’s way of saying we made it through winter, and spring is going to be beautiful and good to us.”
 - a. James
 - b. Joshua
 - c. Agnes
6. “I’ve seen plenty of spinsters, and none of them have looked a thing like you.”
 - a. James
 - b. Tommy
 - c. Mayor Clint



Quiz

7. "Sounds like you and I came from different worlds."
 - a. James
 - b. Sam
 - c. Hannah
8. "Beside him through it all and beside him now stands Miss Aggie."
 - a. McHenry
 - b. Mayor Clint
 - c. Sam
9. "We got so busy working on it that we didn't think hard enough about it and, well . . . we should have made two."
 - a. Rose Clint
 - b. Hannah
 - c. Minnie
10. "I pick this dream of my own free will."
 - a. Sam
 - b. James
 - c. Agnes

ANSWERS

1. B 2. B 3. A 4. C 5. C
6. A 7. B 8. B 9. A 10. B



Recipe

ORANGE ROLLS

Early in the story, Aggie writes to her dad and updates him on her life and also writes about some regrets she has. One of the things she wishes she could have done was learn to make her mom's orange rolls. Agnes may have never gotten the chance to make these delicious rolls with her mom, but you can make them for your friends, family, and book group.

The reason I make the reference to this particular recipe in *A Life Once Dreamed* is because my mom makes these rolls every holiday! Enjoy!

Dissolve 2 tsp yeast into $\frac{1}{2}$ cup warm water.

Add:

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup butter

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup water

3 Tbs sugar

1 tsp salt

2 beaten eggs

approximately 3 cups flour

Knead. Let rise.

At this point, you can use a round cookie cutter to cut them out, then fold each round in half, fill a baking sheet, and make the best rolls ever. (My sister cleverly calls these "little folded over rolls.")

Or, roll the dough out into a rectangle like you would for cinnamon rolls and spread with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup melted butter. Sprinkle with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar and 2 Tbs grated orange peel, then roll it up and cut it into twelve equal slices. I like to put mine in muffin tins to bake, but you could also just put them in a 9x13 pan.

Bake 10 minutes at 375°.

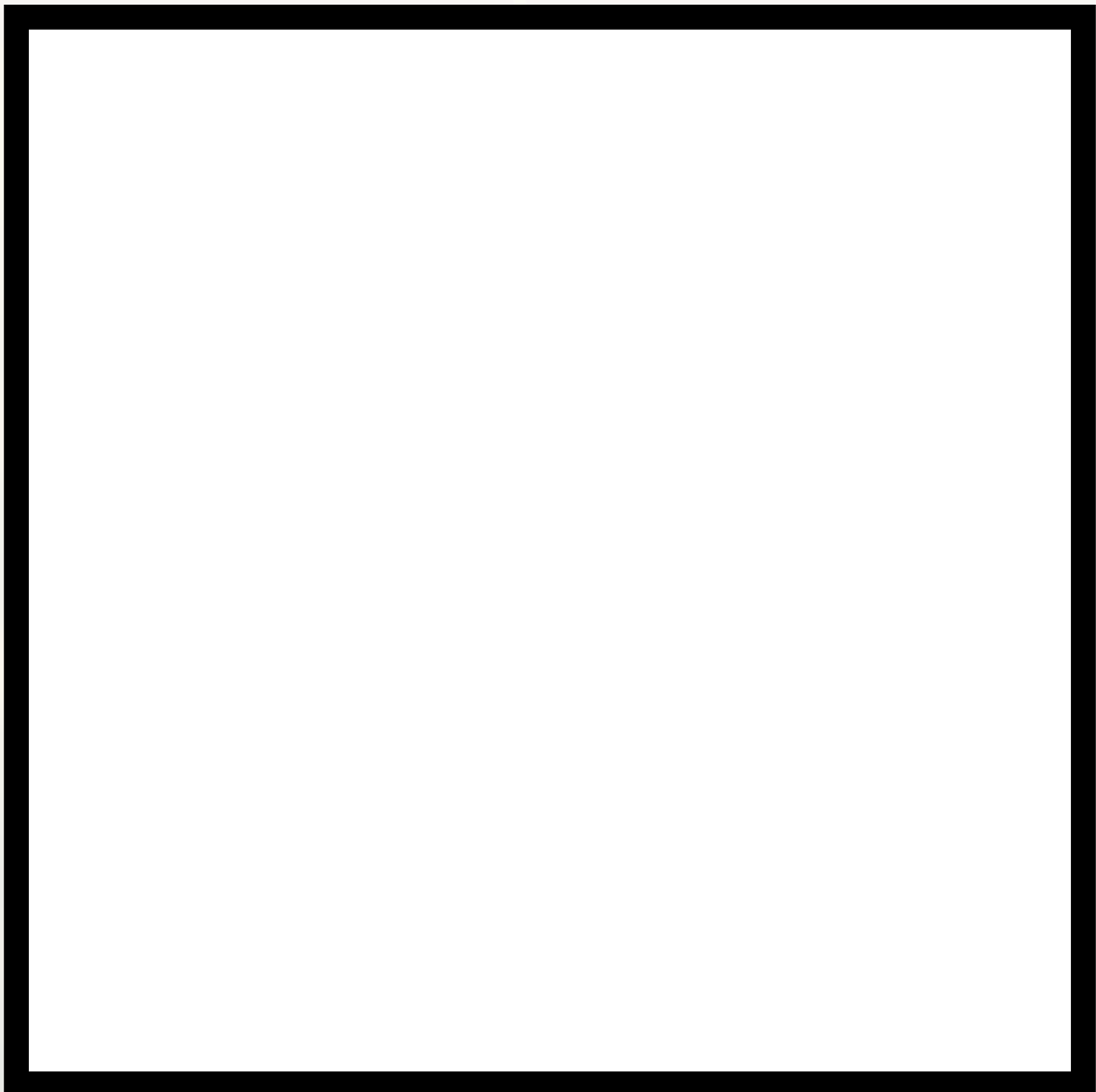
We usually multiply this recipe by three times (but we really like our rolls!).



Craft

QUILT SQUARES

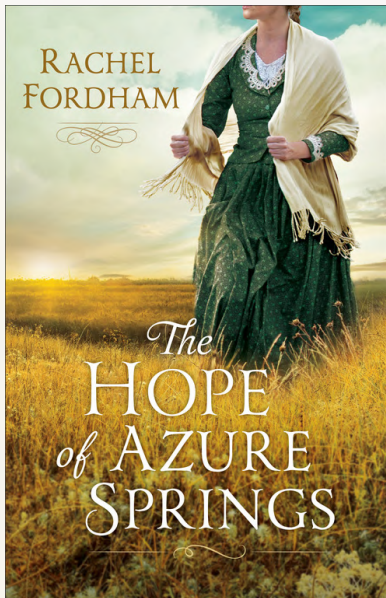
Agnes and James are gifted with a quilt near the end of the book. It's a unique quilt made of squares created by members of the community. Design your own square that symbolizes something from the book or that represents your book group.





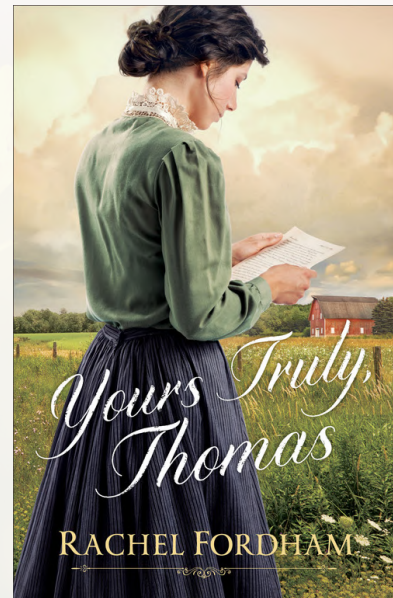
What to Read Next

More Reads from Rachel Fordham



THE HOPE OF AZURE SPRINGS
BY RACHEL FORDHAM

When a young woman wakes up injured and alone in the frontier town of Azure Springs in 1881, she must find a way to face her past, embrace her future, and rescue what she's lost.



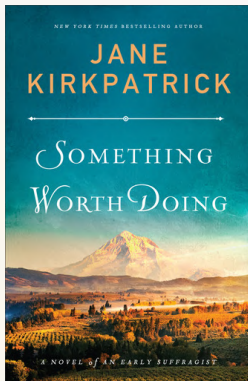
YOURS TRULY, THOMAS
BY RACHEL FORDHAM

A young woman working at the Dead Letter Office in 1883 opens a series of heartbreaking love letters. She's determined to find their rightful owner and make things right. But a trip to Azure Springs, Iowa, may provide love and healing for more than just the letter writer.



What to Read Next

More Reads from Revell



Something Worth Doing by Jane Kirkpatrick

Based on a true story, pioneer Abigail Scott denies herself the joys of a simpler life to achieve her dream of securing rights for women. But running a controversial newspaper and leading suffrage efforts in the Northwest carry a great personal cost. A tender, powerful story of a woman's conflicts—with society and herself.



An Appalachian Summer by Ann H. Gabhart

In 1933, most people are focused on the Great Depression but all Piper Danson can think about is how to get out of being a debutante and marrying Braxton Crandall. In an act of defiance, Piper volunteers as a frontier nursing courier in the Appalachian Mountains where adventure awaits.



What Momma Left Behind by Cindy K. Sproles

After the death of her mother, Worrie Dressar takes on the care of orphans near their Appalachian mountain home. Plagued with two good-for-nothing brothers, Worrie fights to save her home and the children now in her care.



About the Author



Rachel Fordham is the author of *The Hope of Azure Springs* and *Yours Truly, Thomas*. She started writing when her children began begging her for stories at night. She'd pull a book from the shelf, but they'd insist she make one up. Finally, she paired her love of good stories with her love of writing and hasn't stopped since. She lives with her husband and children on an island in the state of Washington.

www.RachelFordham.com



[RACHELFORDHAMFANS](#)



[RACHEL FORDHAM](#)



Foster Care Resources

Freddie, in *A Life Once Dreamed*, was left with no family. In today's society he would have become a foster child. Just like Freddie needed his community to step up and support him, there are children in every community across the US and the world who need advocates to speak up, volunteer, and cheer them on.

Not sure what you can do for foster kids and families in your area? Here are some ideas:

1. **Become a foster parent.** Not everyone can do this, but it's worth thinking about.
2. **Call your local office and ask if they have any needs.** Your book group could work together to support your local foster youth. Children coming into care often come with nothing; clothing and diapers are often donated so these kids at least have their basic needs met for the first few days in a new home.
3. **Volunteer to babysit for a foster family or at the local office.** Many states have programs where community members who aren't able to foster full time can sit with kids who have just come into care. One example is Washington State's Office Mom and Dads.
4. **Take a meal to a foster family.**
5. **Offer to help with tutoring or driving kids to appointments.**
6. **Listen to foster parents and give support** as they go through this tough, important work.
7. **Buy products and gifts that support local foster care causes.**
8. **Read books that help you understand** the experiences of the vulnerable individuals in your area, so you can better be a voice for them.
9. **Pay attention to laws that affect vulnerable children** so you can use your voice to help make important changes happen.
10. **Pray for foster families, bio families, and foster children.**

Find additional resources on foster care at these websites:

[ADOPTUSKIDS](#)

[TOGETHER WE RISE](#)

[THE FORGOTTEN INITIATIVE](#)

[NATIONAL FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION](#)

[AMERICA'S KIDS BELONG](#)

About Revell

Providing books that inspire and equip readers to find hope and help for everyday life.

We hope you've enjoyed this digital book club guide! Find us on social media or visit our website for more book club resources and Christian fiction titles to enjoy. Happy reading!

www.RevellBooks.com



@revellbooks