

Reading Group Guide for
Shadows of the Past
by Patricia Bradley

1. Taylor grew up without her father's presence, and she believes this contributed to her inability to form healthy relationships. She perceives his absence as rejection, and even with a doctorate in psychology, she believes she is a loser. Do you think this is a common problem in families where a parent is absent?

2. After her father left, Taylor's mom never talked about what happened, shrouding the subject in secrecy. Do you believe her mother's silence contributes to Taylor's problems? Have you experienced loss or issues in your family that everyone knew about, but no one talked about? How did you deal with it?

3. The story opens with Nick searching for his alcoholic brother, wondering if he'd been right to practice "tough love" with Scott. Then, when Scott ends up in the hospital, Nick takes him in. Do you think Nick took the right approach or should he have applied tough love again? Do you think one approach fits all with family members and addiction?

4. Taylor tells Nick she'd found a bias in educational circles against a Southern accent. Nick responds by telling her she missed a good chance to prove them wrong. Do you agree with Nick? Or do you think Taylor was right to change a basic part of her Southern roots? Have you ever changed something about yourself to fit in?

5. In the first chapter, Sheriff Dale Atkins tells Taylor that God will bring the right man into her life, then later her mother and a friend echo those words. Taylor doubts that God is interested in her love life. Do you think God is interested in every detail of our lives? Why or Why not?

6. Taylor is upset when she discovers her mom wants to sell the family home—until she learns the house is a constant reminder of what her mother has lost. Can you think of a time when you were so caught up in your own hurts that you failed to consider how another person might be affected?

7. Nick doesn't tell Taylor that the poem she found in her pocket was originally written by him. He tries to once, but the helicopter drowns out his words, and the opportunity passes. His conscience won't let him off the hook, and he tries again, only to be thwarted by the attack on the sheriff and Taylor. After that he believes the information will falsely implicate his brother. How would you handle such a situation?
8. One thing that draws Taylor to Nick is his loyalty to his brother, even though she thinks it is misplaced. Have you ever had someone stick by you even when no one else did? Have you ever believed in someone enough to go against others' opinions of that person?
9. Nick asks Taylor to choose between him and working with the police because he is afraid she will be harmed. Do you think he should have asked her to choose? Why or why not?
10. Taylor doesn't tell her family about being attacked because she doesn't want them to worry. She believes she is protecting them. Have you ever withheld information to keep someone from worrying? Did secrecy make things worse when the truth came out?
11. When her father left, Taylor prayed and asked God to bring her father home. When he doesn't return, she feels that God didn't answer her prayer and that God doesn't care about her. Have you ever asked God for something and received silence? If so, how did you handle it? Did you feel God had abandoned you?
12. Taylor not only has problems trusting anyone besides herself, but she also has a fear of the dark. In the tunnels, she is paralyzed by this fear, and her mother reminds her that God is the Light of the World and that whoever follows him will not be in the dark. Taylor is at the end of her rope and realizes she either has to trust that God will help her or remain stuck in her fear. Have you ever been at the end of your rope? What did you do?