

## BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

### *A Fairy Tale* by Jonas T. Bengtsson, translated by Charlotte Barslund

1. “I’ve just turned six when Olof Palme is shot” (p. 3). How important is it for the reader to understand the historical context of this remark?
2. There are both benefits and challenges in telling a story using a child narrator. One of the challenges is that the child’s perspective may be limited by age and inexperience. Do you find the young boy to be a reliable narrator? Why or why not?
3. In this passage, the father and son exchange lines from the Baudelaire poem “The Stranger:”

“What, then, extraordinary stranger, do you love?”

“I love the clouds — the clouds that pass — yonder — the marvelous clouds” (p. 30).

Why is this poem significant to the father? How does it resonate throughout the book?

4. Who is the White Queen? What curse will be lifted if she is stabbed?
5. After the incident with the boss, the father stops going to the news kiosk and buying newspapers. Why does he stop, and what is later ironic about the father foregoing newspapers?
6. Throughout *A Fairy Tale*, there are recurring images of locks, doors, and mysterious spaces — examples include the antique furniture place and the old lady’s house where the father and son temporarily stay and work. Provide further examples. How do they relate to the father’s last words, “If there are no other ways out, that door is always there” (p. 383)?
7. Compare Sara’s importance to the father to Petra’s importance to the son later in the novel. Are the times spent with these characters periods of comparative tranquility and stability, or are they just a calm before the next storm?
8. Members of the boy’s extended family try to reconnect and establish relationships with him in different ways over the course of the story. Think of some examples of these attempts. Were they successful? Why or why not?

9. "I draw my dad as a zebra sipping coffee from a tiny china cup. I draw Sara as a lioness. I'm about to draw her mane when I remember that lionesses don't have manes" (p. 178). Shortly after this reference to drawing, the boy becomes very engrossed in drawing the actors his father is working with, first comparing them to stuffed animals, and then focusing on their movements. Trace the importance of drawing and painting throughout the life of the boy.
10. "I've seen you doodling at work" (p. 310). Co-worker Kasper helps the protagonist (now calling himself Mehmet Faruk) to start painting again. Why is Kasper so supportive?
11. What was the grandfather asking forgiveness for just before he died?
12. Toward the end of the book, the father observes, "People can adapt to almost anything . . . but that's not the same as saying they have to" (p. 377). How does this apply to his son?
13. Is the son's act at the end of the book surprising or inevitable? Is it an act of love or is it driven by something else?