



Readers Discussion Guide
To Whisper Her Name
a Belle Meade Plantation novel
by Tamera Alexander

Spoiler Alert! As would be expected in a discussion guide, crucial plot points and events are revealed in the following questions. So if you haven't finished reading *To Whisper Her Name* and don't wish to have these "surprises" spoiled, you might want to skip reading the group guide until you have.

Check out the Belle Meade Plantation novels page on Tamera's website for pictures of the mansion and real people who lived at Belle Meade, as well as videos Tamera filmed on location at the plantation in Nashville:

<http://www.tameraalexander.com>

Dear friends,

I'm thrilled you've chosen *To Whisper her Name* as your reading group selection, and I hope you enjoyed Ridley and Olivia's story, and the lovely setting of the [Belle Meade Plantation](#). Christ drew me closer to Him as I wrote this story, and my prayer is that somewhere along the way as you read, you took a step closer to Him too.

I'd love to join your group discussion!

If you're interested in having me join your group via a Virtual Book Club Meeting, visit my website (www.TameraAlexander.com) and click on BONUS FEATURES to learn more about Virtual Book Club Meetings. Also, if you're ever in Nashville, please make a point to see the Belmont Mansion. See www.belmontmansion.com for details, and be sure to ask them about the special "novel tour" for readers.

Incidentally, if you enjoyed *To Whisper Her Name*, a Belle Meade Plantation novel (the first of three in the series), I think you'll also enjoy *A Lasting Impression*, a Belmont Mansion novel (also the first of three in a series). I've written these two three-book Southern series to be read together, because the families in the mansions knew one another. So seeing that their lives connected in the 1800s, it only makes sense that they should connect again...on the page of these novels.

Continued blessings—and thanks for reading!

Tamera

-
1. The novel begins in Ridley Cooper's POV (point of view). Describe Ridley's character from the setting in the prologue, taking into account his conversation with Robert Green and Ridley's actions toward him. What characteristics (both positive and negative) would you assign to Ridley?
 2. We first meet Olivia Aberdeen as she's stepping into the carriage that will take her to Belle Meade Plantation. What happens to her as she boards the carriage? What was your first impression of her as you learned bits and pieces about her past through chapters 1-6? What were your impressions about her marriage? And in your opinion, what's the most important thing to Olivia at this juncture in the story?
 3. At the end of Ch 7, General William Giles Harding tells Olivia about Elizabeth's illness. Then in Ch 9, we learn that he is withholding this information from Elizabeth. Do you agree with his reasoning? Why or why not? Would *you* want to know your prognosis?
 4. At the end of Ch 14, Ridley recalls something he heard from a passing preacher, "*God never leans over the balcony of heaven and gasps.*" In reality, Tamera first heard Chuck Swindoll use this saying years ago, and it stuck with her ever since. What do you think about that statement? Do you believe God knows everything about the future, including your own? If you do, how do you think his knowing "all" affects how you still have the right to make choices?
 5. At the first of Ch 16, Ridley is confronting Olivia about "appearances" and about how she responds in the way she thinks a lady should, instead of honestly speaking her mind. Why do you think Olivia is the way she is, in this regard? What factors contributed to that? And do you think there's a danger in being "ultra polite" versus speaking the truth in love?
 6. In Ch 17, Ridley and Uncle Bob are talking on the front porch of the Old Harding cabin, and Ridley has a passing thought about how they're conversing like "some old married couple." Have you ever had a relationship like this with someone (maybe even someone you've just met), where you feel very comfortable talking with them? What constitutes a relationship like this, in your opinion?
 7. In Ch 25, in a conversation between Ridley and Uncle Bob (pg 213-214), the two men discuss "doing what you were born to do." What did you think about their exchange? Do you believe there are certain gifts you're given—certain talents you were born with—that you have a responsibility to develop and use? Explain why or why not. If you answered affirmatively,

- what do you believe is the ultimate purpose behind those gifts and talents? Are they only for “you?” Or do they have a greater purpose (see Romans 8:29).
8. In Ch 28, Ridley and Olivia are taking a walk and are discussing God’s divine plan and how involved he is in our lives. What’s your belief about God’s involvement in your life? Do you agree or disagree with Ridley’s conclusion?
 9. At the end of Ch 34, Olivia thinks about “perfect families.” What are her conclusions? Can you relate to them?
 10. In Ch 36, page 312, read the paragraph beginning with, ‘ “Mr. Pagette.” General Harding rose from behind his desk. “Your persistence forces me to speak more plainly on this issue than I would wish...”’ What follows in General Harding’s dialogue in that paragraph was taken directly from the pages of history, from a speech Harding made. Discuss the views on—and acceptance of—slavery in the 1800s that was so prevalent in the South. Are you aware that there are more people enslaved today than in all of the transatlantic slave trade of the 18th and 19th centuries? What are ways we can help those who are enslaved? And is there something your group could do as a whole? (Tamera recommends the book [Not For Sale](#) by David Batstone for more information on slavery in our modern culture.)
 11. In Ch 37 (pg 324-325), in a conversation with Ridley, Olivia alludes to have learning something from looking at Elizabeth’s life. What is it that she’s learned? Has “what she learned” ever helped you? Give examples.
 12. In Ch 40 (bottom of pg 351), Ridley is admitting his past to General Harding. He has the following thought even as he feels his Colorado Territory dream slipping away, “...choosing to do the right thing didn’t always get a person what they deserved or even what was fair. The war had taught him that well enough.” What’s a time in your life when you’ve done the right thing and then “gotten punished for it?”
 13. Near the end of Ch 44, Olivia is walking through the foyer, passing the Harding family portraits, and she thinks again about Rachel Norris. Who was Rachel Norris? (And did you know that there really was a Rachel Norris and that she is believed to have been the relative to John Harding that this story portrays)? Olivia thinks about “a cloud of witnesses” in this passage. Read Hebrews 12:1 and discuss this “cloud of witnesses.” Do you believe *others* are watching your earthly race? And even more, are cheering you on?
 14. At the very end of Ch 45, Olivia asks Uncle Bob to dance. How does he respond? And do you agree with what he says about choices coming at a price? What hard choices are you currently facing (or have you recently faced) in your life? What do you think about Uncle Bob’s advice to Olivia? How does she carry through (leading to the end of the story) regarding what

she learned from him?

15. In Ch 55 (top of pg 443), beginning with the paragraph, ‘*Elizabeth smiled, and the brightness in her eyes all but masked the shadows beneath...*’ Elizabeth shares with Olivia the importance of a wife believing in her husband’s dreams. Read that paragraph and discuss whether you agree with her opinion. How do you think the lasting legacy of Belle Meade Plantation would have been affected had Elizabeth not believed in her husband’s dream?
16. Was the ending of the novel “satisfying” to you? What did you like best about that final scene with Olivia and Ridley? Were you hoping Ridley would decide to stay at Belle Meade? Or were you glad he held tight to his dream to go west?
17. In the epilogue, we catch a glimpse of someone from a past novel of Tamera’s. Did you recognize the character? What novel is she from? And do you know that in each of Tamera’s novels there is a character from a previous series featured? Sometimes the character isn’t even named (may be a brief, cameo appearance). But if you’ve read all of Tamera’s books, you’re sure to recognize them!
18. Who is your favorite character in the novel? Why are they your favorite?
19. Do you have a favorite scene? What is it about that scene you liked?

Would you be willing to send Tamera a picture of your book club? She’d love to feature it on her [Facebook Page](#). Send the picture to TameraAlexander@ymail.com with your name(s), your group’s name, and the city where you’re located. Be sure to hold up your books!

Tamera’s website:	www.tameraalexander.com
Facebook:	http://www.facebook.com/tamera.alexander
Twitter:	http://twitter.com/tameraalexander
Pinterest:	http://pinterest.com/tameraauthor
Tamera’s group blog:	http://inspiredbylifeandfiction.com
Contact Tamera:	tameraalexander@ymail.com

Recipe Ideas for Group Gatherings—

Belle Meade Plantation's Carrot Cake

a specialty of Susanna Carter's in *To Whisper Her Name*

Ingredients for cake:

2 cups all-purpose flour

2 cups sugar

2 teaspoons baking soda

2 ¼ teaspoons ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon salt

4 eggs

1 ½ cups vegetable oil

3 cups grated carrots

1 ½ cups chopped pecans (optional)

In a large bowl, combine flour, sugar, baking soda, cinnamon, and salt. Add eggs and oil. Mix with a mixer (or by hand, in Susanna's case) until well blended. Fold in carrots and pecans. Pour into 3 (9-inch) round pans that have been greased, floured, and lined with parchment paper. Bake at 350 degrees for approximately 40 minutes. Remove from oven and cool for 5 minutes. Remove from pans, place on cooling rack and cool completely before frosting.

Ingredients for frosting:

2 (8-ounce) packages cream cheese, room temp

1 stick butter, room temp

1 (16-ounce) bag powdered sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

¾ cup well chopped pecans

Combine all ingredients *except* nuts in a medium bowl and beat until light and fluffy. Fold in the nuts. Starting with the first cake layer, spread frosting on top, then add the second layer. Spread frosting on top, then do the same with the third layer. Spread remaining frosting over the entire 3-tiered cake. Refrigerator leftovers (if there *are* any).

OPTION: You can also make the cake in a 13x9 dish, cut generous portions, and serve warm with the cream cheese frosting "slathered" over. I love it both warm and cold. And don't you just love the word "slathered?" Especially when it comes to cream cheese frosting. *Mmmmm...*

Belle Meade Plantation Beaten Biscuits (the precursor to the "rising" biscuit baked with baking powder)

3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour (with 1/2 cup held back)
1/2 tsp sugar
1/2 tsp salt
3 T cold butter
3 T cold lard or vegetable shortening
1/2 cup cold milk
1/2 cup cold water (that was chilled with ice)

Mix 3 cups of flour, sugar, and salt together in a bowl. Add butter and lard, cutting them in with a pastry cutter or fork until mixture resembles coarse corn meal. Add milk and "iced" water, then lightly blend until moistened. Knead 15 minutes, then beat the dough for 15 minutes with a rolling pin until the dough begins to "blister and pop." (You'll hear the sound.) Cut with small floured biscuit cutter, then prick tops of biscuits three times with a fork.

Place on ungreased baking sheet and bake for 25 minutes at 325 degrees. Biscuits will be done when they're a light golden brown. They will *not* rise up tall and pretty. These are biscuits without leaven. Eat them right from the oven or store at room temp. Makes about 35-40 small biscuits that will keep for up to three weeks stored in an airtight container or plastic bag. These are especially good served with thin sliced Southern country ham. Delicious!

These really are fun to make. Don't let the beating involved put you off. Surely there's some kind of frustration you need to work out of your system. This little biscuit will do just the trick!

View the step-by-step tutorial here:

<http://tameraalexander.blogspot.com/2012/10/beaten-biscuits-southern-tradition.html>

One of Nashville's TV Morning Shows invited me to come on and demonstrate how to make Beaten Biscuits. It was such fun. Watch here:

<http://tameraalexander.blogspot.com/2012/11/channel-5-talk-of-town-show-and-beaten.html>

And of course, don't forget the *delicious* Blackberry Cobbler recipe from Christy Jordan of Southern Plate that's included in the back of the novel.

**Recipes from all of Tamera's novels are available
at www.TameraAlexander.com**

Tamera's Complete Book List--

Fountain Creek Chronicles series

Rekindled, Fountain Creek Chronicles, Book 1 (ISBN 0-7642-0108-5)

Revealed, Fountain Creek Chronicles, Book 2 (ISBN 0-7642-0109-3)

Remembered, Fountain Creek Chronicles, Book 3 (ISBN 0-7642-0110-7)

Timber Ridge Reflections series

From a Distance, Timber Ridge Reflections, Book 1 (ISBN 978-0-7642-0389-3)

Beyond This Moment, Timber Ridge Reflections, Book 2 (ISBN 978-0-7642-0390-9)

Within My Heart, Timber Ridge Reflections, Book 3 (ISBN 0-7642-0391-6)

Stand-alone novel (not part of a series)

The Inheritance, Women of Faith Fiction (ISBN 978-1-59554-632-6)

Belmont Mansion novels (3 book stand-alone novels)*

A Lasting Impression, a Belmont Mansion novel, Book 1 (ISBN 978-0764206221)

A Beauty So Rare, a Belmont Mansion novel, Book 2 (ISBN 978-0764206238)

A Note Yet Unsung, a Belmont Mansion novel, Book 3 (February 2017) (ISBN 978-0764206245)

Belle Meade Plantation novels (3 book standalone novels)*

To Whisper Her Name, a Belle Meade Plantation novel 1 (ISBN 978-0310291060)

To Win Her Favor, a Belle Meade Plantation novel 2 (ISBN 978-0310291077)

To Wager Her Heart, a Belle Meade Plantation novel 3 (Fall 2017)

*To Mend a Dream***, a Belle Meade Plantation novella (ISBN B00PWOGZVM)

* I've written these two three-book Southern series (**the Belmont Mansion novels and the Belle Meade Plantation novels**) to be read individually OR together (your choice!), because the families in the mansions knew one another. So seeing that their lives connected in the 1800s, it only makes sense that they should connect *again* on the page of these novels.

**"To Mend a Dream" is available by itself as an ebook, or in print form in the Southern novella collection entitled *Among the Fair Magnolias* (ISBN 978-1401690731).