



DISCUSSION GUIDE

A Distant Music- The Mountain Song Legacy- Book 1

by B.J. Hoff

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1. Maggie MacAuley is convinced that “the music stopped in Skingle Creek” the day their beloved teacher’s silver flute was stolen. Is she right in her assumption? Or is she equating the failing health of Jonathan Stuart with the overall oppression that seems to have settled over her hometown?
2. What are some of the qualities that have endeared the schoolteacher, Jonathan Stuart, to his students and made him such an important figure in their lives?
3. Jonathan Stuart has a genuine fondness for and an interest in all his students, but at the beginning of the story, he shows an intense concern for two in particular. Which students are these, and why do they evoke such a deep concern on Jonathan’s part?
4. The friendship between Maggie MacAuley and Summer Rankin strikes Jonathan as unusual. What are some of the contrasts between these two young girls that cause their teacher to marvel at their closeness? Did you have a “best friend” in your childhood who was very unlike you? What about now? Are there significant differences between you and your closest friend? If so, do the differences create friction in your relationship, or do they actually draw you closer to each other?
5. What are some of the ways in which the coal company controls the lives of Skingle Creek’s residents? Were there benefits as well as disadvantages to working under the umbrella of a company that virtually owned the town?
6. What one movement that had not yet become a vital force in areas such as Skingle Creek eventually spread across the coal mining locales of the country and made a vital difference in the quality of life for miners and their families?
7. At times Maggie senses that the decline in Mr. Stuart’s health is causing him to “fade away,” that he’s “like a man who was drifting away from himself, leaving only a shadow behind to keep order in the schoolroom.” Have you ever known a time when it seemed as

though your faith was going through the same kind of crisis, when only a “shadow” of your former closeness with God existed, leaving you feeling spiritually distant and “fading?” It isn’t always possible to restore our health or that of a loved one to its former vitality, but what of our faith walk? What can we do to keep it from “fading” in the first place, or how do we find restoration if we have “drifted?”

8. Does Maggie’s plan to restore their teacher’s health by replacing the stolen flute strike you as overly simplistic, or as a classic example of the faith of a child? Did you find yourself assuming they would never be able to carry off such a “far-fetched” idea, or were you more interested in how they might manage it?

9. Matthew MacAuley, Maggie’s father, almost seems to live with a dual nature. What do you see as his admirable qualities and his not-so-admirable traits? How does this unpredictability affect his children and his wife?

10. How does the abuse that Matthew and his mother endured in his childhood affect the way he manages his anger today? Does he manage it? If you--or someone close to you--have ever been the victim of abuse, what have you learned about dealing with any lingering emotional issues in your life today?

11. What do you think the title of the book, *A Distant Music*, refers to? If you were Maggie MacAuley and read this book as an adult, what would the title mean to you?

12. Do you think of Judson Tallman, Kenny’s father, as a “bad” man; a troubled man; a strong man; or a weak man? His background, other than his wife’s desertion, is purposely left unexplained (remember that this is only the first book of the series). Without knowing the actual circumstances of his life, what do you think might account for the man’s coldness, his apparent lack of paternal feeling toward his son?

13. How did the years of Jonathan Stuart’s teaching change Maggie’s earlier image of God? How did she once view her Creator? Later, how does she think of Him? Are your thoughts of God significantly different than they were when you were younger? How have those early images changed?

14. The stumbling block in her faith that Maggie eventually encounters hasn’t so much to do with the troubling things that are happening to her, but with what other events? When she questions God, it’s the blunt, direct plea from an overwhelmed but childish heart seeking to understand what He’s doing. Does that disturb you? Have you ever asked God “why?”

15. Maggie and her friend, Kenny Tallman, exhibit some specific instances of adult

behavior we might find unexpected and surprising. For example, even when Maggie is at her most troubled and distressed about her friend, Summer, she manages to go on, to “take charge” of what needs to be done and see that it’s accomplished as it should be. And when Kenny is badly frightened by the two school bullies, he still comes to Maggie’s defense and challenges her attackers, displaying a streak of courage that may well herald the type of man he’s likely to become. Have you ever witnessed similar behavior in children—your own or others? Do you believe that most children possess certain markers of the character that will be theirs when they’re grown?

16. An event took place in Skingle Creek that some might call a miracle. Do you believe in miracles, or are you more inclined to think they ended with the close of the apostolic age?

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