

HISTORY OF THE PLEASURE SEEKER **by Richard Mason**

Discussion Questions

1. Who is the “pleasure seeker” of the title? Who else might that describe?
2. How does Maarten’s repudiation of pleasure define his character?
3. What is the metaphor of the tightrope?
4. How do the characters’ different religious beliefs shape the events of the story?
5. “Like his father, Egbert was deeply private about his interior afflictions” (page 40). Are there other ways in which father and son are alike? How are they different?
6. Throughout the novel, Mason calls our attention to shared character traits. What do Egbert and Piet share? Piet and Maarten?
7. What role does guilt play in Piet’s actions?
8. The voices Egbert hears are guided by color: “toying with primary colors was an offense that merited prolonged punishment” (page 100). Why do you think color affects Egbert this way? How does Mason use color with other characters?
9. What is the significance of the horseback-riding scene on pages 109–14? Why does it prompt Piet to carry Egbert outside?
10. How does having money—or not having it—affect the characters’ behavior? What about the other members of the household staff? In the terms of this novel, what is the difference between money and class?
11. Why is Piet willing to risk everything to see Jacobina? Is he in love with her?
12. When Louisa seeks her father’s help in opening a shop, he tells her: “You must marry a man with talent and ambition, whose interests you may serve as your mother has served mine. That is the way in which a woman may succeed” (page 153). Is this true for all the women in the novel? How are things changing with the times?

13. What finally gives Egbert the strength to go outside on his own? What role does music play in the decision (pages 154–5)?
14. When Piet turns down Louisa's proposal, what is the result? How does it influence the novel's denouement?
15. Why doesn't the novel end when Piet leaves the Vermeulen-Sickerts household? How might you have imagined Piet's next steps, if Mason hadn't supplied them?
16. How does Piet's interlude with his father change your understanding of his character? How did his late mother shape his behavior?
17. What role does Didier play in the novel's ending? What impact might a different response from him have had on Piet's future?
18. What has changed within Piet, that he resolves to tell the truth to Stacey?