
Sugar and Salt

by Susan Wiggs



About the Book

The *New York Times* bestselling author of *THE LOST AND FOUND BOOKSHOP* returns to Perdita Street with a can't-miss tale of friendship, hardship, redemption and love between a San Francisco baker and a barbecue master from Texas.

Jerome "Sugar" Barnes learned the art of baking in his grandma's bakery, also called Sugar, on historic Perdita Street in San Francisco. He supplies baked goods to the Lost and Found Bookshop across the street.

When the restaurant that shares his commercial kitchen loses its longtime tenant, a newcomer moves in: Margot Salton, a barbecue master from Texas.

Margot isn't exactly on the run, but she needs a fresh start. She's taken care of herself her whole life, pulling herself up by her fingernails to recover from trauma, and her dream has been to open a restaurant somewhere far, far from Texas. The shared kitchen with Jerome's Sugar bakery is the perfect setup: a state-of-the-art kitchen and a vibrant neighborhood popular with tourists and locals.

Margot instantly takes to Jerome's grandmother, the lively, opinionated Ida. The older woman proves to be a good mentor, and Margot is drawn to Jerome. Despite their different backgrounds, their attraction is powerful --- even though Jerome worries that Margot will simply move on from him once she's found some peace and stability. But just as she starts to relax into a happy new future, Margot's past in Texas comes back to haunt her.

Discussion Guide

1. At the start of the novel, Margot thinks, "She tried to feel her own worth. Sometimes the self-talk and self-care worked. A little bit. Other times, the effort simply drew a wall of loneliness around her." Do you think Margot's

traumatic history is responsible for this feeling? Is it something that many women experience in our society?

2. Ida tells Margot early on that "my heart's stuck in the past." Why did her youthful romance with Frank have such staying power? Was it unfair for her to marry Douglas Sugar? What would you have done in her situation?

3. Why are Jerome and Margot attracted to each other despite being from very different backgrounds? What personality traits do they share? How do their differences complement each other?

4. Margie's experiences in the criminal justice system were inspired by a number of real-life stories, including that of an Alabama woman named Brittany Smith, who was incarcerated and faced life in prison after murdering the man who violently raped her, leaving her terribly injured. Were you surprised by the fact that Margie wound up in jail? What do you think should have happened to her after she shot Jimmy?

5. In prison, Margie is desperate to terminate the pregnancy that resulted from being brutally raped. Despite the fact that abortion was legal at the time the scene takes place, she's unable to have one while in jail, and her own lawyer refuses to help her due to his anti-abortion views. What did you make of her dilemma? Should her experience have been different? How? And how would the situation have played out differently today?

6. Why did Margie choose Lindsey and Sanjay as her baby's adoptive parents? How did that decision help change the course of her life?

7. Running from one's past is a recurring theme in *SUGAR AND SALT*. We see it with Margot, running from her experiences in Texas, and Frank, living under an assumed name after dodging the draft. Do you think that they have successfully reckoned with their earlier lives by the end of the book? What does that look like for each of them?

8. Was Margot right to speak to Buckley Hunt for the *Texas Monthly* article? What were the potential risks and rewards of telling her story publicly? Would you have done it?

9. How does the Hunt family use their money and power to manipulate every aspect of Margot's life? How do you think they would have justified their actions, even though their son was obviously a rapist and a criminal?

10. Margot doesn't take offense when Jerome's ex, Florence, says she doesn't want her sons around a woman who had committed murder, saying "...you're a good mom, I imagine you'd do anything to protect your kids and I respect that." What did you make of that response? Were Florence's concerns valid?

11. At the end of the book, Margot tells Queen and Cubby that "I guess I'm about as happy as I deserve to be." What do you think she means? Do you think Margot finds the happy ending she deserves? What do you think the future holds for her, and Jerome?

12. On the front cover of *SUGAR AND SALT*, Susan Wiggs chose the line "Everyone has a past. It's who you are now that matters." Do you agree? Why do you think the author picked that phrase for the cover?

Author Bio

Susan Wiggs' life is all about family, friends, and fiction. She's been featured in the national media, including NPR, PRI and *USA Today*, has given programs for the US Embassies in Buenos Aires and Montevideo, and is a popular speaker locally, nationally, internationally and on the high seas.

From the very start, Susan's writings have illuminated the everyday dramas of ordinary people facing extraordinary circumstances. Her books celebrate the power of love, the timeless bonds of family and the fascinating nuances of human nature. Today, she is an international bestselling, award-winning author, with millions of copies of her books in print in numerous countries and languages. According to *Publishers Weekly*, Wiggs writes with "refreshingly honest emotion," and the *Salem Statesman Journal* adds that she is "one of our best observers of stories of the heart [who] knows how to capture emotion on virtually every page of every book." *Booklist* characterizes her books as "real and true and unforgettable."

Her novels have appeared in the #1 spot on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and have captured readers' hearts around the globe with translations into more than 20 languages and 30 countries. Susan's recent novel, *THE APPLE ORCHARD*, was made into a Hallmark movie called *The Secrets of Bella Vista*, and *The Lakeshore Chronicles* has been optioned for adaptation into a series.

Susan is a former teacher, a Harvard graduate, an avid hiker, an amateur photographer, a good skier and terrible golfer, yet her favorite form of exercise is curling up with a good book. She lives on an island in Puget Sound, where she is working on her new novel, *WAYWARD GIRLS*, which will be in bookstores in the spring of 2025.

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