



LOREENA'S GIFT

COLLEEN M. STORY

**READING GROUP
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

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Reading Group Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the title of the book. How is the special ability that Loreena has a “gift?” How is it more of a curse? How does the ability shape her personality, and her outlook on life? How might she have been a different person had she not had this ability? Are there other ways that she gives and receives gifts in the story?
2. Loreena is raised by her uncle, who is a reverend in a Christian church, but she thinks he’s wrong about the afterlife. Her uncle, in turn, believes that Loreena’s experiences don’t reflect what actually awaits people in Heaven, but are only images portrayed by human consciousness. Some neuroscientists who have conducted studies on the brain believe the same—that “near-death” experiences are merely evidence of “normal brain function gone awry.”* What do you think? Is either side “right?” What do you think Loreena believes by the end of the story? On page 345, she says, “Even with everything I’ve seen, I don’t know anymore than anyone does. Not really. I don’t know what lies beyond, if Ben is still gardening, or Russell still rowing.” What do you think she means by that? Has she come closer to her uncle’s point of view, or he to hers?
3. Loreena’s mother is absent from the book, but yet very much present in Loreena’s and Saul’s hearts and minds. What role does she play in the story? How does her spirit influence Loreena’s actions? How do you think her memory of her mother plays into her decision to take Frank’s life? On page 265-266, she remembers when her mother showed her how to kill the aphids on the rose, Salvador. “Imagine if you had bugs eating your skin,” her mother says. “Sometimes we have to be aggressive when taking care of things.” How does Loreena interpret her mother’s words in her current situation? Do you think she makes the right decision? Are there times in life when we must be aggressive?
4. What is the significance of the angel statue in front of Loreena’s uncle’s home? Why do you think Loreena became attached to this angel? How have her feelings toward it changed by the time the story comes to a close?
5. Uncle Don seems to believe he has all the answers at the beginning of the story. What do you think of his “solution” to Loreena’s gift (or curse)? Do you think he had the right idea in helping the terminally ill? How do you think his decision affected Loreena and her subsequent choices? How does he change by the end of the book?
6. What does the Idaho setting bring to this novel? How might it have been different if it had been set in a different state or part of the country?
7. Each of the characters that die in the book experiences a unique version of the afterlife, and each version is a reflection of the character’s belief. Talk about each version and what you think it says about the character who experienced it. Do you think that our

- personalities and our beliefs shape our experience of this life? What about our thoughts about the next? How much do our beliefs shape the decisions we make and the trajectories our lives take? How might your life change if your beliefs changed? Imagine thinking something totally different about the afterlife than you currently do. How might you act differently with this new belief? What might you do differently in your life today?
8. In many stories of good and evil, the two sides are evenly defined. That is the case in *Loreena's Gift* when she, an innocent girl, is set against Frank and his biker gang. But Saul represents the gray area between the two. He's gotten involved in the gang, but more out of misguidance and bad judgment than because he is bad or evil. Discuss his character. Where did he go wrong? Why do you think he made the choices he did? What does his longing for his childhood home say about his development and where he is emotionally?
 9. Describe how the loss of their mother affects Loreena and Saul differently. It was a key turning point in both their lives, but in some ways they went opposite directions from each other. Talk about how Loreena keeps her mother's memory alive, compared to how Saul holds it close to his chest. Why do you think Saul wants to go to his old home they shared with their mother, while Loreena feels more at home with her uncle? Is this just a matter of an age difference, or is there something else that separates their desires?
 10. Talk about the character of Mrs. Markos. She appears initially to be just a hard old woman, perhaps even a victim of circumstance, but over time, Loreena learns of her role in the biker gang's doings. By the end of the book, she has developed an intense dislike for her. On page 227, she says, "The woman made her sick, always bowing to Frank's demands." Describe what it means for Loreena to feel like that in that particular moment. What does it say about Loreena's mindset at that point, and how she's changed from the beginning of the book?
 11. Frank is a powerful character in the story. His confidence seems to be unshakeable, even after the FBI takes down his gang and forces him into hiding. How does this quality lead to his eventual downfall? What does it say about him that even in the afterlife, as a grown man, he is still compelled to stab his younger brother to death? Do you think this action was what caused Frank to eventually become a criminal, or do you think he would have become one even if he hadn't had a younger brother to irritate him? How do you think character is related to fate?
 12. Though Crystal is the one who delivers Loreena to Frank, it is Dominic who is the catalyst in Loreena's life. It is because of his presence that she feels empowered to leave her home and her uncle, and he is the one that inspires her first thoughts of becoming a more independent woman. Describe Dominic's influence in her life. Considering the trauma that Loreena ends up having to endure, do you think it was a good or bad thing that he came along? Why do you think she becomes attached to him in such a short period of time? What does he represent for her? Do you think after its rocky start, their relationship will last?

13. The purple rose—Salvador—serves as a symbol in the story. At first, it represents both Loreena’s and Saul’s memories of their mother. Then, it becomes a clue when Loreena sees it in Russell’s afterlife. Near the end, at their childhood home in Saul’s afterlife, the rose opens just as Loreena and Saul are saying goodbye. What do you think that signifies? Why do you think Saul took the “forbidden” action of picking the rose off the plant to give to his sister? What does that say about their relationship at that moment?
14. Talk about Loreena’s disability. How does her blindness affect her self-image and self-confidence? How is it a factor in her relationship with Saul? How does her blindness hurt and help her throughout the story? Do you think a sighted person might have escaped Frank’s clutches earlier? Why or why not? How does she feel about it at the beginning of the book compared to the end? Do you see a change in her?
15. It could be said that all of the “bad” characters in the book get their “just desserts” in their afterlives. How did you feel about that? Did it seem just or unjust to you?
16. What is the significance of gender in this story? Loreena often finds herself up against very strong and powerful men, and she has had few female role models. How do you think that has affected her? Who do you think may have inspired the strength that she shows at the end of the book?
17. If the afterlife is shaped by what we believe, what do you think is waiting for *you*?

*Dean Mobbs and Caroline Watt, “There is nothing paranormal about near-death experiences: how neuroscience can explain seeing bright lights, meeting the dead, or being convinced you are one of them,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, October 2011; 15(10):447-449, [http://www.cell.com/trends/cognitive-sciences/abstract/S1364-6613\(11\)00155-0](http://www.cell.com/trends/cognitive-sciences/abstract/S1364-6613(11)00155-0).

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Website: www.colleenmstory.com

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