



The lace reader

By Brunonia Barry

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Genre & subject

Detective and mystery stories

Psychics fiction

Synopsis

A young woman descended from a long line of mind readers and fortune tellers has returned to her hometown of Salem, Massachusetts, for rest and relaxation. Any tranquillity in her life is short-lived, however, when her aunt drowns under mysterious circumstances.

Author biography

Brunonia Barry was born in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1950. She went to Green Mountain College in Vermont and to the University of New Hampshire. After years of trying to become a screen writer, she turned to novel writing. In 2006, after writing it for six years, she and Ward self-published *The Lace Reader*. Eventually the rights were sold to William Morrow for over 2 million dollars. Her second book, *The Map of True Places*, was published in 2010. She currently lives in Salem, Massachusetts.

Discussion starters

- For centuries, women have used lace as an adornment for their clothes and as a decoration for their homes. Just a small piece of lace on a sleeve could evoke a sense of luxury, beauty, and elegance. How does your family use lace today? Is it used every day or only on special occasions?
- Have any pieces of lace been passed down to you or someone else in your family? If so, what feelings do you associate with these heirloom pieces of lace?
- The author states that *The Lace Reader* is, at its core, about perception vs. reality. How does Rafferty's perception of Towner colour his judgment of what she says and does? What about Rafferty's perception of Cal and his actions?
- At the very start of *The Lace Reader*, Towner Whitney, the protagonist, tells the reader that she's a liar and that she's crazy. By the end of the book do you agree with her?
- Eva reveals that she speaks in clichés so that her words do not influence the choices made by the recipients of her lace reading sessions. Do you think that's possible? Can a cliché be so over used that it loses its original meaning?

- When May comments on the relationship between Rafferty and Towner, she states that they are too alike and predicts that "You won't just break apart. You'll send each other flying." Did you agree with that when you read it? And if so, in what ways are Towner and Rafferty alike?
- The handmade lace industry of Ipswich quickly vanished when lace-making machines were introduced. At that same moment, the economic freedom of the women making the handmade lace also evaporated. Why do you think that these women didn't update their business, buy the machines, and own a significant portion of the new lace-making industry?
- Do you think that May's revival of the craft of handmade lace with the abused women on Yellow Dog Island is purely symbolic or could it be, in some way, very practical?
- What role does religion play in the novel? Is there a difference between spirituality and religion? Between faith and blind faith?
- Towner has a special bond with the dogs of Yellow Dog Island—do you agree that people and animals can relate to each other in extraordinary ways?
- How do the excerpts from *The Lace Reader's Guide* and Towner's journal function in the novel? Does the written word carry more truth than the spoken? Did you use the clues in the Guide to help you understand the rest of the book?
- How much does family history influence who a person becomes? Do you believe that certain traits or talents are genetic and can be inherited?
- Is it possible that twins share a unique bond? How does being a twin affect Towner?
- Can geography influence personality? For instance, May lives on an island; does this say something about her?
- If you could learn to read lace and see things about your future, would you?

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