



The Lace Reader

By Brunonia Barry

First published in 2006

Genre and Subject

Detective and mystery stories

Psychics fiction

Synopsis

Look into the lace... When the eyes begin to fill with tears and the patience is long exhausted, there will appear a glimpse of something not quite seen... In this moment, an image will begin to form... in the space between what is real and what is only imagined.

Can you read your future in a piece of lace? All of the Whitney women can. But the last time Towner read, it killed her sister and nearly robbed Towner of her own sanity. Vowing never to read lace again, her resolve is tested when faced with the mysterious, unsolvable disappearance of her beloved Great Aunt Eva, Salem's original Lace Reader. Told from opposing and often unreliable perspectives, the story engages the reader's own beliefs. Should we listen to Towner, who may be losing her mind for the second time? Or should we believe John Rafferty, a no-nonsense New York detective, who ran away from the city to a simpler place only to find himself inextricably involved in a psychic tug of war with all three generations of Whitney women? Does either have the whole story? Or does the truth lie somewhere in the swirling pattern of the lace?

Author Biography

Brunonia Barry is the New York Times and international best-selling author of *THE LACE READER*, *THE MAP OF TRUE PLACES*, and *THE FIFTH PETAL*, which will be released in January 2017. Her work has been translated into more than thirty languages. She was the first American author to win the International Women's Fiction Festival's Baccante Award and was a past recipient of Ragdale Artists' Colony's Strnad Fellowship as well as the winner of New England Book Festival's award for Best Fiction, a People Magazine Pick, and Amazon's Best of the Month. Her reviews and articles on writing have appeared in *The London Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Huffington Post*. She is a regular contributor to *Writer Unboxed*. Brunonia chairs the Salem Athenaeum's Writers' Committee and serves on Grub Street's Development Committee. She is the Executive Director of the Salem Lit Fest, an annual event that brings people to Salem, MA from all over the world. She lives in Salem with her husband, Gary, and their dog, Angel.

Discussion Starters

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. What role does religion play in the novel? Is there a difference between spirituality and religion? Between faith and blind faith?
10. 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?
11. 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?
12. How much does family history influence who a person becomes? Do you believe that certain traits or talents are genetic and can be inherited?
13. Is it possible that twins share a unique bond? How does being a twin affect Towner?
14. Can geography influence personality? May lives on an island, does this say something about her?
15. If you could learn to read lace and see things about your future, would you?

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