

Reading Group Guide to *Thieves Never Steal in the Rain*

About This Book

Still grappling with her daughter's fatal accident, Joanna and her husband Elliott set out from the Rome airport in search of a villa in Umbria, for the purpose of attending Joanna's aunt and uncle's fiftieth wedding anniversary. An odd but friendly innkeeper reveals the story behind a child who Joanna believes is the reincarnation of her dead daughter. But how will this affect her already crumbling marriage, her career, and her relationship with her father? Nancy's decision to lose a kidney in order to save her husband's life jeopardizes her last chance for motherhood and to adopt a child she found abandoned on a train in France. All that Barbara possesses and identifies with including companionship with a ghost—vanishes overnight. Angie takes a drastic measure to lose weight in order to regain her confidence and self esteem, despite having finally found the love of her life. Rosemary, a renowned "agony aunt," falls apart when her husband leaves her, only to find comfort in the strangest of strangers.

Love and the supernatural drive these stories about the intertwining lives of five female cousins in a large close-knit Italian family who learn that loss—from misplacing keys to confronting death—is a constant force to be reckoned with

For Discussion

1. Is there a main character in this collection of stories? What is her function in relation to the other characters? What are the strengths? Weaknesses?
2. Do you think Joanna was a victim of momentary insanity? Does she ever really disregard the notion that Elisabetta is a reincarnation of Jill? How would her personality and character traits support her acceptance of reincarnation? Does the notion of an afterlife, reincarnation appeal more or less to you after reading these stories?
3. Who does the Hispanic woman in St. Mary's window represent? According to her, what is the real miracle of what appears on the window? Why did Joanna get her gift back? When does she realize how she regained it? Do you see any connection between what Joanna learns from the Hispanic woman in this story and what she learns from Marco in "Dressed to Die?"
4. Have any of the characters grown as individuals later in their lives? Can people grow late in life? Have any of the relationships improved? Was Ned justified in leaving Rosemary, in your opinion? What does the way he broke the news to her say about him? What does his response to her offer to get therapy say about her? Do you think Elliott is insensitive to Joanna's needs? Do you agree with how he deals with them?

5. How would you characterize this group of cousins? How do they differ from their mothers? What sustains the cousins individually? As a unit? What differentiates one from the other? Does the miracle of unconditional love play a role in their relationships with one another? With the family in general?
6. What are the similarities in the relationships between the Ficola men and their wives and the Ficola daughters and their husbands? What are the differences? Do you see benefits to any of characteristics?
7. Labozzetta creates an eerie atmosphere in "A Good Father?" In which of the other stories and how does the author create a similar atmosphere?
8. What do you think happened to Pierre's father? How do you feel about Nancy at the end? Does this change after reading "The Swap?"
9. What do you think Nancy means when she cries, "What a waste! What a fucking waste!" upon hearing about Maggie's death. Does she resent having given her kidney or is she solely mournful of the fact that Maggie's death is a waste of a good life
10. The concept of delusion versus reality is a continuous theme. Are Myra's perceptions in "Dressed to Die" all a result of dementia? Show how each of the cousins' might have cause to doubt their own mental stability in "Villa Foresta," "Pretty Face," and "Comfort Me, Stranger."
11. Are you convinced of the existence of the ghost in "The Birthing Room?" If not, how do you explain Barbara's behavior? What indications does the end of the story provide that might otherwise convince you?
12. In "Pretty Face," the reader learns that part of the story has been a dream. At what point in the story does this dream start? What form do the activities and objects in the operating room take on in Angie's dream? What role does Marco's dream play in enabling him to come to grips with his illness and in becoming closer to Joanna?
13. Discuss the place Loss has in this book? Do these characters gain anything from their losses?
14. Food and sexuality appear together frequently in these stories. Discuss their connection in "St. Mary's Window," "Pretty Face," "Deluxe Meatloaf," "The Swap," and "Villa Foresta."
15. Do you find the way relationships and death are treated in this book to be realistic, pessimistic, or optimistic? Does the collection bring you up or down? Why?