

PICADOR

# Reading Group Gold

## The Guardians

by Sarah Manguso



1. Who are the guardians referred to in the book's title? Why would an elegy be named not for the dead person but for those left behind?
2. Discuss the special traits of this book's form, such as the author's use of short sections, repeated words and phrases, and dense, distilled narratives. What makes her unique structure appropriate for the topic? In what way is Manguso's skill as a poet evident in her prose?
3. How does Manguso's experience of grief accompany her experience of courtship and marriage?
4. One of the defining traits of Manguso's grief is its frequent refusal to proceed linearly toward what could be called "recovery." How does the book represent that meandering path?
5. Grieving a suicide is different from other griefs. There is an extra mystery besides the mystery of death. How does Manguso manage this component of her grief? Does she seem to find solace in the exercise?
6. How does Manguso's depiction of her grief differ from other memoirs on this topic?
7. At the end of the book, Manguso tells us, "It's tempting to try to claim I've learned something very important from the experience of Harris's death." In the past, have you learned anything from the experience of grief? Was it what you expected to learn?
8. What are your opinions of the chemical treatment of psychiatric conditions? Did your opinions change as a result of reading this book?
9. How do the other suicides and other deaths mentioned or depicted in the book provide context for Harris's death?
10. What's the function of the quoted material in the book—letters, case studies, lines of poetry?
11. What's the effect of the author's decision to absolutely wallow in her grief? Does it make you like her more or less?

### About the Author

**Sarah Manguso** is the author of a memoir, *The Two Kinds of Decay*; two books of poetry, *Siste Viator* and *The Captain Lands in Paradise*; and a short-story collection, *Hard to Admit and Harder to Escape*.

Join the discussion online:

[www.facebook.com/PicadorBookClub](http://www.facebook.com/PicadorBookClub)



**PICADOR**  
**BOOK CLUB**

Contact us at [readinggroup@macmillanusa.com](mailto:readinggroup@macmillanusa.com)

Don't forget to check out our monthly newsletter! [www.readinggroupgold.com](http://www.readinggroupgold.com)