



# How To Tell Toledo from the Night Sky

Lydia Netzer

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## READING GROUP GUIDE

### About the book:

Lydia Netzer, the award-winning author of *Shine Shine Shine*, weaves a mind-bending, heart-shattering love story that asks, "Can true love exist if it's been planned from birth?"

Like a jewel shimmering in a Midwest skyline, the Toledo Institute of Astronomy is the nation's premier center of astronomical discovery and a beacon of scientific learning for astronomers far and wide. Here, dreamy cosmologist George Dermont mines the stars to prove the existence of God. Here, Irene Sparks, an unsentimental scientist, creates black holes in captivity.

George and Irene are on a collision course with love, destiny and fate. They have everything in common: both are ambitious, both passionate about science, both lonely and yearning for connection. The air seems to hum when they're together. But George and Irene's attraction was not written in the stars. In fact their mothers, friends since childhood, raised them separately to become each other's soulmates.

When that long-secret plan triggers unintended consequences, the two astronomers must discover the truth about their destinies, and unravel the mystery of what Toledo holds for them—together or, perhaps, apart.

Lydia Netzer combines a gift for character and big-hearted storytelling, with a sure hand for science and a vision of a city transformed by its unique celestial position, exploring the conflicts of fate and determinism, and asking how much of life is under our control and what is pre-ordained in the heavens.

### Discussion Questions

1. The mothers in the story plan for their children to grow up to be soulmates. Is this a natural impulse best friends have for their children? Could arranged marriages like this really work in our society?
2. How do you define love? Is it a mystical connection based solely on emotion, or is it a rational decision based on compatibility? A combination of the two? Which is more important?



3. In the book, sleep is a practice for death, and dreaming is compared to the afterlife. Do you believe this? How does dreaming affect the characters' waking behavior?
4. Characters in the novel can manipulate their dreams after they become aware that they're dreaming. Have you ever been able to control your dreams? Change the course of your dreams?
5. Irene stands on "suicide bridges" as a way to come to grips with her mortality. Is this a morbid behavior? Or is this a positive gesture, a way to come to grips with her mortality in a healthy, life-affirming way? If someone you knew had this habit, would you feel an intervention was needed?
6. What do you know about Toledo, Ohio? What makes Toledo a good setting for this story?
7. Do you think that the ending, for Bernice, is fair? What about for Sally? Does either get what she deserves?
8. How did the way Bernice and Sally raised them affect George and Irene's career choices and paths? Do mothers have any control over what their kids choose to do later in life? Do you think that's a good thing or a bad thing? What responsibility does a mother have to her children and their happiness?
9. Are you more comfortable believing in astronomy or astrology? Given that astronomers have often been wrong, do you think it's fair to say that science is more trustworthy than faith?
10. Will these two fields of science and belief always be at odds with each other, or is there a way for faith and science to coexist peacefully, in the same Toledo, in the same mind?
11. How is this novel like Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet? Consider the balcony scene with Kate Oakenshield and Belion, the sunrise sex scene in the super collider, the swordplay, and the scene at the hospital at the end. Would you say Bernice and Sally's storyline was a comedy or a tragedy? Would you say George and Irene's storyline was a comedy or a tragedy?
12. What do you think happened to George and Irene in the end? Do you think there are multiple ways to read this ending?

Want to learn more about Lydia Netzer?  
Visit her online at [www.lydianetzer.blogspot.com](http://www.lydianetzer.blogspot.com) or  
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