



FLATIRON
BOOKS
NEW YORK

All That's Left to Tell Reading Group Guide

1. The epigraph to the novel is taken from *The Arabian Nights*, the collection of tales that the Arabian queen Scheherazade tells to her husband each night, so that her life will be spared. What tone does the epigraph set? How does the relationship between Marc and Josephine compare to that between Scheherazade and the sultan?
2. Saabir and Marc have the following exchange about Josephine:
 “She is man. Man.”
 “She’s strong like a man?”
 “No. Eyes. Eyes of man.”
What do you think Saabir means by “eyes of man”? How does Josephine’s gender shape her relationship with Marc?
3. Marc speaks of “the intimacy of the storytelling” with Josephine, “which had perhaps surprised both of them, as if they somehow had become unintentional lovers.” Discuss their particular intimacy. How is it affected by the fact that Marc is blindfolded?
4. Josephine tells Marc she was radicalized by grief. Did she subvert your expectations of a terrorist? How does grief drive the events of this novel?
5. Marc reflects, on mourners, “Are they grieving over the ones they’ve lost, or for the stories their loved ones won’t get the chance to live and no one will ever tell?” What do you think? Is there a significant distinction to be made between the two?
6. Josephine says to Marc, of Claire, “Her story is yours to tell here with me. But the story of the life she’ll never live—that belongs to both of us.” Do you agree? Are there moral implications to their imagining of her future?
7. Marc and Claire’s relationship is haunted by his inappropriate kiss. As Claire remembers it, “the kiss had marked the end of her perception of him as her father first, and a man, second. At the time, he had said something about her beauty, that that was somehow a reason, and even though she hadn’t felt at all beautiful, she knew that her father, who was almost forty, was looking at her as a woman rather than his daughter, that a forty-year-old man kissing a sleeping fourteen-year-old was an amplification of the scope and depth of men in the world that she did not want to

meet. And yet, after that, was precisely when she had begun to meet it.” Was the kiss sexual? Do you think it was forgivable?

8. In addition to Marc kissing Claire, we have Joline dreaming of an imagined sister’s kiss, Joline kissing Marc, and Genevieve kissing Claire. What do you make of these echoes? How does physical intimacy contrast with storytelling in the novel?
9. Claire says to Genevieve of her life: “Alright, I was thirty-one. I was working as a waitress outside of Lincoln, Nebraska, and a man walked in. It was like a country-western song. I want my life to begin with that song. I’ll give up the final ten years of my life if you cancel out everything before that and it begins with that song.” Have you ever felt that desire? Do you think Marc hopes for something similar in his conversations with Josephine?
10. Jack tells Claire, of an ex-girlfriend, “Sometimes I think you can’t love animals like she did and love people, too. Or it’s harder that way. You love something who can’t tell you why it hurts, it’s harder to love someone who can tell you why it does.” Do you agree?
11. Discuss Genevieve’s description of memory: “So when my father died, what happens is like you have Interstate 80 stretched out over a lifetime. But all those hours, all those weeks and months where nothing was happening, where you were living your life without even thinking about him, those spaces fall away, and the memories you do have slam into each other, one after another, and they’re moving too fast to stop.” Have you experienced that? How much agency does one have in the memories one retains?
12. As the storyline between Claire and Genevieve progresses, Claire is surprised by how much of her life Genevieve seems to know without being told. Genevieve explains: “I’m just observant. I get it wrong every now and then, but most of the time I’m right. You think about most people’s lives. They aren’t that different from each other, even though people think they are.” Do you agree? Or is Genevieve’s omniscience meant to puncture the reality of the story, reminding us that she is Josephine’s creation?
13. When Claire tells Genevieve about not having seen her mother in fifteen years, she says:

“But I talked to her on the phone before I left California. She bawled her head off. But she was still proud.”

“Proud of what? Being abandoned?”

She looked over at Genevieve, and then wiped her eyes with the back of her hand.

“Yeah. I guess that’s a good way to put it.”

What does she mean, that her mother was proud of being abandoned?

14. In conversation, Marc and Josephine define all stories as being “about something that happened, and after that how things never felt the same again.” Do you agree?
15. Josephine, Genevieve, and Joline all have distinctive gray eyes. Marc, at different points, says: “Josephine. Joline’s story is your story, isn’t it?” And: “Genevieve. Josephine. Any difference?” Josephine warns him against viewing the three as interchangeable, but what do you make of their similarities?
16. Jeremy tells Claire he envies her: “maybe it’s better not to remember being hurt.” Do you agree?
17. At the novel’s end, Claire says, “*It’s like waking to a life someone dreamed for you.* Maybe, at some point, that’s partly true for everyone.” What do you think of this?
18. Daniel Lowe’s characters tell one another memories, invented stories, and dreams. What are the distinctions between these categories? What unique truths do they offer?
19. The violent sexual fantasies that Seth tells Claire offer a much darker view of storytelling: “there are these words in the air that are so close to you, like I said, well, the words become more real, like a physical presence in the room. It was like they wanted a life of their own. And that’s why I think I was hurt, that’s why I think I was attacked.” What do you make of that assertion? How does it resonate with the other examples of storytelling in the novel?
20. Claire reflects: “Can you grieve for someone you don’t remember? About whom you’ve only heard stories?” What do you think? How does that relate to the grief you might feel for fictional characters?