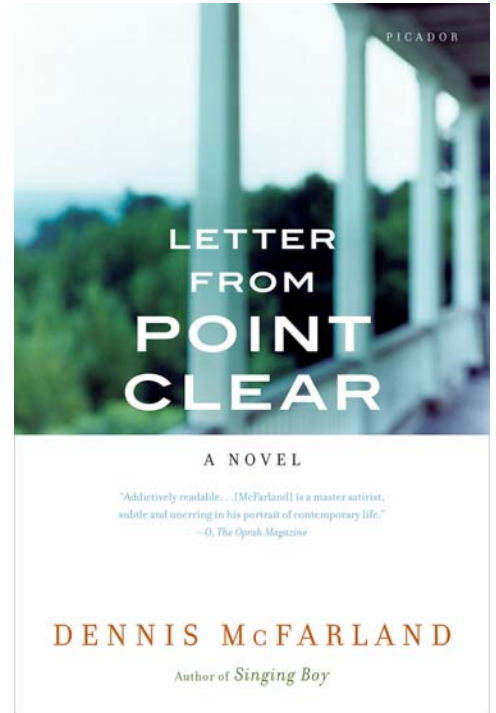


READING GROUP GUIDE

Letter from Point Clear A Novel

by Dennis McFarland

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Letter from Point Clear* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Mr. White's Confession*.

About the Book

The older Owen siblings—Ellen and Morris—long ago left behind their gracious family home in Alabama in favor of the northeast. But when they learn that their wayward baby sister Bonnie has moved back into the old place with her new husband, a local evangelical preacher, they had home to perform a rescue. Upon their arrival, they find Bonnie reformed, and pregnant. But she hasn't yet broken the news to her husband that her brother Morris is gay, and the preacher soon begins a campaign to rescue him.

With tremendous insight and empathy, Dennis McFarland “turns a comic showdown between New England skeptics and Bible Belt fundamentalists into an eloquent mediation on the many meanings of faith” (*The Washington Post*).

Praise for *Letter from Point Clear*

“Addictively readable...[McFarland] is a master satirist, subtle and unerring in his portrait of contemporary life.”—*O, The Oprah Magazine*

“A beautiful work, one of those novels that is constantly aware of the surrounding natural world....*Letter from Point Clear* likely will draw the praise [McFarland’s] five previous ones did, and deserves it.”—*Chicago Sun Times*

“An emotionally rich family drama propelled by vivid characters and lovely writing...This is not a novel for readers who like endings neatly resolved. Consider it more an unsolved emotional mystery: no crime, no gimmicks, but chock-full of lovely clues.”—*USA Today*

“Dennis McFarland’s forte is family psyche, a dynamic masterfully exploited in *Letter from Point Clear*.”—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

“Dennis McFarland again displays his knack for eloquent subtlety. *Letter from Point Clear* takes on religious, family dysfunction and gay marriage, among other issues, but not in a didactic way.”—*Los Angeles Times*

About the Author

Dennis McFarland is the bestselling author of *Prince Edward*, *Singing Boy*, *School for the Blind*, *A Face at the Window*, and *The Music Room*. He lives with his family in Massachusetts.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss what role the father’s death plays for the different characters in the novel. How has it affected Ellen, Morris, and Bonnie differently?
2. When Bonnie’s letter arrives, Ellen’s first reaction is ‘what to do,’ and Morris’s is ‘what to think.’ Discuss their differing responses in the context of their behavior generally.
3. Why do you think Bonnie is still so unformed? Why doesn’t she feel anchored? Has she saved herself by marrying Pastor? Has she substituted God for drugs and medication?
4. Were you surprised by Pastor’s parents? How would you describe Rex’s take on Morris? On Bonnie? On Pastor?
5. Ellen is the peacemaker in the family—she has a tendency to rescue others and try to protect other people’s feelings. How does she play this role in the novel? Is she successful at it?

6. What memories does Ellen have of her mother? How does the visit to Point Clear affect her relationship to her mother?
7. At the dinner party, Bobby mentions a story by Eudora Welty, “A Memory,” about the loss of a young girl’s innocence. Does this story resonate with the characters in the novel? If so, how?
8. To what degree does this dinner scene reveal the author’s views about traditional Christianity? How fairly does the author treat Pastor during this scene and throughout the novel?
9. Given the portrait of Bonnie in Chapter 4, is it surprising that later she sides with her siblings against her husband? Why doesn’t she try harder to support Pastor? Discuss her wavering allegiances over the course of the story.
10. Pastor thinks Bonnie will “settle back down” after her siblings leave and that their marriage will return to “normal.” What do you think?
11. When Pastor tries to get support from Macy regarding his discomfort with Morris’s homosexuality, what is the result? Discuss Macy’s response and how it affects Pastor.
12. When they return to Massachusetts, why don’t Ellen and Morris tell their spouses about Pastor’s mystical experience and subsequent breakdown?
13. Do Ellen and Morris get what they expect from their trip to Point Clear? What has changed for each of them?
14. Discuss forgiveness and compassion as themes of the novel.

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