



MAUREEN JOYCE CONNOLLY

"A shattering adventure."

—Jacquelyn Mitchard, bestselling author
of *The Deep End of the Ocean*

LITTLE

LOVELY

THINGS

a novel

Reading Group Guide

1. How did you feel while reading Andrea and Lily's kidnapping on That Day? What emotions did you experience?
2. The way Claire grieves the loss of her daughters is to become too busy to face all her pain, which in turn boxes Glen out of their relationship. Have you ever had an experience where you have done something similar, perhaps on a smaller scale?
3. Gretchie is a source of comfort for Claire after the disappearance. Have you ever had a pet that has helped you through a difficult time? How would you describe that bond?
4. Moira and Jay both have deep ties to their heritage. How do the Lakota and Traveller cultures influence the story? How do they shape these characters? How has your own heritage shaped you?
5. One of the key themes of *Little Lovely Things* is that people have the capacity to change and heal. Which characters do you view as changing in a positive way? In a negative way?
6. How do both Jay's and Moira's pasts influence their decision-making in the story?

7. Claire believes the light she sees on the day of the funeral is a sign sent from Lily. Have you ever experienced a strong sense of intuition or a sign? What did it feel like? Did it affect your decisions in any way?
8. Howard is able to draw emotions out of Claire that she actively avoids without his help. Is there anyone in your life who has played this role?
9. Andrea's imagination and creativity serves to keep her whole in a difficult situation. Do you believe that art has healing qualities?
10. Colly's relationship with Moira becomes more difficult as Colly grows older. How much does this impact the choices Moira makes?
11. The novel changes point of view each chapter. Was there a character you wished to return to more often than the others? Why?
12. The yearning to belong is universal to the human experience. Which character do you believe is most affected by this emotion?
13. Life can change quickly. Have you or has anyone close to you suffered tragedy and come through changed in a positive way?
14. Which characters do you find most relatable in the story? Why?
15. What do you think happens after the story ends? How does this family come together? Where does Jay fit in? Describe how you think each character will change from this experience.

A Conversation with the Author

What inspired you to write *Little Lovely Things*?

There were many things, but one that jumps out at me was a brief newspaper article I encountered after my third child was born. For some reason, it stirred something deep inside me. It was about a kidnapping that occurred where the child was discovered as an adolescent many years later. There was no follow-up or closure to the story, which, in effect, left it to my imagination to create something larger.

This story deals with one of the greatest fears of motherhood—losing one’s children. How did writing those emotional scenes affect you?

Because I am so profoundly connected to my characters, I had to force myself to separate when things became too difficult to write. I got in the habit of taking breaks—things like going on short walks—to recharge before returning to the emotionally rough scenes. Several times, I cried.

Which scene was the most difficult for you to write?

There were two scenes that were very difficult for me. The first is when Claire wakes, disoriented, after Detective Hearn tells her and Glen that Andrea is dead and visits the “snow angels” outside, imagining that the marks in the snow were made by her girls. It still gets me. Even now, my voice tends to tremble when I read it.

The second scene is at the very end, when Claire first sees Andrea after so much time has passed and so much pain endured. It really broke me up imagining how that would go. I love them both so much and wanted them to be together, but I also knew how tenuous the situation would be based on what had transpired in their lives. I am entertaining, at some point, writing another book that addresses their lives after the reunion.

We see both the Lakota and the Traveller cultures come into play throughout the novel. What kind of research did you do to help you portray those cultures accurately?

Plenty! Both cultures have incredibly interesting stories and languages associated with them. I spent a great deal of time studying Shelta and Lakota. Even though I used very little in the book, it helped inform my view of Jay's and Moira's personalities. My ultimate goal was to develop them as individuals, instead of simply casting them as representatives of their cultures.

Which character was the most challenging to write?

Moira. Jay basically presented himself to me fully developed, and I just followed the direction he provided. Both Claire and Andrea gave me difficulties at different times because they weren't always interested in cooperating with my desires! But it was the complexity of Moira's competing traits that made her the most challenging to pin onto the page.

Both Claire's and Jay's characters rely on signs and feelings of intuition to guide them throughout the novel. Do you believe in following your intuition in real life?

Yes! And then yes again! It's really interesting, because being educated in science, I've always been in the business of relying on the analytical side of my brain. When I started *Little Lovely Things*, I was determined to nourish my intuitive side more. Jay and Claire certainly emerged from this effort.

If you could pick a quality from each character to give to yourself, which would you choose?

This is easy! Claire has so many great qualities, but I would have to choose her determination. Andrea—hands down, I would love to have her feisty spirit and creativity. As for Jay, I appreciate his deep compassion and lovely soul. With Moira, I would probably go for a bit of her self-delusion. It might be helpful when I overthink things!

When you're not writing, what are you doing?

Oh man, what am I *not* doing? I recently quit my long-term career, so I am still adjusting to a new schedule as a writer. Aside from taking care of my family, I read a lot. I have many friends and love to socialize. I garden, paint, and cook, all of which inspire me creatively. I also am on a dragon boat team, which practices regularly and competes in festivals.