

A NOVEL

The
LOST
and
FOUND
NECKLACE

LOUISA LEAMAN

Reading Group Guide

1. Aggie accuses Jess of being too nostalgic. What are the benefits and drawbacks of nostalgia? How do you see that throughout the book?
2. What did you think of Steph's rebellions? Why is she acting out?
3. Jess and Guy agree that jewelry is a window into a person's personality. What does Guy's leopard ring say about him? Jess's True Love Necklace? What messages are you sending with your own jewelry?
4. When Tim tries to be supportive of Jess, he comes across as smothering and undermines her independence. Discuss the ways that Jess balances her need for self-sufficiency with her chronic pain. Does her pride ever get in the way of help she genuinely needs?
5. Early in the book, Jess is determined to accept a grounded life and predictability. What do you think of her approach? If you were in her place, how would you have reacted to Nancy's accusation that Jess has lost her spirit?

6. What did you think of Tim? Were he and Jess a good match? How does he compare to Guy?
7. Bevan Floyd claims that a soul mate's job is to move us forward in some way, not to be a long-term companion. Do you agree? Which characters would you consider soul mates under Bevan's definition?
8. Do you think the True Love Necklace is actually magical, or does it just remind its wearers to be open-minded?
9. What effect do you think Anna's pining had on Nancy's upbringing?
10. Jess rankles at the idea of Aggie and Ed steering her life for her, even though she knows they mean well. Why does their meddling bother her so much? Why does Aggie feel like she has to take care of Jess?
11. Describe Jess's relationship with her father. What other work do you think they'll need to do to truly reconcile?
12. Do you think Jess made the right choice? What's next for her?

A Conversation with the Author

Aggie meddles a great deal in Jess's life. Do you have nosy siblings?

I have an older sister and a younger brother. We're very close. My family are, in fact, my favorite people to hang out with, mainly because we laugh so much when we're together. I feel lucky. Over the years, I've learned this isn't something to take for granted. Also, it's taken some work. We were rotten to one another when we were teens, and when we were little, our parents had to be scrupulous about dividing everything equally between us. But now that we're grown with families of our own, we understand one another's differences and want the best for one another. Basically, we've found the sibling sweet spot. I believe Jess and Aggie are destined for it too. Even though their relationship is fairly fraught at times, it's driven by love, and as they grow through the story, their bond proves stronger than their differences.

Jess believes that jewelry expresses personality more than anything else. What kind of jewelry do you wear, and what message would Jess get from it?

I'm crazy about earrings. My mum recently gave me a box of her old earrings, and there are so many, I think I'll have a pair for every day of the year. I occasionally wear necklaces and bracelets, but I haven't the patience for rings. They get in the way when I'm typing or wrangling my children. I'm not bothered by value, status symbols, or designer labels. I like unusual, dramatic pieces, random vintage finds, hand-me-downs, costume rather than fine. Jess would no doubt think I'm arty, playful, and a little bit hippyish. I'm fascinated by the geology of precious and semiprecious stones, how they're formed from the earth. I own one diamond, on my engagement ring, which is black. My husband chose it. He did well—better than poor old Tim!—realizing I'd want something unconventional and expressive.

Do you share Bevan Floyd's definition of soul mates, that they incite change in us but are not meant to be our lifelong companions? Who would you call your soul mate with that definition?

Like many, I had the misconception that a soul mate is a person you fall most in love with or feel destined to be with. When I researched the concept, I was surprised to learn that one of the more traditional definitions is the idea of someone who comes into your life to incite meaningful change but doesn't stay. I've got to give it to my husband; he really feels like my soul mate. But if I'm going to go with Bevan's definition, then it's the boyfriend I had *before* I met my husband. We met through mutual friends and were instantly drawn to each other. He moved in with me within a few weeks. We went traveling together. We supported each other emotionally. We were

good for each other. And then a few years later, we both reached a point where we had to start making decisions that would affect the rest of our lives—where we were going to live, careers, family, etc. Our good relationship had helped us become wiser and stronger, but it suddenly felt like we'd outgrown each other. We separated, and within months, we both met the people who would then become our lifelong companions.

The love triangle in this book feels more like a choice between two lifestyles for Jess. Did you ever hesitate when deciding which path she would take? Would you have chosen the same way?

I felt very aware that there would be readers who would want Jess to stick with reliable Tim—and for perfectly valid reasons. But the story I wanted to tell was one about taking risks, about breaking away from safety to find your own version of happy. It's a broader impulse than simply picking a lover—it's about identity, about learning not to be swayed by the judgment and influences of other people or conventional viewpoints about how women's lives should be. Jess has always had an appetite for adventure but is being pummeled by the popular opinion that she should be settling down and thinking about starting a family. The trauma of her accident is also adding pressure, the shame and regret of it making her question her choices. In the end, Guy wins because he offers her challenge, excitement, and liberation from her fears. Tim is not a bad option, but he's like a comfort blanket. I couldn't help thinking that if Jess were to stick with him, years later, it would all unravel. Would I make the same choice? Of course. I subscribe to the life's-too-short-not-to

philosophy. I love traveling, and I'm a dreamer whose motto is *Seek and you shall discover!*

Throughout *The Lost and Found Necklace*, you draw a pretty firm line between comfort and passion. How do you strike the right balance between passion, spontaneity, and stability?

I think the key word is *balance*. Never too much of one thing, never too little of another. I pay attention to different aspects of my life—health, work, family, finances, fun—and I constantly aim to balance the scales. For instance, I run and do yoga, but I also eat chocolate like it's going out of fashion. I've followed my passion, building a career as a writer, but I also have a teaching qualification if finances ever get tight. A few years ago, I had a life-threatening health complication, perhaps echoed in Jess's accident, and this experience changed my outlook on life. It made me realize the precariousness of it all, the need to enjoy things while you can. So basically, I say go on that trip, buy that great pair of red shoes, eat that triple-scoop ice-cream cone. Then do what you need to do to balance the scales: buy travel insurance, save some money next month, and go on a five-mile hike. All of it! Do all of it!

The plot hinges on several characters who are devoted to preserving their history. Do you think of yourself as sentimental? How do you fulfill the duty of passing on history?

I'm ridiculously sentimental! I'm intrigued by historical objects, particularly everyday ones like clothing and furniture. One of my favorite aspects of writing about the True Love Necklace was

contemplating the possible histories of different pieces of jewelry—the idea that a brooch or bracelet could have been worn to a first date or anniversary dinner, chosen for the significant moments in a person’s life. I then caught on to the idea that an older piece of jewelry could have several different owners, be witness to several eras, and was tremendously excited at the thought. All that history encapsulated in one tiny item. I guess it’s no surprise that my house is full of random antiques and hand-me-downs. I don’t do minimalism. One of my favorites is a mid-century Ercol table passed on to me by a friend’s mother. When I came to collect it from her, she was worried about a scorch mark on the surface that had been made when her children’s gaming computer overheated way back in the early eighties. She hoped I’d be able to sand it down and erase it, but I never did because I love that scorch mark. It’s part of the table’s story, like the rings of a tree. Now my children are inflicting their own dents and scratches on this timeworn piece of furniture, but somehow it survives. That’s the other wonder of old things. They were built to last!

In your previous book, *The Second Chance Boutique*, you discussed your work for the Victoria and Albert Museum, writing about archival wedding gowns. Did your work for the museum influence this book as well? How did you research jewelry history?

After writing about the Victoria and Albert Museum’s wedding dress collection, I had the privilege of writing about their collection of art deco artifacts. This led me to their jewelry galleries, where they had some stunning art deco belt clips and brooches, but my

eye was constantly drawn to the more ornate art nouveau designs that preceded them. So yes, I think this was the seed of *The Lost and Found Necklace*. When I finally started working on the book, the jewelry galleries had closed for refurbishment. It was painful, waiting months to get back in and ogle at all the lovely things. But I had fun going to auctions, browsing the antique markets on Portobello Road, reading up about jewelry design, and creating lavish Pinterest boards. I also enjoyed researching the locations and eras of history represented in the book, such as the nineteenth-century world fairs, where influential designers like Lalique would have showcased their work. One of my favorite research trips was to the site of the Crystal Palace in London. It's now a ruin, but it was tantalizing to imagine how it would have been. Thankfully, the internet helped bring it to life. There are many paintings and photographs of the original building online. And there is some wonderful footage of the 1889 Paris World Fair on YouTube, featuring the Eiffel Tower. I couldn't stop watching it. I also became mildly obsessed with photographs of faded Hollywood mansions. The research is fun and can get *very* distracting.

Did you have a favorite character to write? How do the characters you enjoy writing compare to the ones you enjoy reading?

I loved writing Jess, as she goes on such a journey and ultimately finds the courage to go against the grain of expectation. At the same time, I had fun writing Aggie, with her high-maintenance, control-freak ways. The love-hate tension that unfolds between the two of them was interesting to write, that the people you're closest to can be

the ones who infuriate you most. I also loved writing about the different generations of Taylor women. I have lots of affection for poor old Anna, with her dashed dreams of Hollywood glory. I could write much more of her story! And then, of course, there's Guy, whose playfulness was fun to explore. Basically, it's hard to choose, because I enjoyed writing them all. In the characters I both write and read, I want that enjoyment. I don't want perfect heroes. I don't want super nice or vanilla bland. I want interesting energy and I want flaws: characters with commitment issues, insecurities, hot-headedness, impulsiveness, irrational jealousy, paranoia—all the stuff that makes people complicated and real. Then I want to see them grow, figure it out, do incredible things. And ultimately, I want to find myself rooting for them, punching the air with joy when they get what they need/want in the end.

Do you have a plan for your next project?

Absolutely. I get twitchy when I don't have at least one writing project on the go. I'm in the first draft stage of my latest project. It's nearly there, but I'm looking forward to a time when the foundations of the story are established and I can enjoy revising, editing, and polishing it into a final draft—my favorite part of the process. This time, I'm going for something bigger and a little darker, with a family saga at its heart.

What are you reading these days?

I always have several books on the go. I'm nearly finished with Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch*, late to the party (I think I was

intimidated by its length, because I'm a painfully slow reader), but I'm adoring it. I've also just read a UK book called *The Flatshare* by Beth O'Leary and *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens. I thought it was wonderful. I loved the evocative setting and the underdog charisma of the main character, although I must admit I had to look up what a crawdad was! With my children, I read a lot of picture books and middle-grade fiction. Now that my daughter is older, I'm getting more into young adult fiction. I like to read the books she chooses, then we can discuss them. She's a horror enthusiast, so it's pushing me toward books I wouldn't normally pick up!