Help for the Haunted

by John Searles



About the Book

Winner of the 2014 Alex Awards!

It begins with a call one snowy February night. Lying in her bed, young Sylvie Mason overhears her parents on the phone across the hall. This is not the first late-night call they have received, since her mother and father have an uncommon occupation: helping ?haunted souls? find peace. And yet something in Sylvie senses that this call is different from the others, especially when they are lured to the old church on the outskirts of town. Once there, her parents disappear, one after the other, behind the church?s red door, leaving Sylvie alone in the car. Not long after, she drifts off to sleep, only to wake to the sound of gunfire.

As the story weaves back and forth through the years leading up to that night and the months following, the ever-inquisitive Sylvie searches for answers and uncovers secrets that have haunted her family for years.

Capturing the vivid eeriness of Stephen King?s works and the quirky tenderness of John Irving?s novels, HELP FOR THE HAUNTED is told in the captivating voice of a young heroine who is determined to discover the truth about what happened on that winter night.

Discussion Guide

1. After her parents' death, Sylvie learns from Father Coffey that her family was driven out of the church by rumors and gossip. But the Masons were very devout. How does the tension between their faith and their unusual activities play out? In what ways do the intersections of these two forces make sense?

2. When speaking in Ocala, Sylvester says he investigates "the otherness" of the world we live in. What, exactly, do you think this means? Are demons and spirits the only manifestations of "otherness" we encounter in the novel? Are there

any kinds of "otherness" that the Masons are not interested in confronting?

3. When Sylvester drags Rose out of their hotel in Ocala --- once she has returned from her evening with Uncle Howie --- what do you think he says to her?

4. In the theater, Howie recounts for Sylvie how he admitted to Sylvester the truth about the "globules." Why do you think Sylvester reacted the way he did, with silence? How do you explain the other encounters he had that weren't Howie's tricks? Why were the ghosts so important to him?

5. Why are the horses Howie gave her so significant to Sylvie? What do you think they represent, and why is she so upset when they break?

6. Of the Entwistles, Sylvie's mother says, "What they were doing, I believe, was sharing with us a kind of truth they had created for themselves?There are times when it is easier to fool yourself than swallow some jagged piece of reality." What are some other examples in the book of characters fooling themselves?

7. With her father gone, there are many different men that Sylvie turns to for guidance: Sam Heekin, Detective Rummel, Derreck, Arnold Boshoff, Father Coffeey, Lloyd, and Uncle Howie. What role do they each play in her life?

8. Sylvie's mom and her dad have very different reactions when Abigail begins to take Rose's place in their household. Why is this? And what does Abigail represent for each of them?

9. Derreck says to Sylvie, "It's not the end of the world if you don't always know all the answers." We eventually learn who killed the Masons but, at the end of the book, what questions are we still left with? What are some answers that Sylvie is still looking for?

Author Bio

John Searles is a *New York Times* bestselling and award-winning author of four novels. His books have been published in over a dozen languages and have been voted ?Best of the Year? or top picks by *Boston Globe*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Salon* and the American Library Association. A frequent contributor to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, John was a top editor at *Cosmopolitan* for two decades, first hired by Helen Gurley Brown.

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