

Whatever Happened to Lori Lovely?

by Sarah McCoy



About the Book

From *New York Times* bestselling author Sarah McCoy comes a spellbinding novel based on a true story: a beautiful young movie star of Hollywood's Golden Age gives up her bright career to become a nun.

In 1969, 23-year-old starlet Lori Lovely, the apple of Hollywood's eye, shocks the world by ditching a promising film career to take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as a Benedictine nun. Gossip columnists and scandal sheets can't get enough of the story. Why would such a beautiful girl take the veil? Was she hiding from someone? Did it have anything to do with the tragic death of her costar, heartthrob singer Lucas Wesley?

In 1990, Lu Tibbott is under the gun to complete her senior thesis in modern American history. Instead of spending weeks in dusty archives, Lu decides to dig into a true 20th-century mystery and write about her aunt Lori, now the Mother Abbess at a cloistered convent in rural New England. Biographers, bloggers and media types have long speculated about her aunt Lori's sudden departure from Hollywood. Mother Lori, however, has refused all requests for interviews --- until Lu arrives at the abbey with a tape recorder in hand. To her delight, Mother Lori announces she's finally ready to talk...but only if Lu is truly ready to listen.

Lu is shocked to discover that the story of Lori Lovely's rise in Hollywood was far more tumultuous than she'd ever expected, a fairy tale twisting with ambition, unforeseen alliances, forbidden love and secrets. What began as a history thesis now threatens to upend all their lives with its unexpected truths, especially as the media gets wind of Lu's project and begins to ask?

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Discussion Guide

1. The book is set against the backdrop of 1960s Hollywood, a time when fame was glamorous, isolating and perilous for young women. How does the culture of that era shape Lori's experiences and decisions? Do you think her struggles with fame would be different in today's celebrity culture?
2. What role does Ginny Wilde play in Lori's life? Which other friends made a difference at critical moments? Did Lori strike the right balance between relying on others and standing on her own?
3. Lori and Ginny are ambitious women navigating a male-dominated industry. What were the costs and rewards of ambition for women during the 1960s? How do their experiences compare to Lu's modern struggles?
4. Lori's transformation into Lori Lovely begins with her role in *Romeo & Juliet, The Musical*. How does Hollywood shape her sense of self, and how does she reconcile her public persona with her private identity?
5. How does the book use art and performance as a metaphor for personal growth and reinvention? What does this suggest about the role of creativity in shaping identity? How does this theme play out in Lu's life?
6. Lori says, "Memory is made of human stuff." How does this idea shape the way she and Lu reflect on their pasts? How reliable do you think memory is in shaping identity?
7. Did you suspect Lori's true relationship to Lu?
8. Lori says of giving her baby to her sister, Marie, "I didn't have one moment where I doubted my decision, nor do I feel any regret. What some may call a mistake was repurposed into a miracle." Are there instances in your life in which an event that seemed negative turned into a positive?
9. Lori's life as a nun is described as proof that "the holy and unholy are on the same daily journey." Do you agree? How does the book explore the tension and coexistence of these two seemingly opposite worlds? Do you think Lori reconciles them?
10. The Author's Note mentions that Lori is inspired by three actresses. Who do you think those real-life inspirations are?

Author Bio

Sarah McCoy is the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and international bestselling author of the novels *WHATEVER HAPPENED TO LORI LOVELY?*, *MUSTIQUE ISLAND*, *MARILLA OF GREEN GABLES*, *THE MAPMAKER'S CHILDREN*, *THE BAKER'S DAUGHTER*, a 2012 Goodreads Choice Award Best Historical Fiction nominee, the novella "The Branch of Hazel" in *GRAND CENTRAL*, *THE TIME IT SNOWED IN PUERTO RICO* and *LE SOUFFLE DES FEUILLES ET DES PROMESSES (PRIDE AND PROVIDENCE)*.

Her work has been featured in *Newsweek*, *Real Simple*, *The Millions*, *Literary Hub*, *Writer's Digest*, *Huffington Post*, *Read It Forward*, *Writer Unboxed* and other publications. She hosted the NPR WSNC Radio monthly program

?Bookmarked with Sarah McCoy? and served as a Board Member for the literary nonprofit Bookmarks. Sarah taught English writing at Old Dominion University and at the University of Texas at El Paso.

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