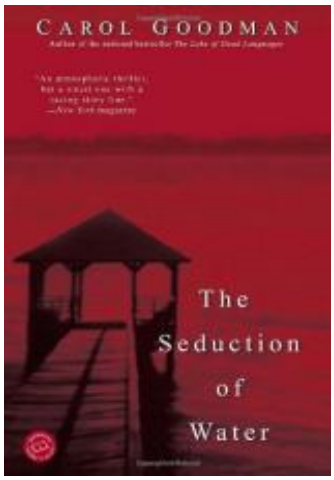
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

The Seduction of Water

by Carol Goodman



About the Book

Iris Greenfeder, ABD (All But Dissertation), feels the "buts" are taking over her life: all but published, all but a professor, all but married. Yet the sudden impulse to write a story about her mother, Katherine Morrissey, leads to a shot at literary success. The piece recounts an eerie Irish fairy tale her mother used to tell her at bedtime?and nestled inside it is the sad story of her death. It captures the attention of her mother's former literary agent, who is convinced that Katherine wrote one final manuscript before her strange, untimely end in a fire thirty years ago. So Iris goes back to the remote Hotel Equinox in the Catskills, the place where she grew up, to write her mother's biography and search for the missing manuscript?and there she unravels a haunting mystery, one that holds more secrets than she ever expected. . . .

Discussion Guide

1. The fairy tale assignment galvanized Iris's students and helped them to find their own voices. Why do you think this assignment successful on so many levels? Did you ever have a school assignment that affected you in such a manner? Discuss why it reached you and what it taught you.

2. Discuss your favorite fairy tale from your childhood. How did you learn the story and what did you learn from it? What does it mean to you now?

3. Both Iris and Phoebe are haunted by the early loss of their mothers. Discuss how these characters have been shaped by and have adapted to their losses and more generally how the death of a parent or a parental figure affects us all.

4. A schism exists in Iris's life: before and after her mother's death. Do you have such a defining event in your life? Discuss the various life-changing events?births, deaths, and other rites of passage?that can result in such a before-and-after outlook.

5. Her mother's death is the defining event of Iris's life when this novel begins. Do you think it will remain the defining event by the close of the novel?

6. Iris confesses that she is "still not comfortable being the giver of grades, the passer of judgment." Can you identify with her struggle? Or do you judge her to be immature?

7. When Iris begins to investigate her mother's past, she comes to understand that her mother felt like an imposter in her new life at the Hotel Equinox. Why is this so? Discuss the many reasons why people might feel like an imposter in their own lives.

8. Iris wonders whether Danny the baker she meets in Brooklyn or his brother Vincent the painter "is really the artist in the family." What do you think? How do you define an artist?

9. The financial and personal toll exacted in securing the time and space to create art is central to this novel. Discuss the hurdles that artists face. Do you think female artists still confront more obstacles than their male counterparts?

10. Have you ever suffered from writer's block or a comparable affliction in your own life? Did you resolve it? If so, how? If not, why not?

11. Thinking about her relationship with Jack, Iris speculated, "Lover and beloved. Didn't there always have to be one of each?" Do you agree?

12. Aidan believes that "there's more sorrow in not following your heart." What do you think?

13. The seven-year age difference between Aidan and Iris troubles Iris greatly. Do you think the pairing of older women and younger men?as opposed to the reverse?still carries a social stigma? Is this changing?

14. Aidan is not a career criminal, but worries that will be his fate once he is released from jail. Discuss the plight of the ex-convict in our society.

15. Iris's mother spent much of her life observing and recording the carelessness of the wealthy and how the rich could ignore and mistreat those who served their needs. Discuss the class tensions in this novel, from the plight of Iris's mother to Harry Kron's attitude toward his staff Iris's mother spent much of her life observing and recording the carelessness of the wealthy and how the rich could ignore and mistreat those who served their needs. Discuss the class tensions in this novel, from the plight of Iris's mother to Harry Kron's attitude toward his staff to Aidan's fears that he is not "good enough" for Iris.

16. Iris's unfinished dissertation is an analysis of her mother's very personal fiction, an analysis hobbled by the daughter's ignorance of the mother's past. Discuss the complex blend of mythical, religious, and personal influences in K.R. LaFleur's fantasy novels.

17. Do you think learning the full truth about her mother will set Iris free to live her own life on her own terms?

18. "She wouldn't want me to spend my life telling *her* story, she would want me to tell my own," Iris concludes at the

close of the novel. Do you think Iris will write again? If so, what do you think she will write?

19. What do you think would have happened to Kay and her family if she had told her husband the whole truth about her past? Could the tragedies that followed have been averted?

20. Which characters are your favorites and why? Did you wish to hear more (or less) from certain characters in this novel?

21. Discuss the structure of this novel. Did you find the story-within-the-story format compelling?

22. Do you agree that **The Seduction of Water** defies categorization in a single genre? How would you describe this novel to prospective readers?

23. Is your group interested in reading this author's first novel **The Lake of Dead Languages**?

Author Bio

Carol Goodman?s rich and prolific career includes novels such as THE WIDOW'S HOUSE and THE NIGHT VISITOR, winners of the 2018 and 2020 Mary Higgins Clark Award. Her books have been translated into 16 languages. She lives in the Hudson Valley, NY.

Critical Praise

"Mystery, folklore, a thoroughly modern romance, a strong sense of place, and a winning combination of erudition and accessibility make this second novel a treat."

The Seduction of Water
by Carol Goodman

Publication Date: December 30, 2003
Genres: Fiction, Suspense
Paperback: 400 pages
Publisher: Ballantine Books
ISBN-10: 0345450914
ISBN-13: 9780345450913