

Discussion Guide

THE
READING
AGENCY

Quick Reads

20
YEARS

Can she choose between family and love?



About the author

Rosie Goodwin is the four-million-copy bestselling author of more than forty novels. She is the first author in the world to be allowed to follow three of Catherine Cookson's trilogies with her own sequels. Having worked in the social services sector for many years, then fostered a number of children, she is now a full-time novelist.

She is one of the top 50 most borrowed authors from UK libraries and has sold over four million copies across her career. Rosie lives in Nuneaton, the setting for many of her books, with her husband and their beloved dogs.



Discussion Questions

Chapter 1

1. What is your first impression of Charity?

What kind of person is she at the start of the story? How does the author describe her?

2. How is the gypsy camp described, and what does it tell us about Charity's life?

What do you learn about her home, family, and daily life?

3. How does Charity feel about turning sixteen and having a husband chosen for her?

Is she excited, worried, or something else?

4. Who does Charity love, and why is being with him difficult?

What problem does she face with Luca?

5. What does Charity receive from her father, and what does it symbolise?

What is the gift, and why is it important?

Chapter 2

1. What is your first impression of Luca?

What kind of person does he seem to be at the start of the story?

2. How is the circus described, and what does it tell you about Luca's life?

What do you learn about his home, work, and daily responsibilities?

3. How does Luca feel about the animals and performers in the circus?

Does he like them, care for them, or something else?

4. How does Luca first see Charity as she grows up, and how does he feel about her?

What changes in her make him notice her, and what does he feel?

5. What conflict or problem does Luca face regarding Charity?

Why might he not be able to be with her?

Chapter 3

1. How does Luca react when he sees the gypsy camp arriving?
What does Luca do when he sees Charity on her camp? How does he feel?
2. Describe the interaction between Luca and Matthew. What does it reveal about their friendship and the connection between the circus and the gypsy camp?
How do Luca and Matthew talk, and what does it show about their families?
3. How is the River Anker scene used to show Charity and Luca's growing relationship?
What do they do at the river, and how do their words and actions show their feelings?
4. What cultural or family obstacles prevent Charity and Luca from being together?
What traditions stop them from being together, even though they like each other?
5. How does jealousy play a role in Luca's behaviour and decisions in this chapter?
What makes Luca jealous, and how does it affect what he says or does to Charity?

Chapter 4

1. How do Charity and Luca manage to spend time together?
How do they meet secretly, and what rules do they have to follow?
2. What do Charity's parents' plans reveal about gypsy customs and the expectations placed on young women?
What are her parents planning, and what does it show about their traditions?
3. How does Luca react to the news about Charity's possible arranged marriage, and what does this tell us about his feelings?
What does Luca think and feel when he hears about the cousin, and why is it important?
4. Describe how the circus and fair work schedule affects Luca and Charity's relationship.
How does the timing of the circus and fair make it hard for them to see each other?
5. Why is the evening meal at the gypsy camp significant for Luca and Charity, and what might it mean for their relationship?
Why is the dinner important, and what could happen there between them?

Chapter 5

1. How does the atmosphere of the party reflect the contrast between the circus, the gypsies, and Luca's focus on Charity?
Look at the description of the fire, dancing, music, and children.
2. What role does Scarlet play in this chapter, and how do her actions create tension between the characters?
Consider her jealousy, her attempts to spend time with Luca and how this affects Charity.
3. How do Luca and Charity respond to the pressures of their families' traditions and expectations?
Think about the rules of gypsy marriage and the circus traditions.
4. What strategies do Luca and Charity use to steal time together and what do these moments reveal about their personalities and priorities?
Look at their secret meetings, whispered conversations, and risk-taking.
5. How does the chapter build the theme of love versus duty, and what decisions do Luca and Charity make to follow their hearts?
Consider the ending by the stream and their plan to be together.

Chapter 6

1. How does the author convey the sense of urgency and routine in the gypsy camp?
Look at the description of packing, preparing horses, and cooking meals.
2. How do Luca's emotions reflect his attachment to Charity and the difficulty of their separation?
Consider his reactions when the Vardos leave.
3. What role does Scarlet play in creating conflict in this chapter and how does she try to distract Luca?
Look at her attempts to invite him for supper and her later actions at the river.
4. How does the river scene highlight Luca's loyalty to Charity despite Scarlet's attempts at seduction?
Look at the author's descriptions of temptation versus commitment.
5. What themes are reinforced in this chapter regarding love, tradition, and personal choice?
Think about the obstacles Luca and Charity face and the choices they make.

Chapter 7

1. How does Charity feel during her first week at Appleby Fair?
Think about her worries regarding her father announcing her marriage.
2. How does the author show the challenges Charity faces in finding work away from her family?
Look at the reactions of the farmers and villagers and how she responds to being turned away.
3. What does the encounter with the farmer reveal about Charity's skills and character?
Consider how she presents herself, her abilities and her willingness to take on work.
4. How is the farm and the children described, and how does Charity respond to this environment?
Think about what the state of the house and the children tells us, and Charity's reaction.
5. What does this chapter reveal about Charity's plans and determination to be with Luca?
Consider her decision. How does this show her courage and independence?

Chapter 8

1. Why is Charity feeling a mixture of emotions as she prepares to leave the camp and how are these emotions shown in the text?
Think about her sadness, anxiety, and love for Luca. Look at what she does before leaving.
2. How does Charity manage to leave the camp without being noticed, and what does this tell us about her character?
Consider the steps she takes, such as packing quietly, leaving a note, and waiting until everyone is asleep.
3. Describe Charity's first impressions of the farmhouse and Eddie Wells.
Look at how she reacts to the dirty kitchen, the children, and the tasks she is given.
4. What actions show Charity's independence and skills in her new life at the farm?
Think about how she cooks, cleans, milks the cows, and organizes her new surroundings.
5. How does the chapter build anticipation for Luca's arrival and Charity's future?
Consider her thoughts at the end of the chapter and what she hopes will happen next.

Chapter 9

1. How does Charity react when she first meets Maureen?
Think about her politeness, curiosity, and willingness to get along with Maureen.
2. What do we learn about Maureen's past and her relationship with Eddie? How does this help us understand her character?
Look at what she says about waiting for Eddie, her family responsibilities and her sacrifices.

3. How does Maureen help Charity adjust to her new life on the farm?

Consider what she does for Charity with clothes, advice and showing her around.

4. What evidence shows that Charity and Maureen are beginning to form a friendship?

Think about how they talk, share drinks and work together.

5. How does Charity feel about being away from her parents and friends, and how does she justify her actions?

Look at her thoughts about Luca and the life she hopes to build with him.

Chapter 10

1. How does Luca feel as the circus begins the journey to Appleby Fair, and why is this journey important to him?

Think about his excitement, worry about Charity and relief about escaping Scarlet.

2. What do we learn about Luca's relationship with his father and how he is teased about Scarlet?

Consider what his father says and how Luca reacts.

3. How is Charity feeling at Top Acre Farm and what is causing her discomfort?

Look at her physical symptoms and her emotional state.

4. How does Charity rely on Maureen and Eddie during this time?

Think about how she accepts help.

5. Why is Charity so focused on the arrival of the circus and how does this affect her daily life?

Consider her anticipation, thoughts about Luca, and her excitement despite feeling unwell.

Chapter 11

1. What are Luca and the circus folk's first tasks when they arrive at Appleby, and why is the day so exhausting for them?

Think about unloading animals, erecting the Big Top, and preparing the fair for visitors.

2. How does Luca interact with Scarlet during this chapter and what does his behaviour show about his feelings?

Consider his responses to her and his thoughts about Charity.

3. How does Charity communicate with Luca about her escape, and why does he need to be careful with Scarlet?

Focus on the role Scarlet plays as a messenger and Luca's need for patience.

4. What is the reaction of Jethro and the other gypsies when they discover Charity has disappeared?

Think about their worry, confusion, and the seriousness of her running away.

5. Why is Luca anxious even when the gypsies are merry and what does this reveal about his priorities?

Consider his anticipation of receiving news from Charity and his need to act quickly.

Chapter 12

1. Why does Charity feel anxious about leaving the farmhouse to meet Scarlet, and how does she plan to do it safely?

Think about why she's afraid of being seen and what disguise or timing she uses.

2. How does Charity help Maureen prepare for the circus, and what changes does Maureen undergo?

Focus on the dress, hairstyle, and how it affects Maureen's appearance and confidence.

3. What instructions or message does Charity give to Scarlet, and why is it important?

Consider the letter with the address and why Luca needs to receive it.

4. How does Scarlet react to Charity, and what might her behaviour suggest?

Look at Scarlet's unease and why she seems cold despite being friends.

5. Why is Charity relieved at the end of the chapter even though she hasn't yet met Luca?

Think about how she knows Luca will get the letter and what that means for their plan to be together.

Chapter 13

1. How is Charity feeling physically in this chapter, and what are the signs?

Think about the nausea and tenderness.

2. What does Maureen realise about Charity and how does she help her understand the situation?

Focus on their conversation about Charity possibly being pregnant and what Charity tells her.

3. How does Charity feel about telling Luca, and why is she worried?

Consider her emotions about the pregnancy and what she thinks Luca's reaction might be.

4. How does Luca react when Scarlet tries to seduce him and what does this reveal about his feelings?

Think about his anger, his loyalty to Charity, and how he defends himself.

5. What is Scarlet's plan, and how does she react when Luca rejects her?

Focus on her spiteful words and determination to make him regret refusing her.

Chapter 14

1. Why is Charity anxious while waiting, and what is she waiting for?

Think about her concern for Luca and whether Scarlet has delivered her letter.

2. How does Charity finally meet Scarlet, and what is their conversation about?

Focus on where they meet, how Charity approaches Scarlet, and what she asks.

3. What shocking news does Scarlet give Charity?

Consider Scarlet's confession about her feelings for Luca and their engagement.

4. How does Charity respond to Scarlet's news, and what does it show about her character?

Think about her pride, calmness, and acceptance despite being hurt.

5. What trick does Scarlet play on Luca after the meeting, and what does it suggest about her personality?

Focus on how she deceives him about who Charity was and how she reacts afterward.

Chapter 15

1. How does Charity feel after learning about Luca and Scarlet, and what does she do that shows her sadness?

Think about her emotions sitting on the grass and when she gets home.

2. What conversation does Charity have with Maureen, and what does Maureen suggest to help her?

Focus on what Charity tells Maureen about Luca and her baby, and how Maureen plans to speak to Eddie.

3. How does Luca react when he hears from Scarlet about Charity, and what does this reveal about him?

Think about his disbelief, heartbreak, and how he responds to Scarlet's explanation.

4. What solution does Eddie come up with for Charity and her baby, and why is it important?

Consider the empty cottage, Charity's ability to continue working, and having a safe home for her child.

5. What do these events tell you about Charity, Luca, Scarlet, and Eddie as characters?

Focus on Charity's strength, Luca's heartbreak, Scarlet's role in the situation, and Eddie's kindness.

Chapter 16

1. How does Charity feel when she learns from Maureen that Eddie will let her stay in the cottage?

Think about her relief, the "weight lifted" feeling, and what this means for her baby.

2. What does the cottage look like when Charity first sees it, and what is her impression?

Describe the inside (dusty, furnished, kitchen/sitting room, bedrooms) and her initial reaction.

3. Why does Charity feel conflicted about living in the cottage even though it is a safe home?

Consider her love of life on the road, her memories of the gypsy camp, and the lifestyle she has lost.

4. What preparations does Charity make for moving into the cottage, and who helps her?

Include cleaning, polishing, arranging furniture, and the roles of Maureen and Eddie.

5. How does Charity react when she learns the circus has left town, and what does this show about her feelings for Luca?

Think about her heartbreak and the images of Luca with Scarlet.

Chapter 17

1. How does Luca feel while helping to set up the circus in Nottingham, and why?

Consider his emotions about Charity.

2. What doubts does Luca begin to have about Scarlet and the message she gave him about Charity?

Think about his trust of Scarlet.

3. How does Scarlet behave around Luca at the circus, and what effect does this have on him?

Describe her attitude, her interactions with other men, and how Luca responds to it.

4. How do Luca's parents react to his decision to look for Charity, and what conflicting advice or support do they offer?

Compare his father's concern with his mother's attitude.

5. What decision does Luca ultimately make at the end of the chapter, and what does it show about his character?

Think about the risk and obstacles.

Chapter 18

1. Why is Charity concerned at the start of the chapter, and how does she plan to help?

Consider Maureen's absence and what Charity offers to do for her.

2. How has Charity adapted to life in the cottage, and what challenges does she still face?

Think about her morning sickness, adjusting clothes, and her feelings about Luca.

3. What do Charity's thoughts reveal about her feelings for Luca and her unborn child?

Look at her reflections on betrayal, loneliness, and imagining the baby.

4. Describe the atmosphere of the town as Charity takes the children shopping. How does this contrast with her internal feelings?

Note the bright, sunny day, children playing, and her inner sadness or longing.

5. What future hopes does Charity have for Maureen and Eddie, and what does this reveal about her character?

Think about Charity's concern for the happiness of those around her despite her own struggles.

Chapter 19

1. What task does Eddie ask Charity and Maureen to do for the harvest, and how do they prepare for it?

Think about the sandwiches, bottles of tea, and where they are supposed to deliver them.

2. How does Charity feel about the possibility of encountering her gypsy family during the harvest?

Consider her fears and Maureen's advice on worrying only about what actually happens.

3. What clues make Luca realise that the girl he sees in the field might be Charity?

Look at how he observes her from a distance.

4. How does Luca react when he hears that Charity is having a baby?

Think about his feelings of heartbreak, jealousy, and his decision about whether to approach her.

5. Why does Charity decide to return to the top field the next day, and what is she hoping to discover?

Consider her curiosity about the young man.

Chapter 20

1. How does Charity initially react when she sees Luca in the field during the harvest?

Consider her emotions, physical reaction, and what she notices about him.

2. What misunderstanding about Charity's situation does Luca have, and how does Maureen help to correct it?

Think about what Luca believes about Charity being married and having a baby, and Maureen's response.

3. How do Charity and Luca finally resolve their misunderstanding?

Look at their conversation at the farmhouse.

4. What double wedding announcement occurs at the farm after Charity and Luca's marriage?

Think about what Eddie reveals about his own relationship with Maureen.

Chapter 21

1. How do the two sets of parents handle the young couple's marriage?

Think about how both families react and what decisions they make regarding acceptance.

2. What name do Charity and Luca choose for their son, and why might it be meaningful?

Think about how they come to agree on the name.

3. How does the chapter show the resolution of the story's conflicts?

Consider the joining of families, Charity and Luca's love, and the arrival of the baby.