

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE MARZIPAN FRUIT BASKET

I was recently approached by a reader who asked me why I had published a book of short stories when none of the stories were complete? Upon probing, I discovered that she found the endings to all of the pieces to be unsatisfactory. She wanted a greater sense of resolution and closure, and she wanted happy endings. This conversation made me think that some discussion questions might be helpful.

I will say that I have always found *endings* (in fiction and in life) to be the most difficult. In this collection I have attempted, while invoking a sense of closure, to leave space for the reader's own imagination to enter and establish for themselves a complete resolution that is compatible with their own life experiences and beliefs.

1. In ***A Hawk in Winter***, the story ends with Ian walking towards the woods looking for a pair of hawks he has been watching: *And now I was remembering what it was to clutch at love while spiralling slowly to the ground*. What do you think Ian means by this line?
2. In ***Creamers***, the story ends with the nurse taking Elaine from the room: *And the nurse would return. Taking Elaine from the room but not from her. She had already gone*. What is meant by the final line? Has Joan left the room before Elaine and the nurse? Where has Joan gone?
3. In ***A Love Story***, the piece ends with the husband leaving while the woman watches him. Did this ending surprise or disappoint you? Do you think the husband was being selfish or unselfish in his leaving? How would you have preferred the story to end, and why?
4. The childbirth story in ***A Love Story*** is brutal. Did this cause you to reflect on a relatable experience that was also traumatic and potentially life-changing?
5. The story ***Blue Eyes*** is about a woman coping with miscarriage and the fear of losing another child. There is also a mysterious, ghost-like woman in the story. Why would this mysterious woman be important to the story? Are the fears ones that you understand?
6. ***School Days*** is, among other things, about a female student with mental health issues. Does her condition resonate in any way?
7. ***Blue Mountain*** is the story of a woman coming to terms with her husband's illness. I was writing specifically about Lou Gherig's disease but I have been told that the description also captures other illnesses. Did it speak to you about loss in your own life? Would you consider this piece to also be a love story?
8. Can you choose a character in any one of the stories that spoke to you or stayed with you after you closed the book? Who was it and why did they linger?
9. Some readers may find some of the stories *dark*, but I actually believe that they are filled with stories of love in its many guises. Which of these two positions most closely expresses your view?
10. Dislocation is the unifying theme of the collection. Do you believe the author was successful in portraying some of the dislocating experiences in a woman's life journey?