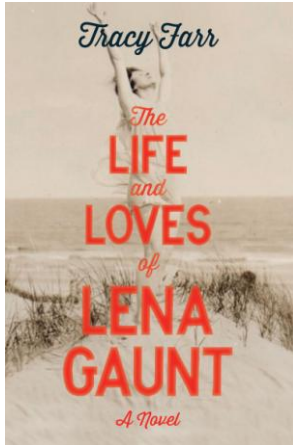




## Reading group questions



*I was a solitary child, lacking companions my own age, but I was not lonely I was happy in my own company, dancing to my own drum.*

What kind of a character is Lena Gaunt? Do her childhood experiences shape the woman she is to become, or is there something innate in her character that helps to shape her life story?

What is the impact of different relationships on Lena's life, beginning with her relationship with Little Clive and ending with her relationship with Mo?

How would you characterise Lena's relationship to the concept of 'home'?

It might be said that Lena's oldest and longest relationships are with Uncle Valentine, and with music. What difference do these make to her life?

What is Lena Gaunt's relationship to grief? And what is her relationship to music?

*In those magazines of my uncle's, and in the slim literary volumes on his shelves, I found pages alive with the buzz of the next new thing. Like me, they were of this century, not the last; they looked forward, not to the past. If these are possible, I thought – this machine, or this poem – if these are possible, then anything, anything might be possible.*

In what ways are aspects of the unfolding twentieth century revealed through the character of Lena Gaunt? In what ways are they metaphors for her life?

Does it matter that we do not ever really find out what happened to Grace?

What is Lena's reason for beginning – and then finishing – the writing of this story? Why does she choose to withhold and then deliver her long-kept secret to Mo?

Why does the novel end in the way that it does? Does this book have a 'happy ending'?