

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

# SMALL GAME HUNTING AT THE LOCAL COWARD GUN CLUB

Written by Megan Gail Coles

1. Olive sees Omi speaking English and wonders about her own language: “Olive doesn’t even know her own words. No one in her family taught them to her because no one in her family knew them” (12). Olive also keeps quiet to conceal her identity: “Olive holds her rural tongue for fear of being found out” (4). How does language allow you to belong in social communities? How might it isolate you? How are these tensions at play within the novel?
2. Coles represents a wide variety of accents depending from whose perspective she is writing. For example, Calv has the strongest discernable Newfoundland accent in the novel. In what ways was your reading of Calv’s perspective altered by his speech style? How did this technique vary with the other characters?
3. Issues of consent are central to the novel. Olive faces traumatic experiences of sexual assault, and the issue comes up again in Iris’s relationship with John. Describing their relationship, Coles writes “every gesture is no. But she hasn’t said it” (100). How does consent factor into the various relationships in the novel? What does Coles suggest about boundaries, mental and physical, through her characters?
4. Coles reminds us throughout the novel of the different bays and small towns where her characters grew up. For example, we know that “Olive grew up in a place where polar bears ate your dog. As did Iris” (106). What does the novel suggest about people being a product of where they grew up?
5. While Olive is quiet, Iris is described as the opposite: “No one in the history of the fucking world would refer to her as timid” (53). How is Iris a foil for Olive? How do these two women’s different personalities affect how they support one another, or fail to?
6. Coles describes the unstable families of numerous characters. Damian, Iris, and Olive all have neglectful or absent fathers. In contrast, we know that Calv’s mother tried to teach him to be a kind man (381). How does knowing a character’s family history influence your interpretation of them and their actions? How do the characters create their own families in the absence of traditional support systems?
7. In Jo’s perspective, John is a sociopath: “Jo believes John is incapable of genuine shame, guilt, grief or love, while Iris marinates in the mixture” (93). How does Jo’s description of John alter the understanding of John that we get through his own perspective? How does Coles complicate our understanding of the characters by showing them through multiple different perspectives?

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8. John says that “maybe [he] will let Ben take Iris home tonight” (141). Does John have as much power as he thinks he does? Does this change throughout the course of the novel? Where do you think John ends up, after the narrative ends?
9. The entire novel takes place over the course of one day. Do any of the characters change during this time? What is the effect of restricting the narrative to this time frame?
10. Olive reflects on the sealskin clothing and boots that her family made her. Through Olive, Coles questions the ethical implications of buying “Canadian premium leather boots made in China” instead of supporting the local seal hunt (250). How does the novel engage with the debate about the seal hunt in Canada today?
11. Olive remembers losing her mother’s fur coat and says that “maybe that was the start of this new downhill slide” (251). Why does Olive give the fur coat so much meaning?
12. Damian witnesses Olive’s assault from afar while working as a clerk at the hotel. This is one example in the novel where the close connections of a small city influence the narrative. Where else does the story unfolding in a smaller community influence what happens? How would the narrative change if it were set in a big city?
13. Describing Dot’s fractured identity, Coles writes: “Dot was operating under the misguided notion that she was still a white woman. And while she was indeed that, she had recently become other things that trumped that” (313). Dot is an example of how the intersecting identities of gender, race, and economic status all contribute to an individual’s social position. Where else do you see these layered, intersectional identities at play within the novel?
14. At the end of the novel, we don’t know what happens to Iris. Why does Coles end the novel in this state of suspense? Do any of the characters experience closure at the novel’s ending?