

### The Lauras Reading Group Questions

- 1) Belonging is a major theme in the novel: Alex doesn't fit in at school, Ma never managed to belong to a family in the traditional sense when she was growing up. What do you think constitutes a feeling of belonging? How important do you think it is for people to feel that they belong somewhere?
- 2) Hereditary traits and actions are one of the preoccupations of the novel. Ma uproots Alex and their family life in the middle of the night, just as her father did to her family. Part of the reason Alex doesn't want to identify with one gender is because to do so seems to involve choosing whether to be like Ma or like Dad. From reading the novel as a whole, do you think we are destined to be like our parents in some way, or can we break free of our childhood and upbringing?
- 3) Do you think Alex's mother was justified in taking Alex with her in the middle of the night? How would you have reacted if you were Alex?
- 4) Alex's androgyny isn't explicitly mentioned until page 43. How had you read the narrative voice up until this point? Had you identified Alex as male or female?
- 5) *'I felt like I'd never really seen her before, like I'd held onto a shorthand image of her that was one half how she'd looked when I was six and the other half the idea of "mother", which wasn't too different from the idea of "God" when you thought about it.'* Do you remember a time when your idea of your parents changed? Do you think most children identify their parents with some kind of deity?
- 6) Ma asks Alex 'What is home?' on page 35. How would you answer?
- 7) *'I was looking at the wrong end of things, not realizing that what he was trying to tell me was that we aren't always the heroes of our own stories.'* Who would you say is the 'hero' of *The Lauras*? Why?
- 8) Do you think the road trip is the only type of journey explored in the novel? What significance does the idea of destination hold for the characters?
- 9) What is the significance of time in the novel?
- 10) Why do you think Ma decides not to talk to Carla (her daughter)? What would you have done in her position?
- 11) Think about the title of the book, 'The Lauras' and the fact that Alex only ever signs the letters to Dad as 'me'. How important are names for us and for the people connected with us?
- 12) What did you think of the last line of the novel? Was it the ending you expected? Do you think we have control over our own fate or do you think we simply follow where life leads us?