

Readers' Group Questions for
The Flat and Weightless Tang-Filled Future, by Lyn Fairchild Hawks

These questions can guide your book group discussion. Feel free to share questions with me that you develop and that inspired good exchanges for your group.

“By the Water”:

- How would you describe Martin’s supervision of his sons at the beach?
- What does Martin’s point of view in the first two pages tell you about how he sees the world?
- The presence of the elderly lady reveals has a certain effect. What more do you learn about each character through her presence? What does the incident at the pool reveal about Jeremiah and Martin?
- What reasons does Martin directly state regarding his divorce? Do you have any theories to add to the reasons?
- We never see Marjorie, but we know certain details about her through Martin’s lens. Does this information change your perception of Martin or the boys?
- The three boys are different personalities. What role does each play in the family unit?
- Why does Stephen Alex disappear?
- In the water, what does Stephen Alex tell his father? What does Martin discover about himself?
- How do you feel about Martin at the end, as opposed to how you felt about him during other parts of the story?

“My Grandma is a Racist”:

- What do Sunny and Grandma’s political fights tell you about them as individuals? As parents?
- What does Wendy know of Cindy’s home life? How do their upbringings compare?
- What kind of relationship do Sunny and Wendy have? Grandma and Wendy?
- A ten year-old’s point of view can be authentic and not pull any punches, and it also can be misguided and limited. Where do you see great honesty and truth-telling, and where do you see ignorance and blindness?
- How does Wendy see herself in the first several pages of the story, before she meets Shaye, and in the early days of their friendship?
- Why does tragedy strike Wendy?
- What do you learn about Sunny when Wendy reaches out to her for help?
- What do the glimpses of Adeeb and his family—and the incident in the pool—tell us about what Wendy is learning?
- How does Wendy’s perception of herself change? By the end of the story, what does she know about herself?
- If Wendy’s tragedy is the main event, why is “My Grandma is a Racist” the title of the story?
- What do you think will happen to Wendy next?

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“3.0”

- Which version of Elisabeth’s life do you want for her? Why?
- Can you characterize Elisabeth with core traits common to all three versions of her life, or is she a completely different person in each version?
- What has the narrator discovered by revisiting the actual life—version 1.0—and then inventing two lives for Elisabeth—2.0 and 3.0?
- Is the narrator part of 3.0, or would you characterize the version that her life is in another way? How would you describe this “evolution of the species”?
- What does the reference to versions (1.0, 2.0, 3.0, as in software and technology) tell you about the narrator and the era she lives in?
- How do you explain the narrator’s choice at the end of the story?

“Retrograde”:

- Why do you think Freda and Neal are dating? What draws them together?
- The story is told from both characters’ points of view. Do you find yourself picking a side? Do you find one’s point of view more reliable than the other’s? Who would you rather be friends with?
- Why can’t they move forward as a couple?
- How does the incident in the beach parking lot reveal certain sides of Freda’s and Neal’s personality?
- Why did Neal write the list? How does Freda interpret it?
- How does Neal’s finding of a new girlfriend reveal more about both him and Freda as individuals?
- What does the title of the story mean?

“Midrift”:

- When the story opens, we see Antoniette’s focus on the architecture of the school and a student walking outside the school. How do these details establish the setting?
- Why does the student interest Antoniette so much?
- Describe the interactions Antoniette has with the school counselor and secretary. What does Antoniette take away from these conversations that further develops her theories about the school?
- Is Antoniette’s view of the school reliable? How do you know?
- What does the incident with the letters tell you about the school community? About the life of girls at the school?
- What kind of a relationship does Antoniette have with Monique?
- Antoniette speaks often to her mother who has passed away. What do we learn about Antoniette’s past, her beliefs, and her vision for the future from these conversations?
- What does Antoniette’s request of the principal say about her? What does the

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- principal's response say about him?
- What other recourse does Antoinette have in this situation? What would you do as a parent?
- Why doesn't Monique take advantage of the opportunity her mother gets for her?
- How can you tell this story is set in the first few years of the twenty-first century?
- What does the title mean?

"Serendipity":

- What is unique about Andy's point of view? How does he experience other people, food, and life in general?
- What does his relationship with Franklin show us about both of their personalities?
- How would you describe Andy and Elsa's relationship?
- What does Franklin's trouble reveal about Andy, Elsa, and Deanne?
- What are the pros and cons of Andy's idea for the Spring Valley lesson?
- Is the outcome of the lesson what Andy imagined?
- Is Elsa's decision a surprise? Why or why not?
- Why does Andy return to his computer at the end of the story?
- What does the title of the story mean?

"The Flat and Weightless Tang-Filled Future":

- How does Ronalda view her life? What would make Ronalda's life better?
- What do you know about Ronalda's background, before she and her husband moved here?
- Compare how Ronalda and Diane approach the following people and situations: Bradford, Kenny, husbands, and books. How would you characterize Diane's view of life?
- Why are Ronalda and Diane friends?
- It's 1976, Southern suburbia. How does the setting seem to fit and not fit Ronalda? How does the setting seem to fit and not fit Diane?
- We never meet Ronalda's husband, but we hear about him from other characters. What do you know about him?
- How does Ronalda's interaction with Kenny reveal the family's situation?
- Why does Ronalda run through the sprinklers with the girls? How does what happens at the end of that moment with them show us something about Ronalda?
- What does Ronalda discover by the close of the story?
- Explain her reaction to this discovery. Why does Ronalda make the changes in the bedroom?
- What other choices does Ronalda have? Do you understand or critique her choices?

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Questions for All Stories

- One reviewer has characterized this collection of stories as linked by the theme, “No good deed goes unpunished.” Do you find this interpretation true for any of the stories?
- What do certain stories say about the status of women? In what ways do women find and take their power, and in what ways do women suffer from oppression?
- What do certain stories say about the relationships between men and women? About dating, marriage, and divorce?
- How do stories present race and race relations?
- What perspectives do stories offer on childrearing and parenting?
- Are any of these stories a portrait of a situation, a type of lens on a situation, or a rant about a situation?
- How does the title of the collection apply to every story?