



DIANA LIVELY IS FALLING DOWN

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Subject: Motherhood/Marriage/
Gender/Loss/Environment (Fiction)

Summary: Diana Lively—a talented British architect who builds doll-houses so she can tend to the needs of her three children and demanding husband—finds her world turned upside down when an American entrepreneur invites her family to live in Arizona for a year.

“Diana Lively is *Falling Down* is a real pick-me-up. One British woman crosses the pond to find herself a fish-out-of-water—only to realize that for the first time in her life, she can stand on her own two feet. Filled with characters who make you laugh out loud even as they break your heart, this is a funny, warm, inventive, original book.” —**Jodi Picoult, author of *Vanishing Acts* and *My Sister’s Keeper***

“Filled with exceptional characterization, Curran’s novel gently reminds readers that fantasy has a place in everyone’s life. . . . This is a gem.” —**BOOKLIST, starred review**

“Brilliant, touching and funny as hell.”—**Carlos Eire, 2003 National Book Award Winner for *Waiting for Snow in Havana*.**

Sheila Curran is a writer, mother and faculty wife who lives in Tallahassee, Florida. Her experience as a trailing spouse in Oxford, England, and Phoenix, Arizona, provided the backdrop for this novel.

Topics to Consider

1. In the first chapter, when Ted shows Wally the picture of the knight Gawain, whose compassionate impulse freed his wife from a spell, Wally says, almost to himself, “Kind of about faith, if you think about it.” Later, when he and Diana picnic on the land overlooking the Dreamy Draw, they discuss their somewhat fragile understanding of the supernatural. What do they mean by faith, and what role does it play in explaining the behaviors of the characters? In the end, would you say Wally’s faith was warranted or not?
2. How do you explain Audrey’s attachment to the idea that her mother and she have Native American blood? Is it connected to her desire to return the world to a more innocent state, wherein mother nature is respected? Do other characters romanticize the past, and if so, are they fools or heroes for doing so?
3. Humphrey’s mannerisms and interests are very feminine, from his devotion to Martha Stewart to the nurturing that he showers on Diana and Audrey. Is his sexuality, as it plays out at the end, believable? If so, do you think such a character would be possible in another era, before the push for gender equality in contemporary life? If your child were like Humphrey, would you encourage his nurturing traits, or fear for his emotional survival?
4. What does motherhood mean for the various characters in the novel? For example, how does Wally’s reverence for his own mother translate to his relationship with Mary Kate and her alcoholism? For Diana, how does her sense of what children need from parents play into her relationship with Ted? Is Mary Kate’s dramatic choice an act of love or selfishness? Is it forgiveable?
5. What role does guilt play in motivating the characters’ actions? How does it operate as both a negative and positive force for them?
6. What is the author’s attitude towards fantasy? Is it simply escapist in nature, providing a means of escape from the more difficult parts of life, or does it inspire the characters to do things they previously felt were impossible? For example, how does William’s fantasy that Johnny is his father help to keep alive Wally’s suspicion that his wife has reached out from death to give him a message? How does Wally’s fantasy of the perfect theme park both blind him to certain facts and simultaneously allow him to triumph over Ted’s sabotage?