

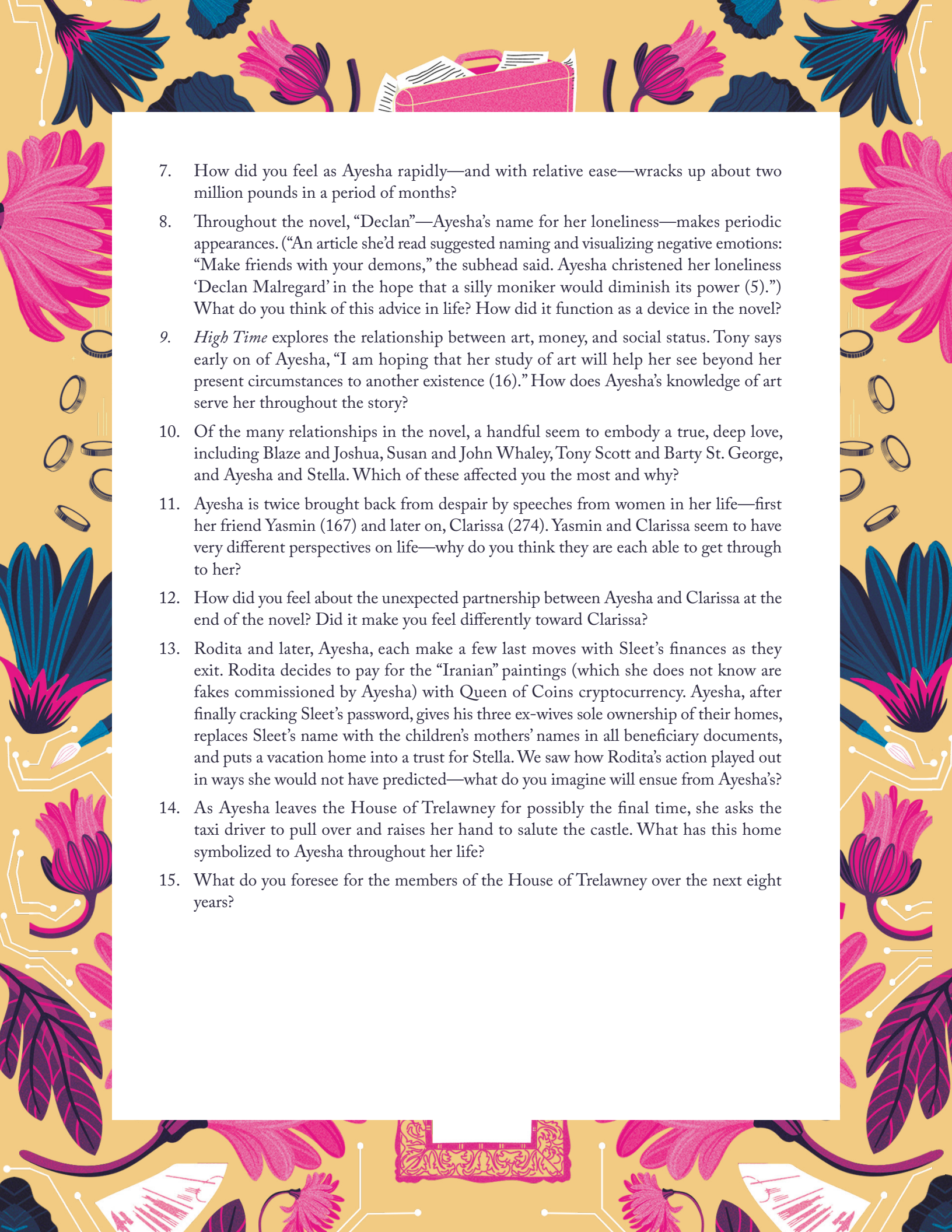


HIGH TIME

READING GROUP GUIDE

Eight years have passed since we first met the eccentric Trelawney family, with Hannah Rothschild's *House of Trelawney*. And whether you are a fan already or meeting this unforgettable family for the first time, we know your book club will devour this delicious story of madness, mayhem, and mischief run amok. Here are some questions to enhance your group's conversation.

1. Right away, we learn that "to give her life more substance and her marriage more gravitas, Ayesha has created a narrative in which she was the heroine and her husband the misunderstood hero. They were, so the story went, injured people healed by mutual love (3)." How do the narratives we construct about our lives serve us and in what ways do they have the potential to harm?
2. Which details of Sleet's characterization did you find the most amusing? (His constant consultation of *Taste and Refinement* magazine comes to mind.) Which did you find the most loathsome? Did his character bring to mind any real-life figures?
3. If you have read *House of Trelawney*, in what ways have things changed for the Trelawney family since you met them last? In what ways have things remained the same?
4. This story takes place in the midst of seismic world events, in particular the Brexit referendum and the 2016 election. What role does that backdrop play in the novel? How do these events affect (or not affect) the Trelawney family, and why?
5. Often throughout the novel, the consequences of characters' actions ripple out in unexpected ways. In one significant example, Sleet shorts Whaley Precision Engineering's stock and peddles misinformation causing the company to plummet. John Whaley kills himself due to the shame, and Sleet appears to feel nothing. How much of the blame for that tragic death does Sleet deserve? What about Joshua and Blaze? Rodita? Ayesha? How do you think the various characters in *High Time* disabuse themselves of guilt for this and other misdeeds?
6. Sleet justifies his quest for money over intellectual pursuits by saying, "The creation of wealth is a more useful way of spending life than the pursuit of knowledge. I make money for other people, I fill their pension funds, I provide for their families, enable their old age. You stuff your brain with useless facts (150)." How would you respond?

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7. How did you feel as Ayesha rapidly—and with relative ease—wracks up about two million pounds in a period of months?
 8. Throughout the novel, “Declan”—Ayesha’s name for her loneliness—makes periodic appearances. (“An article she’d read suggested naming and visualizing negative emotions: “Make friends with your demons,” the subhead said. Ayesha christened her loneliness ‘Declan Malregard’ in the hope that a silly moniker would diminish its power (5).”) What do you think of this advice in life? How did it function as a device in the novel?
 9. *High Time* explores the relationship between art, money, and social status. Tony says early on of Ayesha, “I am hoping that her study of art will help her see beyond her present circumstances to another existence (16).” How does Ayesha’s knowledge of art serve her throughout the story?
 10. Of the many relationships in the novel, a handful seem to embody a true, deep love, including Blaze and Joshua, Susan and John Whaley, Tony Scott and Barty St. George, and Ayesha and Stella. Which of these affected you the most and why?
 11. Ayesha is twice brought back from despair by speeches from women in her life—first her friend Yasmin (167) and later on, Clarissa (274). Yasmin and Clarissa seem to have very different perspectives on life—why do you think they are each able to get through to her?
 12. How did you feel about the unexpected partnership between Ayesha and Clarissa at the end of the novel? Did it make you feel differently toward Clarissa?
 13. Rodita and later, Ayesha, each make a few last moves with Sleet’s finances as they exit. Rodita decides to pay for the “Iranian” paintings (which she does not know are fakes commissioned by Ayesha) with Queen of Coins cryptocurrency. Ayesha, after finally cracking Sleet’s password, gives his three ex-wives sole ownership of their homes, replaces Sleet’s name with the children’s mothers’ names in all beneficiary documents, and puts a vacation home into a trust for Stella. We saw how Rodita’s action played out in ways she would not have predicted—what do you imagine will ensue from Ayesha’s?
 14. As Ayesha leaves the House of Trelawney for possibly the final time, she asks the taxi driver to pull over and raises her hand to salute the castle. What has this home symbolized to Ayesha throughout her life?
 15. What do you foresee for the members of the House of Trelawney over the next eight years?