

## BOOK CLUB NOTES

# All Our HIDDEN GIFTS

CAROLINE O'DONOGHUE



FOR READERS AGED 14+  
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PAPERBACK

*I'll give up the tarot readings. I'll apologize to Lily. But Lily doesn't come to school on Monday. Or Tuesday. It's not until Wednesday that the police show up.*

Maeve Chambers doesn't have much going for her. Not only does she feel like the sole idiot in a family of geniuses, she managed to drive away her best friend Lily a year ago. But when she finds a pack of dusty old tarot cards at school, and begins to give scarily accurate readings to the girls in her class, she realises she's found her gift at last. Things are looking up – until she discovers a strange card in the deck that definitely shouldn't be there. And two days after she convinces her ex-best friend to have a reading, Lily disappears.

Can Maeve, her new friend Fiona and Lily's brother Roe find her? And will their special talents be enough to bring Lily back, before she's gone for good?

"This YA debut from Caroline O'Donoghue knocked me sideways. About tarot, the complexity of friendship & so much more besides. So gripping, so intriguing, so layered and lovely and creepy – *All Our Hidden Gifts* feels like a book that should have always existed. I'm glad it does"

– Kiran Millwood Hargrave

"Fiercely, furiously good."

– Melinda Salisbury

"*All Our Hidden Gifts* has the most authentic teenage voice I've read in ages. It's spellbinding in its ability to tap into teen issues such as friendship power battles, self-esteem, blooming romance, and social justice and then sprinkles it with magic.

I was utterly bewitched, and know I would've read this book a thousand times when I was young."

– Holly Bourne



## Discussion Questions

1. What did you know about tarot before reading *All Our Hidden Gifts*? What did you learn? What's your personal opinion on tarot and the occult and why?
2. “*Dad is the youngest in his family, too, so he tends to have a bit more sympathy than everyone else. But he was the one genius in a family of idiots, and I'm the one idiot in a family of geniuses. It's not exactly the same,*” (page 27). How does Maeve compare herself to her family? In what ways have Maeve's relationships with her parents and siblings contributed towards how she sees herself?
3. Discuss how friendship dynamics are explored in *All Our Hidden Gifts*, including why and how Maeve and Lily's friendship originally deteriorated, Maeve's connections with the other girls at school and her friendship with Fiona.
4. “*...Like I'm this tiny metal ball that is just racing around this giant thing, colliding with all these levers and bumpers and bits of machinery. Except the bumpers are all labelled things like 'dresses' and 'naked women' and 'Keanu Reeves'. And each time I hit something, it's proof of either one thing or another,*” (page 205). Roe uses the metaphor of a pinball machine to explain how he feels about his gender identity and the labels other people use around it. Do you agree with Roe's metaphor? How does *All Our Hidden Gifts* explore gender, sexuality and the experience of LGBTQ people?
5. How does Maeve's identity and sense of self grow and change? How and why do the events of the book and the relationships she forms shape her self-worth?
6. “*He wants it to look like an uneven fight. He wants to lose. This, I realize, is a PR exercise... I imagine the pieces in the paper, the segments on the radio, Aaron giving perfect soundbites to the press, the endless talk panels,*” (p289). Discuss the riot at the Cypress and how the event gets framed by the media afterwards. How and why was Aaron intending to utilise media bias to his advantage? Did it work?
7. Discuss how guilt affect various characters in the novel, and the actions they take. For example, Maeve's guilt over how she treated Lily; and Fionnuala with her sister Heaven.
8. How are real fundamentalist groups similar or different to The Children of Brigid? What differing perspectives on religion and spirituality does *All Our Hidden Gifts* present?
9. In a note to readers, author Caroline O'Donoghue says that of her core characters: “*Maeve will give you courage, Fiona will make you laugh, Roe will stay sensible, and Lily ... well, it's better you get to know Lily yourself. (If you can find her.)*” Do you agree with her descriptions? How do these four key characters complement each-other?
10. *All Our Hidden Gifts* is the first book in a series. What would you like to see in future books? Have you got any predictions for the characters?



## Q&A with Caroline O'Donoghue

**What's your 10 second elevator pitch for *All Our Hidden Gifts*?**

*All Our Hidden Gifts* is about a girl who finds a haunted set of tarot cards in her school and accidentally summons a demon to capture her ex-best friend. She also falls in love and makes new friends.

**How did you come up with the character of Maeve? What do you think makes her similar or different to other YA protagonists?**

When I started writing Maeve, I based a lot of her personality on how I felt when I was sixteen. I am the youngest of a big family, and often felt that my siblings were all much more charismatic, better looking, smarter or more popular than I was. I felt a bit lost in the shuffle, a bit of an afterthought, which I now know is a very normal thing for a youngest child to feel. I also really, really didn't 'get' school: I was good at English, and sometimes History, but everything else made absolutely no sense to me. I felt angry about it all the time. I didn't understand why I was constantly being judged on things that I clearly had no aptitude for: it felt like I was a squirrel being criticised for not being a chemical engineer.

So those were two things from my own life that went into Maeve, but she went on to become her own character. She's similar to a lot of YA protagonists in that she's an ordinary girl who great things are demanded from. I think what makes her different, though, is her flaws. She's hot-headed, she can be selfish and jealous. I've read some YA books where the heroine always keeps her cool, and Maeve is not that.

*All Our Hidden Gifts* has a lot to say about trying to find out your identity, and the parts of you that are and aren't defined by the people around you. Why did you decide to write about these issues, and why do you think they're important for young people to read about?

I firmly believe that you find out the most important things about yourself during times of crisis. And that's what these characters are going through. At the beginning of the book, Roe is beginning to discover new elements of his gender, but he's still trying to keep it as quiet as possible. But the more he realises that he only has one life to live, he starts to abandon the gender binary. He's stronger when he's following his instincts – everyone is, I think – and because he needs to be strong to get his sister back, his journey with gender is a central aspect of the story.

I also wanted a gender non-confirming romantic lead because I think a lot of romantic heroes that are aimed at young girls can be uber-masculine: the strong, brooding, hunter. Often the heroine is depicted as 'one of the boys', meaning a self-sufficient tomboy – but you rarely get a hero who is 'one of the girls'.

**Why did you decide to write for teens, and how did you work to get Maeve's voice and dialogue to feel genuine?**

I always knew I would write for teens eventually. I love reading YA, particularly supernatural YA. It was just a matter of finding the right time and right idea. As for Maeve's voice, I really don't think there's much of a difference between how teenagers think and how adults feel. The only real difference, I think, is that adults are better at numbing their more extreme emotions: passion or jealousy or anger.



They've learned to do it naturally, after years and years of being told to compromise, or to act more reasonably. When I sit down to write as Maeve, it's like the years of adult numbing goes away, and I'm right on the edge of every feeling. It's exhilarating, if a bit exhausting!

**What drew you to the world of tarot and the occult? Have you had your own tarot read?**

I love the tarot. I've been interested in it my whole life, but started learning it properly when I was about 25. I read my own tarot and for my friends a lot – lots of us practice it, so it's a lovely way to catch up after a long time of not seeing each other. It's not spooky at all: we just open a bottle of wine and deal the cards. It's very social, and a nice

way to care for one another. We'll often say: "Oh, hey, I see there's a lot of swords in your spread – are you sure everything is going ok for you?"

**What would you like readers to take away from *All Our Hidden Gifts*?**

I would love for them to buy their own tarot deck and learn to read them! There's some basic knowledge in the novel to get you started. Other than that, I just want them to enjoy the story. I would hate if anyone thought it was a big moral message book.

**Can you give us a teaser about what to expect from Book 2?**

We'll certainly be seeing more from Aaron and the Children of Brigid!



## About the Author

Caroline O'Donoghue is a journalist and author. She has published two adult novels, *Promising Young Women* and *Scenes of a Graphic Nature*, and is currently working on a collection of personal essays exploring her experiences of feminism and witchcraft. She has a regular column in *The Irish Examiner*, and has written for *The Irish Independent*, *Glamour*, *Buzzfeed* and *Vice*, among others. Caroline also hosts *Sentimental Garbage*, a podcast in which she reviews commercial women's fiction titles with other authors. *All Our Hidden Gifts* is her first novel for young adults. Visit Caroline on Twitter: @Czaroline

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