

Reading Group Guide for
Love's Sweet Beginning
by Ann Shorey

1. In the opening of the story, Cassie's uncle calls her useless. As the novel progresses, she can't forget his unkind label. Words leave scars. Can you remember being called names? How did they make you feel? Do they still sting?
2. Cassie is determined to follow the fifth commandment: *Honor thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee*. How can we follow this commandment today? Do you have a special way of honoring your parents, or parent, as the case may be?
3. Three years have passed since the War Between the States ended, but Eliza Bingham, Cassie's mother, still gives every appearance of being a wilting Southern belle. She uses their family's losses as a reason to compel others to step in and care for her. Although circumstances today are quite different, have you ever known a person like Eliza?
4. In today's world, we've recently seen a huge economic downturn. With jobs disappearing, many families have lost the income of a major breadwinner, which sometimes thrusts unskilled family members into the job market. Do you see a parallel with Cassie's experience? Have you ever known anyone who faced such a situation?
5. Cassie's initial venture into employment results in her being fired on her first day. Can you relate to how she felt? Have you or anyone close to you ever been fired? What did you think of Cassie's reaction?
6. Early in the story, a freed slave comes to Jacob to ask for a job. At this time in history, there were many unemployed former slaves in this country. How did Jacob's decision affect the way you felt about his character? Have you ever made a similar decision?
7. Jacob West is a respected storekeeper in Noble Springs, but as the novel progresses we begin to suspect there's a dark side to his past. How long do you think it should take for someone to live down a bad reputation? A year? Five years? More?

8. When Cassie and Eliza are separated by distance for the first time, one would think Cassie would be happy to be free of her mother's sometimes exasperating presence. Instead, Cassie is lonely. Can you recall a time when you, or someone you know, faced a similar situation?
9. In one part of the story, Reverend French says, "Misapplied scripture has been the cause of far too much unhappiness in our world." Do you agree or disagree? Can you give examples to support your opinion?
10. Of all the characters who experienced change by the end of the novel, which one most impressed you? Why did you choose this character?



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