

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Language of Flowers

A romance short story by C.R. Lang

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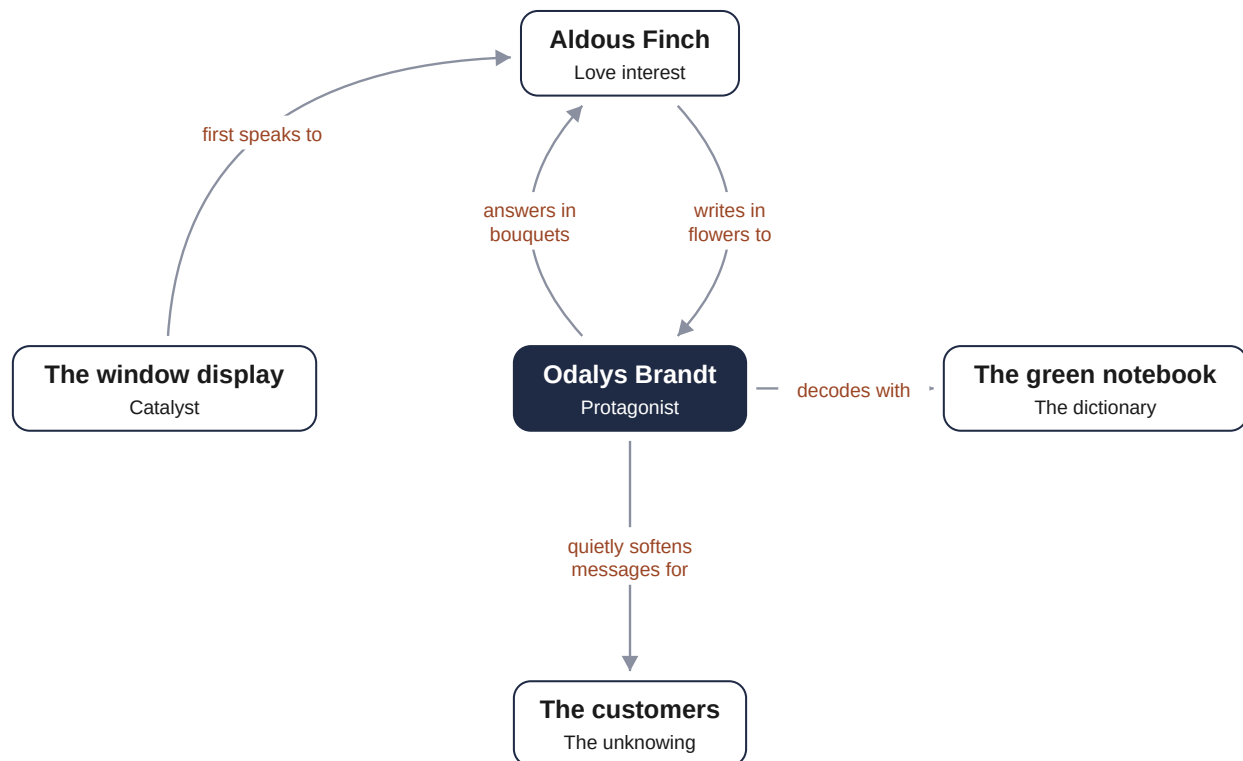
About the story

A florist fluent in the Victorian language of flowers receives weekly orders from a mysterious customer whose bouquets are messages. She answers in kind, and a courtship unfolds entirely in stems and petals.

This guide assumes everyone has finished the story, so it discusses the ending.

Character map

The main character is in the dark box. Arrows show who acts on whom.



Who's who

Odalys Brandt (Protagonist). Has run Thistle & Rue for eleven years and keeps her own additions to the flower dictionary.

Aldous Finch (Love interest). Works at the botanical archive. Read the language for twenty years with no one to say it to.

The green notebook (The dictionary). Odalys's private grammar of flowers, in pencil.

The customers (The unknowing). People who say things with flowers without knowing it.

The window display (Catalyst). Dried lavender and snowdrops for a customer's mother. Aldous read it and knew.

Themes to look for

Hidden language. The Victorians used flowers for ‘things that could not be said aloud.’

Privacy and respect. Odalys won’t trace him, because that would be ‘reading someone’s mail.’

Loneliness. Rue: ‘I have been alone for a long time and I am not sure I remember how to stop.’

Being understood. ‘There is someone who is saying something, and she means it.’

Discussion questions

- 1 Odalys tucks kinder flowers into customers’ bouquets without telling them. Is that kind, or a little presumptuous?
- 2 What made Mr. Finch’s first order impossible to dismiss as chance?
- 3 Which exchange of flowers moved you most, and why?
- 4 The four-leaf clover card says ‘be mine’ and also ‘I’m afraid.’ Why include both?
- 5 Why does Odalys refuse to trace the account even though she could? Would you have?
- 6 Aldous fell for Odalys after reading a window display meant for someone else’s grief. What does that say about him?
- 7 Odalys’s new entry for rue means ‘stay.’ Why is it fitting that the story ends with her adding to the dictionary?
- 8 Is there a ‘secret language’ you share with someone: a phrase, a gesture, a gift?

Craft corner

For writers in the group: two ways to look at how the story is built.

Symbolism. Each flower carries a meaning. How does the story let objects do the talking?

Subtext. Most of the courtship happens without a spoken word. Where is the real conversation happening?

Try this together

Using the flowers named in the story (or a simple flower-meaning list), have each person compose a three-stem ‘bouquet’ message for someone in their life. Trade and decode.

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