



# MIDNIGHT INK

## BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

### *Murder at the Portland Variety*

1. During the course of the book various secrets are revealed about the character of Libby Seale. How did each piece of knowledge affect your feelings about her? Was your opinion of Libby Seale changed by the end of the book from your initial impression of her?
2. By the end of the book Peter and Libby have decided that they cannot pursue a romantic relationship. Do you think they made the right decision?
3. How does the solution of Vera's murder parallel the secrets uncovered about Libby's own life? How does the soul-searching Libby has undergone in the course of the novel change her attitude when confronting Vera's murderer?
4. Many of the characters in the novel reflect upon the nature of marriage. What are some of the types of matches/marriages described in the course of the book? Do you think certain themes regarding marriage emerge?
5. Marriages in the novel are shown leading to consequences and results both good and bad. In what ways has the institution of marriage changed since 1894? In what ways is it the same today?
6. The late 19th century was a time of great movement of Americans Westward. What does the city of Portland represent for the main characters in the book: Libby, Peter, Vera, Gerald, McKennock?
7. America is often described as a great melting pot. How many different ethnic and religious backgrounds can you find in the novel? Are there any types of people you were surprised to find in the American West?
8. How did you feel about Mrs. Crowther's decision at the end of the novel? Do you think she is representative of the general populace of Portland when it comes to her opinions on the White Slave Trade?
9. Walford McKennock is in some ways the kind of ruthless businessman found in every place in every era. Do you think the arguments he presents to Peter near the end of the novel about the price of progress and urban growth make sense? Do you feel he had been adequately punished for his actions by the close of the book?
10. The changing roles of women, and the career paths available to them, form a theme in the novel. Do you think Libby works to support herself purely out of

need, or out of choice and temperament as well? What about Vera, May, Madame Josephine, Anna Englund, Hatty or any of the other women in the book? What are the attitudes expressed about these different career choices?

11. In 1894, the Vaudeville theatre circuit was enormously popular throughout America. Was Libby's job at the theatre a catalyst for other changes in her life? How might her personality be different if she had not gotten this job upon arriving in Portland?

12. How did Portland in 1894, as shown in the novel, match your preconceptions of life in "the Old West"? In what ways did it surprise you? Do you think this book could take place in a different location and remain the same?

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