

## ***Reading Group Questions Books 9 & 10***

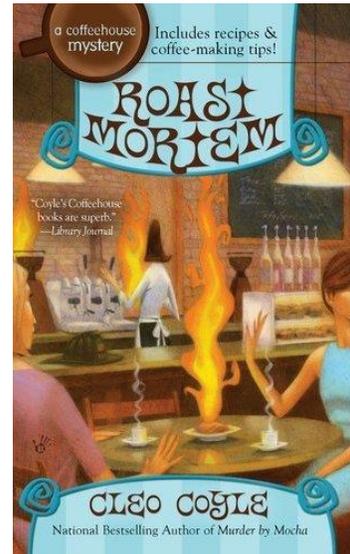
The following questions were designed to help lead a reading group through the events in this book's narrative from beginning to end. Ideas are introduced to help spark discussion and encourage the sharing of thoughts and opinions. Feel free to skip any of these questions or add your own.

### **Roast Mortem by Cleo Coyle**

#### **Coffeehouse Mystery #9**

**Story Summary:** Arson leads to murder when Clare investigates the torching of a friend's cafe. As she doggedly digs for the truth, firefighters begin to die in suspicious ways and soon someone is threatening to extinguish Clare. Recipes include firehouse favorites.

To see many of these recipes, [click here](#).



1. ***Roast Mortem*** opens in the mind of an arsonist, and a culinary clue to the killer's identity appears in the same scene. This item reappeared throughout the story, in the hands of different characters. What was the item?
2. What did you think of the character Madame? Enzo is one of the many men from Madame's past. Did you find this elderly shop-owner and artist intriguing? Does Enzo make you curious about what other men might lurk in Madame's past?
3. Enzo's café name is Lucia? Where did the name come from? What did you think of his daughter Lucia? Were you suspicious of her?
4. Mrs. Quadrelli made a minor appearance but is a very memorable character. Did you like her? Did she infuriate you? Was there a reason to put her on the suspect list?
5. What was your first impression of Fire Captain Michael Quinn? Were you as curious as Clare Cosi about the longstanding grudge between him and her love interest, Police Detective Mike Quinn?
6. The author uses fire as a metaphor. Let's look at how. After the fire is put out, Clare Cosi speaks with Captain Michael Quinn, wanting to know more about how the fire may have

started. Was it arson or not? Captain Quinn describes a “fire triangle” to her. What is a fire triangle? (See page 40 for the definition.) The fire triangle comes up again. Where? (Hint: see page 254.) The author also uses fire in the book’s opening epigram: “Love is a fire. But whether it is going to warm your hearth or burn down your house, you can never tell.” How was that idea echoed in the story of *Roast Mortem*?

7. Like Enzo, Clare is an artist who went into the coffee trade. At one point in the book, she tells the reader that if she were going to paint the two Quinn cousins one would be cool blue and the other raging red. “I’d always seen those men as primary colors,” Clare says, “each was singular in his own characteristics; neither able to change the other...and when they mix, the shade is violence...” What do you think of Clare’s observation?

8. Let’s talk about the two Quinns in *Roast Mortem*. One is the patient, caring man whom Clare loves. The other is an impulsive and aggressive womanizer—the cousin of the first. But are there ways these battling Quinns are similar? Does Captain Michael Quinn have good qualities? Is there a dark side to Detective Mike Quinn?

9. On page 98, Clare talks about the issue of children being saddled with parental aspirations. Was Clare’s boyfriend Mike Quinn expected to be something other than a police detective? What story does he tell that changes his career path at a young age? By the end of the book, we know that this was not the full story of the grudge between Mike and Michael. But the idea of a parent (or parental figure) saddling a child with heavy expectations does come up again in the book. (Hint: See page 250.) When Clare sits down in the back of the pub with Michael Quinn, what truth does Clare help the fire captain realize about his little brother, Kevin? Why is it so important to Clare for him to realize this? The idea of parental expectation comes up again in the course of the story, between Enzo and his daughter, Lucia. What did Enzo want his daughter to become? Why couldn’t she fulfill his expectations? (Hint on page 225.) Did this help you better understand Lucia’s attitude toward her father and his art?

10. What did you think of James Noonan? James has a talent for cooking, but he left the restaurant business. His passion and “fire” was for firefighting, why? Did you think his attitude toward his work hurt his marriage? Would you conclude James got married too young? Or that he married the wrong woman? When you consider James Noonan’s situation, does it help you better understand Captain Michael Quinn’s choice of a lone wolf life?

11. When Clare teaches the firefighters in Michael Quinn’s firehouse how to use the donated espresso machine, we are not only introduced to a crew of firefighters, we’re introduced to colorful characters who might be suspects. Who did you like in the group? What did you think of Bigsby Brewer? Did you suspect any of the men in this firehouse of setting the firebomb in Enzo’s shop? Why?

12. Were you surprised to learn about Oat Crowley's secret relationship? What did you think when you learned about it?
13. Late in the book, the two Quinn cousins come to blows in a physical confrontation. Who do you feel started the fight? Why? Did it trouble you that the FDNY stood behind their Captain, while Detective Quinn was actually arrested by his fellow NYPD officers?
14. What did you think of Clare's ex-husband Matt? This is a character who has changed over the years, but Clare's affection for him and his for her remains strong. Do you think their marriage might have worked had Clare persevered, or if Matt changed his ways?
15. In ***Roast Mortem***, references were made to the classic Alfred Hitchcock film *Strangers on a Train*. Are any of you familiar with that film? Was there a parallel in the plot of the movie and this novel's mystery plotline? Was this idea reflected in any other plotline?
16. By the climax, Clare has solved two mysteries. Did the convergence of the twin storylines surprise you, or did you see that twist coming?
17. In the afterward (page 315), the author reveals part of the inspiration for this story. Were you aware of this issue? Did ***Roast Mortem*** give you a new appreciation for the risks firefighters take and/or the weight of loss to a firehouse when one or more members die?
18. In the Epilogue, Clare admires Enzo's restored mural. Part of the mural is described as a self-portrait with a dark doppelganger. What is a doppelganger? Why do you think the author brought up the idea of a dark doppelganger at the end of the book? (As a follow up: Does that also explain why the author chose to give the cousins the same name?) Do you have a doppelganger in your own life? Or are you ever surprised to find yourself switching personalities so drastically that you feel like you've become your own dark twin?
19. Detective Mike Quinn was less than honest with Clare throughout this story. Do you think this may have jeopardized his relationship with Clare? Did the ending scene in the hospital repair the damage done by Mike Quinn's silent dishonesty?
20. ***Roast Mortem*** is also a culinary mystery. In one scene, the morning after she realized Mike Quinn withheld information from her, Clare bakes up a furious storm—a Dutch Baby pancake, a pan of brownies, and a dozen cinnamon-sugar doughnut muffins, all in quick succession. "Stress always did this to me," she says, "I had to bake..." What are some of the reasons Clare gives (on pages 110 and 111) for finding cooking therapeutic? Though Clare's behavior is a bit manic, she does show insight into why she's doing it. Do you have hobbies,

sports, or other activities that you find therapeutic? Like Clare, have you ever stopped to consider *why* they make you feel better? Share with the group—some of us may try it ourselves!

21. ***Roast Mortem*** also takes you to a bake sale in Union Square that features a stand selling Elvis-inspired baked goods, and another that caramelizes the tops of crème brûlees with a blowtorch. Would you have enjoyed going to this bake sale? What's your favorite bake sale goodie? Was there any food or drink mentioned in the book that had you salivating for a taste? What about the recipe section? Will you be trying any of the recipes?

22. The next book in the series, ***Murder by Mocha***, has a foodie angle, too—chocolate. Clare Cosi agrees to provide top-quality Village Blend beans for an aphrodisiac drink called *Mocha Magic*. But chocolate and coffee lead to a perplexing murder and a shocking secret in Madame's past. Are you interested in reading the next book in the Coffeehouse Mystery series?

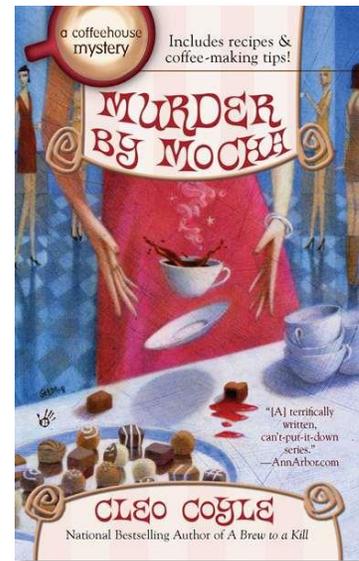
**Final Note:** Cleo Coyle enjoys hearing from readers. She invites you to post to her on her "Coffee Talk" message board (in the upper right column) of her online coffeehouse at [www.CoffeehouseMystery.com](http://www.CoffeehouseMystery.com) or write to her at [CoffeehouseMystery@gmail.com](mailto:CoffeehouseMystery@gmail.com).

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### **Murder by Mocha by Cleo Coyle** **Coffeehouse Mystery #10**

**Story Summary:** Can coffee and chocolate heat up your love life? For Clare Cosi, the answer is murder. Village Blend beans are being used to create *Mocha Magic*, a coffee laced with an herbal aphrodisiac, to be sold exclusively on Aphrodite's Village, a popular online community for women. But at the product's launch party, one of Aphrodite's "sisters" is killed. It appears someone wants control of the coffee's secret formula—and will to kill to get it. Includes recipes for chocolate cookies, cakes, and candies. *To see many of these recipes, [click here](#).*



1. The prologue of **Murder by Mocha** takes place on a high railroad bridge, where an unknown character is faking a suicide. What do we learn about this person and this person's state of mind? Have you ever felt like you wanted to disappear and start over somewhere else?
2. Mocha Magic is marketed as a safe, all-natural aphrodisiac. But the product is made with Village Blend beans, and Clare fears her coffeehouse's reputation will suffer if it's a dud. Do you think aphrodisiacs really work? If you had the chance to try it out for yourself or give it to someone else, would you? Tell us what *you* would do with Mocha Magic.
3. Clare and her employer (her former mother-in-law, Madame Dreyfus Allegro-Dubois), enjoy a close relationship that is tested by the arrival Madame's old friend Alicia Bower. Why doesn't Clare warm to this woman? Is Clare jealous, or does she have good reason to distrust Alicia?

4. Alicia Bower drags Clare into a hunt for a vanishing corpse. Considering their contentious relationship, should Clare have gotten involved in the first place? Does her love and respect for Madame make a difference?
5. There are two men in Clare's life: Matteo Allegro, who is her ex-husband; and Detective Mike Quinn, who has strong feelings for her. Clare demonstrates her passion for Mike at the Rockefeller Center party, but we also see Clare sharing important things with her ex-husband, their coffee business and the raising of their daughter, Joy. Which man do you feel Clare should be with and why?
6. At Aphrodite's Temple, the notion of a kinder, gentler workplace is turned on its head. The company's executives appear to be at each other's throats—and plotting behind their backs. Have you witnessed workplace rivalries, big or small? Were you ever part of one? The dispute at the Temple leads to violence. How did yours turn out?
7. Some of the events that take place at the Rockefeller Center Loft and Garden are caught on security camera. Unfortunately for Clare, this includes catching her and her boyfriend in an intimate moment. Security cameras (and cell phone cameras) have become ubiquitous; sometimes it seems we are all on camera. Do you think this constant surveillance is a wise precaution, or are the lenses becoming too intrusive and invading our privacy? Did you notice the author's use of description in the Rock Center lobby artwork and balcony skyline to amplify this idea of being watched?
8. After finding the murder victim at the Rock Center party, Clare is distraught. At the close of Chapter Nineteen, Detective Lori Soles says: *"Sorry, Cosi. When bad guys win, I know it's hard to take. But that's the world we live in. Answers never come easy, and you can't expect miracles."* Do you agree with Lori? Or do you agree with Clare when she silently replies with these words: *"But I did expect miracles. I expected them because I saw them every day. My daughter was a miracle; Mike was a miracle; love was a miracle; and so was life itself."* Is Clare a Pollyanna? Or is she buoyed by a sense of faith? Who do you sound more like in your daily life: Lori or Clare? Is that okay with you? What are the drawbacks to either outlook?
9. In her hunt for a vanishing corpse, Clare confronts a "Greek god" at the International Confectioners' Expo, where candy and snack companies have set up booths to show off their product lines. Have you ever attended a professional trade show? Did Clare's convention adventure give you a laugh or a scare—or both?
10. Clare brings Sergeant Emmanuel Franco to the Confectioners' show for backup. She also uses the trip as an opportunity to interview her prospective son-in-law. Do you think Franco

passed the “audition?” Do you believe he would make a good match for Clare’s daughter Joy or not? How do you think Matt would see such a union?

11. Several revelations about Madame’s past are exposed in this book. Were you shocked to learn the facts? Did your opinion of Madame change after the details about her arrest decades ago was revealed?

12. In a discussion with Clare over the ingredients in Mocha Magic, Matt displays some keen pharmacological knowledge. Where do you think he got that information? What are your thoughts on Matt’s past and his potential for a relapse?

13. During the book’s climax, Clare confronts both the killer and the killer’s main target. After learning the facts, do your sympathies lie with the victim or the murderer? Do you feel some compassion for the killer, or were the murderer’s action too vile to elicit your sympathies?

14. In the epilogue, Mike tells Clare the reason Madame’s old flame took days to reveal himself to her. Did you understand what he meant?

15. Clare is worried about moving too quickly with Mike. She’s not yet ready for a diamond ring from him. Why do you think she’s so reluctant to move quickly? Take another look at the dream Clare has in Chapter Twenty. Do elements of the dream tell you more about Clare’s fears? Like Madame’s old flame, is Clare tough when it comes to seeking justice but lacking nerve when it comes to taking a second chance in marriage?

16. The next book in the Coffeehouse Mystery series, ***A Brew to a Kill***, introduces a major change in the lives of Clare and Mike. Are you interested in reading it?

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