

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At the beginning of the book, Lina allows her nickname— “Stone Cold Healer”—to define her in many ways. She believes tucking away her feelings makes her a better medic and a better soldier. She justifies her approach as a way to be viewed as “equal” to the men in her unit. Is she right to adopt this persona to survive? How does this affect her later, when she’s forced to face her actions on the battlefield?
2. Lina arrives in Puerto Rico filled with despair and a sense of failure. She believes that, by returning home, she is letting down everyone who believed that sending her to Florida would put her on a path to greatness. How does this view change over time? How does her family change Lina’s view on her return?
3. Once Lina meets Eli, she is faced with a very different approach following a tragedy on the battlefield. How does this affect her? How does her relationship with Eli affect her own choices about managing the pain from her memories in Iraq?
4. The theme of fate is often discussed in Mami’s famous quote: “If only things went the way they were supposed to go.” What does this mean to you? How does its meaning evolve for Lina throughout the story?
5. Dolores’s presence comes as a big surprise to Lina. Not only was she initially unaware that her cousin was living at her parents’ home, but she knew very little about her. Why do you think the family chose not to tell Lina about Dolores’s circumstances early on? How does Dolores’s presence in Lina’s life alter the course of her future and how she sees the world?
6. Lina struggles with the stark contrast of identifying as a healer and the realities of being a soldier in wartime. After reflecting upon everything that happened that day on the battlefield, do you think her guilt is misplaced? Why or why not?
7. At one point, when Lina really begins to spiral, she convinces herself that she needs to tuck the memories further in and forget about what happened in Iraq in order to heal. Do you think this is a common response for trauma and processing difficult choices? What about Dr. Robles’s

approach helped shift her thinking? Do you have a supportive group or professional resources you can turn to in times of crisis?

8. Despite the inner turmoil Lina is dealing with, she keeps her focus on trying to be a good mother at the forefront of her mind and her actions. Do you think she's successful in her approach to raising a child with special needs? How do you think being raised as a military kid has affected Teó? Do you agree that returning to Puerto Rico was the best decision she could make for him? Why or why not?
9. Lina discovers that everything she believed about Leonardo and his rejection of both her and her child was a misunderstanding. Do you think there was room to forgive her family's actions? Even after the impact on Teó and both his parents? Why or why not?
10. The relationship between Lina and her tía Lisandra is complicated. What are some ways that her aunt showed her best intentions for Lina and her well-being? Why do you think her approach was so unconventional? Do you think these complexities helped Lina in the long run or made her worse off? Why or why not?
11. In the novel Lina goes from an idealist in uniform to a bitter veteran to a woman at peace, realizing her journey, both professionally and in motherhood, led her to her greatest happiness. What were the most profound moments that helped her get there? Was it Eli? Her family? Getting into AA? Returning to service? How do you feel about Lina at the end of the novel? Do you wish she'd found a way back to Leonardo, or are you happy about the possibilities with Eli? What do you think her future looks like?
12. At the end of the book, Lina finds herself back in uniform and feels as though she is where she was always meant to be. Did this feel right to you? Discuss a time in your life when you may have veered off course from your heart's truest desires. Did you ever find your way back? If not, are there ways back onto a path of fulfillment, even on an unexpected road?