

## STORY SIX *Passing Through*

In *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, Queen Gertrude marries her dead husband's brother, Claudius, too quickly after the funeral for her son's liking. The dead king appears as a ghost and tells his son, Prince Hamlet, that Claudius murdered him. The ghost orders Hamlet to seek revenge on the man who usurped his throne and married his wife. In *Passing Through*, after Trudy's husband, Dave, dies she drifts into a relationship with Dave's brother, Jack, who agrees to help her try to hang on to her financially strapped ranch. But Trudy's son, Spencer, has his own plans for the ranch.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

*If you're into Shakespeare*

1. *Hamlet* includes many suggestions of incest, including hidden desire between Hamlet and Gertrude. Discuss any such suggestions in Trudy and Spencer's relationship.
2. To what extent does Jack play the role of antagonist in *Passing Through* as Claudius does in *Hamlet*?
3. What similarities, if any, do you find between Prince Hamlet and Spencer?
4. Gertrude seems to rely on men for status and comfort. What about Trudy?
5. Shakespeare portrays Gertrude as shallow, insensitive to Hamlet, lacking good judgment, and unwilling to face the truth. To what extent, if at all, does Trudy resemble Gertrude?

*If you're not*

1. What is the significance of Spencer wearing his father's long black overcoat at the funeral?
2. How are death and rebirth explored through setting and plot?
3. How does this line—*Why hadn't she tried it elsewhere?*—serve as a clue to Trudy's character at the beginning of the story?
4. What is the effect of Dave "hanging around" in Spencer's dreams and the thoughts of Trudy and Jack?
5. What does the cabin represent to Trudy? To Spencer? What's the significance of Trudy's acknowledging she never wanted it?
6. What does Trudy see in Jack? How does she compare him to Dave? What can you infer about her marriage to Dave?
7. Why does Trudy want to hold onto the ranch? What else does she want?
8. Trudy's life has involved gender power struggles. To what extent does she take back her power?
9. What do the last two lines imply about Trudy's life going forward? *She still hadn't heard from him when the first calf arrived—hip-locked and dead. They needed the tractor to pull it out of the mother.*