



## Eleven Minutes

By Paulo Coelho  
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### Introduction

Maria is a young girl from a Brazilian village whose first innocent brushes with love leave her heartbroken. At a tender age, she becomes convinced that she will never find true love, instead believing that "Love is a terrible thing that will make you suffer..." A chance meeting in Rio takes her to Geneva, where she dreams of finding fame and fortune, yet ends up working as a prostitute.

In Geneva, Maria's despairing view of love is put to the test when she meets a handsome young painter. In this odyssey of self-discovery, Maria has to choose between pursuing a path of darkness, sexual pleasure for its own sake, or risking everything to find her own "inner light" and the possibility of sacred sex: sex in the context of love.

### Discussion Questions

1. In what ways is Maria's process of self-discovery similar to the rites of passage all young women experience?
2. Of all the turning points in Maria's life, which was the most crucial and why?
3. Why do you think Paulo Coelho chose a prostitute as a protagonist for a parable on the sacred nature of sex? Can you think of other memorable literary figures who resemble Maria?

### About the author

Born in Brazil, Paulo Coelho is one of the most beloved storytellers of our time, renowned for his international bestseller *The Alchemist*. His books have been translated into 56 languages and published in 150 countries. He is also the recipient of numerous prestigious international awards, among them the Crystal Award by the World Economic Forum, Frances's Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur, and Germany's Bambi 2001 Award. He was inducted at the Brazilian Academy of Letters in 2002. Mr. Coelho writes a weekly column syndicated throughout the world.