



An Unknown Woman

Questions for Bookclubs

In order to provide bookclubs with thought-provoking questions, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot. We suggest that you finish the book before you read on.

*'I just adored it!' Liza Perrat,
author of Spirit of Lost Angels*

- At the beginning of the novel, Anita stands in the road outside her home of fifteen years watching it burn. How well do you think the author succeeded in conveying her sense of dismay and impotence?
- Did you view the fire as the main event, or the event that set in motion a destructive chain of events?
- Anita admitted to best friend Natalie that she and Ed were very badly equipped to deal with disasters. She explained that she thought this was because both she and Ed were only children and therefore had limited experience of arguing and making up. Did you accept this explanation, or did you think that Patti and Ron were also adverse to conflict?
- After the meeting with the loss adjuster, Ed revealed that he hadn't been honest with Anita on a number of counts. How did you feel about his choice of timing? How did you feel about author's decision to set the scene in the hire car outside the wreckage of their house?
- Ron's understanding of marriage is that it includes a host of unspoken and unspeakable things, and that the marital home should remain a sanctuary. How do you think this

attitude informed Anita's understanding of relationships? Do you think it is a viewpoint she would have agreed with?

- Anita expressed the opinion that part of the dilemma she and Ed faced was not having a purpose that was the equivalent of raising a child. Do you agree?
- How far do you agree that our sense of self is bound up in material possessions?
- What did the use of three narrators contribute to the story? Did it add to your understanding of the family's dynamics?
- If you think the use of three narrators helped to highlight the social changes that have taken place between Patti and Ron's generation and Anita and Ed's, what do you think the most significant of these were?
- How well do you think that the author captured the complexity of how childlessness can be a positive choice and yet still prove to be an alienating experience?
- To a large extent, the author chose not to censor her character's thoughts. Ron's first reaction on learning of the fire was to compare it to his childhood experience of the Blitz. How did you feel about his decision to share his story with his daughter in the immediate aftermath of the fire?
- Which of the three narrators did you relate to the most? Why did you choose this character?
- What was Anita's relationship with Liverpool? How did this compare with her relationship with London?
- Virginia Woolf said, 'For most of history, Anonymous was a woman.' What do you think it said about Patti that she decided not to put her name to her book?
- The author chose not to name one of the characters in the novel. Why do you think that was?
- How well did you feel the book's title related to its subject-matter? Did the 'Unknown Woman' come to have a particular meaning for you?
- Ron is thunderstruck when he realises that, as far as Patti's parents were concerned, he was the 'Jason Adams' who derailed their daughter's plans. Did this comparison ring true? If so, why do you think it had never suggested itself to him before?
- What role does Auntie Magda play in the novel?
- How did you feel about the author's decision to stage the accidental illicit meeting at St Pancras station? What did St Pancras station represent to you?

- How did you feel about Anita's reluctance to take any major decisions that might be irreversible?
- Were you satisfied with the book's ending? What did you think the future held for (a) Anita and Ed (b) Anita and her mother? and (c) Anita and Natalie?
- Vladimir Nabakov said, 'The writer's job is to get the main character up a tree, and then once they are there, throw rocks at them.' How well do you think that the author succeeded in doing this?