

Book Club Notes

Introduction

Thank you for reading *The Woman Behind the Waterfall*.

I wrote this novel when I was at a major crossroads in my life, when part of my life was finishing and the future very uncertain. I was filled with burning questions – what was the purpose of living? What should we be doing with our lives? What did it mean to be a good mother? How do you recover when everything you expected for the future is suddenly shattered? Can you believe in life again after being broken? How do you protect children from your mistakes? Are the blows that occur in life mistakes or is it all part of the experience of living?

These, and many more questions were circling unresolved in me as I tried to draw a new vision for my own life.

I don't think that I answered any of these questions in the book. I don't think any of them have clear answers, or universal answers. Perhaps they have answers which are correct for one person at one stage of their lives. Perhaps living through them is answering them, each in our own way.

I hope, through exploring them in this book, that they have brought some perspective to the burning questions in your own lives. I hope that my own experiences have contributed to the conversation we are all having as we build our lives: how to live; how to live in imperfection; how to carry the legacy of our generations; how to be happy.

If you would like to contact me, I would love to hear from you. Please write to me at leonora@leonoramerial.com

Themes and Questions

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

- What does it mean to be a good mother?
- How far should we try to protect our children from our own mistakes?
- What do we tell our children, when their lives are tied up in mistakes we have made?
- How much do we carry the influence of our mothers through our own lives?

DEPRESSION / PERIODS OF GRIEF

The main character, Lyuda, is trapped in her unhappiness. Sometimes when traumas are too great for us, we can be overwhelmed by grief or negative emotions for long periods – months, or even years.

- How have you managed to overcome periods of grief and being overwhelmed?
- Have any of your most precious dreams been shattered in the past? How have you coped?
- What advice would you give to Lyuda? How would you help her to follow it?

TRANSFORMATION

Angela can transform herself into birds and leaves, into clouds and air. In literature and art there is a rich history of transformation, starting with the Greek and Roman gods who transformed themselves and mortals into an array of forms, for example in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Two thousand years on Kafka's Gregor Samsa transforms into a giant beetle. In art, Chagall's villagers fly over the rooftops of houses, and Magritte paints human bodies made of water and clouds of stone.

The theme of transformation necessarily plays with the line between imagination and reality. For Angela, her reality mixes with the nature around her. For Lyuda, her reality mixes with her emotions from the past. The physical world around us is often only a part of what constitutes our experience of the world.

- What different realities do you include in your day-to-day life? Future plans? Past joys or sadnesses? Dream lovers? Flying over the rooftops of your town or village?
- Should we dream more in our everyday lives? Is using our imaginations always positive or should we stay more rooted in the physical around us?
- Should we encourage children to imagine and pretend and live in their multiple realities (the grown up world / the children's world / made-up worlds), or should we teach them one reality?