

# ***THE MYSTERY WOMAN***

## **BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS**



### **WARNING: SPOILERS BELOW**

1. What do you think of the relationships between the female characters in the novel? Are they all antagonistic or are some of them supportive?
2. How do you think Rebecca sees herself in relation to men? To what extent do you think society has shaped this view and to what extent do you think it stems from her own personality? Do you think Rebecca would see herself differently if she had been born after the 1970s?
3. Do you think Rebecca changes over the course of the novel? In what ways?
4. Timothy is a master of the technique of psychological abuse known as 'gaslighting' (manipulating someone's perception of reality in a way that causes them to doubt themselves). What particular instances of him doing this

in the book stand out for you? How do you think he manages to fool someone as worldly- wise as Rebecca?

5. 'One in four women will experience domestic abuse in her lifetime.' This is a frightening statistic. Do you think society has come a long way in its understanding of the dynamics of domestic abuse – or do we still stereotype and blame the victims?\*
6. Do you think what Rebecca did to Sanders Olsen was justified? What would you have done in her place?
7. The author describes the book as a 'Modern Australian Gothic Romance'. Traditionally, Gothic novels have the following elements: an atmospheric setting; a damsel in distress; mystery and suspense; a ghost/monster or a beast within; a burdened male protagonist; horror and death. How does *The Mystery Woman* fulfil these characteristics and in what ways does it deviate from them?
8. Do you think Rebecca's relationship with Stefan is a classic romance? Do you see them living 'happily ever after' – or not? Why?
9. What do you think about the double standards with which both the press and public view Rebecca's affair with Ned – for example the idea that he's been led astray but she's a homewrecker? Do you think these double standards still prevail today?

10. The cruelty of whaling isn't even a consideration for the citizens of Shipwreck Bay. The town's economic prosperity is the first priority. Can you think of specific examples today where economics overrides animal welfare? Do you think this imbalance will change in the future as people become more concerned with animal welfare issues?

11. What surprised you most in the story?

12. What scene did you most enjoy and why?

13. If you were to choose a soundtrack for the novel, what would it be?

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\* For readers interested in gaining a better understanding of the often-covert nature of domestic violence and the methods of psychological control that abusers frequently employ, the following are recommended reading:

Lundy Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?: Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*, Penguin Putnam, New York, 2002.

Don Hennessy, *How He Gets Into Her Head: The Mind of the Male Intimate Abuser*, Cork University Press, Cork, 2012.

Carol A. Lambert, *Women with Controlling Partners: Taking Back Your Life from a Manipulative or Abusive Partner*, New Harbinger, Oakland, 2016.