



FLATIRON
BOOKS
NEW YORK

The Resurrection of Joan Ashby

Reading Group Guide

1. Discuss the novel's title. How is Joan "resurrected" over the course of the novel?
2. Do you agree that "treacheries experienced in childhood are among the most difficult to overcome, or to forgive"? How is Joan shaped by her childhood, and how are her husband and children? Discuss the ways in which treachery affects their family dynamic. What do you believe is the role of nature vs. nurture in terms of ambition and success?
3. Daniel reflects: "It is a long-borne burden, knowing what you lack, and I knew what I lacked. . . . Where, I thought, was the lost and found for discarded genius, from which I could select what I desperately wanted and needed?" How does this novel define "genius"? What is the relationship between genius and work in these characters' lives?
4. Joan says in an interview: "Love was more than simply inconvenient; its consumptive nature always a threat to serious women. I had seen too often what happened to serious women in love, their sudden, unnatural lightheartedness, their new wardrobe of happiness their prior selves would never have worn, the loss of their forward momentum. I wanted no such conversion, no vulnerability to needless distraction." Do you agree? How do Joan's views on love shift over the course of the novel?
5. What role do the excerpts of Joan's stories and novels play in *The Resurrection of Joan Ashby*? Did you read them as a lens into her character, ambitions, and perspective on motherhood? Do you have a favorite excerpt?
6. Joan asks: "Is motherhood inescapably entwined in female life, a story every woman ends up telling, whether or not she sought or desired that bond; her nourishment, her caretaking, her love, needed by someone standing before her, hands held out, heart demanding succor, commanding her not to look away, but to dig deep, give of herself unstintingly, offer up everything she can?" What would you answer? Discuss the various depictions of motherhood in the novel, including in Joan's own writing.
7. Joan reflects at one point: "Writers have infinite choices and mothers nearly no choice at all." How do her roles as writer and mother shape her over the course of the novel? Does she ultimately reconcile those two sides of herself?

8. Joan refers to her characters as “her people.” Discuss Joan’s different creations, as an author and as a mother. How much control does she have over her characters? Over her children?
9. How do you feel about Joan’s letter to Daniel? Do you think he deserves a second chance? What does the novel suggest about unconditional love within families? Do you think we hold mothers to different standards than fathers when it comes to unconditional love?
10. Vita Brodkey says to Joan: “I will not tell you to be safe, safety is for fools, but remember everything.” What is the importance of memory and history in this novel? Discuss Vita’s importance in Joan’s life.
11. Joan finds herself living an “unintended life.” What is the relationship between intention and accident in the novel? How much agency do we have in our own stories? How does meditation shape Joan’s quest to live an intended life?
12. Names play a significant role throughout this novel. Discuss Joan’s decision to go by “Ashby” when she is in India. How does she change over the course of the novel, and what role do names play in that transformation?
13. What is the role of place in the narrative? How do Joan’s various homes influence her happiness and creativity? Where does she most belong, and how does she find belonging? How is India, in particular, portrayed, and how does the country itself shape Joan’s transformation?
14. Joan, Martin, Daniel, and Eric all keep secrets from one another. How do those secrets protect or harm them? Are secrets inevitable within families? Do artistic endeavor and genius have their own rules when it comes to openness?
15. When Joan has been in Dharamshala for several months, she finally takes a pilgrimage. Willem meets her on the way, and tells her a pilgrimage doesn’t have to be taken alone. Discuss Joan and Willem’s relationship, and how it differs from Joan’s relationship with Martin.
16. Kartar tells Daniel his name means “Lord of Creation.” What does Kartar’s presence in both Daniel’s and Joan’s life mean? How would you characterize his role? Has he shaped his life around the meaning of his name and the stories his own mother told him?
17. If you could leave your life to pursue your dream, where would you go, what would you do?