



Backward-Facing Man

By Don Silver
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Introduction

An explosive story of love, loss, and betrayal, *Backward-Facing Man* is a novel about three people who met in Boston in the late '60s—Chuck Puckman, an MIT student; Lorraine Nadia, a free-spirited young woman; and Frederick Keane, a fiery radical.

As the '90s come to a close, Chuck is facing serious jail time after an industrial accident at the family business he runs. Lorraine's daughter is searching for the father she never knew, and Frederick is still missing after events in the '60s spiraled out of control.

Epic in scope, this is a book about the choices people made in the '60s and the effect those choices had on those people's lives, their families, and American society.

Questions for Discussion

1. *Backward-Facing Man* opens with an account of the narrator's childhood friendship with Patty Hearst, the real-life heiress famous for her abduction by the Symbionese Liberation Army in 1974. How did the author's inclusion of such a well-publicized historical event impact your understanding and appreciation of the fictional relationships explored in the novel?
2. When Stardust Nadia first meets the *Backward-Facing Man* on her commuter train to work, what does she notice about him? Why does she feel compelled to follow him, and where does he take her?
3. Describe the relationship between Lorraine Nadia and her daughter, Stardust. What qualities do the two women share? What aspects of their life together seem strained, and what details does the author provide that hint at this emotional disconnect?
4. Discuss Stardust Nadia's penchant for anonymous one-night stands. How does her behavior lead her closer to uncovering the true identities of her parents? What role does the F.B.I. play in Stardust's illicit activities?
5. What kind of vision of the 1960s and 1970s does *Backward-Facing Man* establish? How do the intersecting romantic relationships between Lorraine Nadia, Frederick Keane, and Chuck Puckman hint at the shifting social boundaries of those decades?
6. How does the death of Ramon Gutierrez serve as the catalyst for the dispute between Arthur and Chuck Puckman? What is the fallout for each of the brothers in the wake of the industrial accident, and how does their internal disagreement reflect their different roles in the family business?
7. How does Frederick Keane embody the radical politics and social forces of the late 1960s and 1970s? How would you describe his political agenda? What role does Patty Hearst's abduction play in that scheme?
8. How do you reconcile Chuck Puckman's search for Stardust Nadia with the many indications throughout *Backward-Facing Man* that he may not, in fact, be her biological father, but rather one of her mother's suitors? What explains his ongoing fascination with Stardust?
9. Patty Hearst, Lorraine Nadia, Arthur Puckman, and Frederick Keane all disappear over the course of this book. What do these departures mean to the other characters in the novel? What do these disappearances (some permanent, others temporary) enable us to understand about the nature of random chance and personal choice?
10. Which of the characters in *Backward-Facing Man* do you most identify with? Why?

About the Author

For ten years, Don Silver was the president of a manufacturing company in Philadelphia. In 1999, after getting his master of fine arts from Bennington College, he left corporate America to become a full-time writer. This is his first novel.