



The Book of You

By Claire Kendal
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Questions for Discussion

1. Consider Charles Perrault's folktale "Blue Beard," referenced before the novel begins. What tone does it set? What issues or questions does it introduce?
2. What is gained by the novel being written in large part as dated journal entries? What changes when the narrative shifts to a more objective point of view?
3. What are the effects of the journal being a second-person, direct address to Rafe? Do these change as the story progresses?
4. Rafe makes the sinister statement to Clarissa that "men need secret places." What might be healthier, more understandable reasons to have a secret place to visit or keep things?
5. One of the various taxi drivers, a woman, helps defend Clarissa. Where else in the novel are there examples of strong or courageous women?
6. What does the brutal parallel experience of Carlotta Lockyer and the trial add to the novel? What specifically does Clarissa seem to learn from it?
7. Is the adversarial legal system justified in treating a victim like Carlotta as it does?
8. In what ways might Rowena's ideas about her own body and the need to "limit [her] expressions" be relevant to the danger Clarissa is in?
9. In the restaurant with Rowena and Rafe Clarissa comments on the Deco paintings of nude women. Is such a public display, however artistic, an element of the threat Clarissa and other women face?
10. What do various mentions of poetry—Keats, Yeats, etc.—add to the novel? In particular, what does Clarissa's reading of Anne Sexton's *Transformations* add to our understanding?
11. What kind of man is Henry, Clarissa's ex-boyfriend? What do we learn about Clarissa through her many memories of him?
12. What's appealing to Clarissa about Robert, the fireman?
13. On more than one occasion Clarissa asks Robert to tell her about fire. What might she be interested in or fascinated by? Where else does fire or objects relevant to it appear in the novel?
14. Sewing is very important to Clarissa. Why? In what ways is it valuable to her? Are there ways the skill serves the novel metaphorically?
15. Of what significance is Clarissa's memory of being punched and robbed of her bag when she was just a teenager?
16. At one point Robert tells Clarissa, "anyone could do violence." Is this idea helpful or disturbing?
17. Is DC Hughes a good man? Is Robert? Are there men in the novel that deserve the title? What characteristics or actions make them so?
18. What do you make of Clarissa's decision regarding Robert at the end?