

## Woman on Fire

Harper Paperbacks

By Lisa Barr

ISBN: 9780063040885

### Introduction

**From the author of the award-winning *Fugitive Colors* and *The Unbreakables*, a gripping tale of a young, ambitious journalist embroiled in an international art scandal centered around a Nazi-looted masterpiece—forcing the ultimate showdown between passion and possession, lovers and liars, history and truth.**



After talking her way into a job with Dan Mansfield, the leading investigative reporter in Chicago, rising young journalist Jules Roth is given an unusual—and very secret—assignment. Dan needs her to locate a painting stolen by the Nazis more than 75 years earlier: legendary Expressionist artist Ernst Engel’s most famous work, *Woman on Fire*. World-renowned shoe designer Ellis Baum wants this portrait of a beautiful, mysterious woman for deeply personal reasons, and has enlisted Dan’s help to find it. But Jules doesn’t have much time; the famous designer is dying.

Meanwhile, in Europe, provocative and powerful Margaux de Laurent also searches for the painting. Heir to her art collector family’s millions, Margaux is a cunning gallerist who gets everything she wants. The only thing standing in her way is Jules. Yet the passionate and determined Jules has unexpected resources of her own, including Adam Baum, Ellis’s grandson. A recovering addict and brilliant artist in his own right, Adam was once in Margaux’s clutches. He knows how ruthless she is, and he’ll do anything to help Jules locate the painting before Margaux gets to it first.

A thrilling tale of secrets, love, and sacrifice that illuminates the destructive cruelty of war and greed and the triumphant power of beauty and love, *Woman on Fire* tells the story of a remarkable woman and an exquisite work of art that burns bright, moving through hands, hearts, and history.

### Questions for Discussion

1. *Woman on Fire* is a showdown between two strong-willed women—Jules Roth, an ambitious young journalist and Margaux de Laurent, a brilliant albeit ruthless gallerist. Neither woman should be underestimated. Are they a good match, and why?
2. Jules pushes the envelope and is guilty of “cowboy antics” as she pursues her stories. Does she go too far to expose the truth, and are her bold efforts worth the risk?

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Renowned investigative reporter Dan Mansfield maintains that investigations only work if all the players follow "The Rules." What are "The Rules"—and how does each character break them?

3. Margaux is both cruel and deeply wounded—a lethal combination. Like Margaux—Jules, Ellis, Dan, Adam, and Lilian Dassel all wrestle with “inner demons.” How do each handle their painful pasts both positively and negatively?
4. Do Ellis and Margaux both have a legitimate claim to *Woman on Fire* – whose claim is stronger and why?
5. World War II ended nearly eight decades ago. Why has this period of history made such an impact on the literary world, and why is Nazi-looted art STILL front-page news?
6. Family ties are a key element in the book. Margaux is deemed a psychopath – evil and cold-blooded—except when it comes to her grandfather. Does this loving, loyal quality redeem her and perhaps change how you feel about her—especially in the end?
7. The fictional character Carl Geisler is inspired by real-life art collector Cornelius Gurlitt, son of Hitler’s “art thief” Hildebrand Gurlitt. Margaux believes she is justified to steal Geisler’s treasure trove of art, rationalizing that it is *not* a crime to rob the robber. Where should the line be drawn between the pursuit of justice and the hunt for revenge?
8. *Woman on Fire* is an exquisite example of Expressionist art. Expressionism is defined by how a painting makes you *feel*. How does this Expressionist masterwork impact each of the main characters—what emotions does the painting evoke and what actions does it inspire?
9. The novel is filled with empowered multigenerational female characters: Jules, Margaux, Elizabeth Roth, and Lilian Dassel. How does each woman use her “power” to impact the plot and affect the others while defining her own path?
10. Adam, Dan, and Ellis all wrestle with addiction, having camouflaged their dependence on drugs and/or alcohol while rising to the top of their respective fields—art, journalism, and fashion. How do secrets versus success play out in this novel?
11. Revenge is a powerful theme threading the novel. Each character grapples with it. Who takes vengeance too far at the expense of their own happiness, and why is that price tag worth it to them?
12. The artist Joan Miro once said: “You can look at a picture for a week and never think of it again. You can also look at a picture for a second and think of it all your life.” Finding *Woman on Fire* becomes an obsession for Margaux and Ellis because of what it represents to each character—love and great loss. Have you ever been deeply affected by a work of art, and why?