13, rue Therese

by Elena Mauli Shapiro

About the Book

American academic Trevor Stratton discovers a box full of artifacts from World War I as he settles into his new office in Paris. The pictures, letters, and objects in the box relate to the life of Louise Brunet, a feisty, charming Frenchwoman who lived through both World Wars.

As Trevor examines and documents the relics the box offers up, he begins to imagine the story of Louise Brunet's life: her love for a cousin who died in the war, her marriage to a man who works for her father, and her attraction to a neighbor in her building at 13 rue Thérèse. The more time he spends with the objects though, the truer his imaginings of Louise's life become, and the more he notices another alluring Frenchwoman: Josianne, his clerk, who planted the box in his office in the first place, and with whom he finds he is falling in love.

Discussion Guide

1. What is the role of history in this novel? Is there a character whose version of the story you trust more than another character?s?

2. Describe your understanding of Trevor and Josianne?s relationship and the ways in which it changes from the beginning of the novel to the end.

3. Is the third-person narration still in Trevor?s voice? If not, who is he channeling?

4. What is the purpose of the scanned objects? What do they add to the story?

5. Do the scanned objects tell a story of their own that is different from the text of the novel?

6. What is the role of desire --- sexual and otherwise --- in this novel? What are its consequences?

7. Describe Louise?s relationship with her father and how you think it does or does not shape her relationships with Camille and Xavier.

8. What does the novel say about memory? Can there be such a thing as an objective account of the past?

9. Why does the author use footnotes in the novel? How do you make sense of the fragmenting of the text that occurs on pages 246?47, for example?

10. Broadly speaking, how does the war change the way men and women think of each other in this novel?

Author Bio

Elena Mauli Shapiro grew up in Paris, and currently lives in California with her husband. She has accumulated literature and writing degrees in and around the Bay Area (Stanford, Mills, Davis). Her novel 13 rue Thérèse will be published in February 2011.

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Publication Date: February 2, 2011
Hardcover: 288 pages
Publisher: Reagan Arthur Books
ISBN-10: 0316083283
ISBN-13: 9780316083287