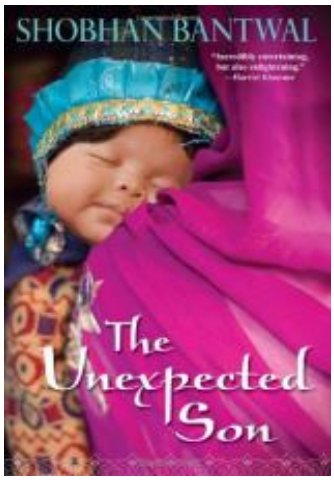
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

The Unexpected Son

by Shobhan Bantwal



About the Book

What happens when a woman who's realized her dreams wakes up to a shocking truth? Shobhan Bantwal's poignant new novel weaves a captivating tale of one woman's return to India: the place where she lost everything --- and now has everything to gain?

It is a morning like any other in suburban New Jersey when Vinita Patil opens the battered envelope postmarked ?Mumbai.? But the letter inside turns her comfortable world upside down. It tells Vinita an impossible story: she has a grown son in India whose life may depend on her?

Once upon a time, a naïve young college girl fell for a wealthy boy whose primary interests were cricket and womanizing. Vinita knew, even then, that a secret affair with a man whose language and values were different from her own was a mistake. He finished with her soon enough --- leaving her to birth a baby that was stillborn. Or so Vinita was told...

Now, that child is a grown man in desperate need. To help her son, to know him, Vinita must revisit her darkest hours by returning to her battle --- scarred homeland --- and pray for the faith of the family she leaves behind...

Discussion Guide

1. In a close-knit, conservative society like Palgaum?s in the 1970s, what were the chances of a girl like Vinita and a man like Som marrying? Would their marriage survive?

2. Why does Vinita?s family lie to her about her child dying? As heartless as it seems, are their actions justified?

3. If Vinita had been awake during childbirth and had insisted on keeping the child, what kind of a twist would it lend to

the story?

4. Is Girish?s reaction to Vinita?s confession too strong? Unexpected? If so, why?

5. Why doesn?t Vinita automatically think of her brother or mother as prospective bone marrow donors when she?s told she can?t be one?

6. Is Rohit?s reaction to Vinita?s sudden appearance appropriate under the circumstances? Discuss the issue of an adopted child and biological parent meeting for the first time.

7. A remotely possible but unlikely marrow donor is Som Kori?s wife (since she?s his first cousin). Discuss the implications of that particular scenario.

8. Why are Vishal and Sayee?s twin sons referred to a few times, but never appear in the book? What role do they play?

9. Vinita?s mother is almost always harsh in her judgment of Vinita. Is she justified in her attitude?

10. Discuss Arya?s role in the story. What does she bring to the plot?

11. Vishal is always the stern, humorless brother. What motivates him in his relationship with Vinita? Discuss his behavior and what it means to you as a reader.

12. My favorite challenge to readers is to ask them to discuss some other ways the story could have ended. Get as creative as you wish.

Author Bio

Shobhan Bantwal was born and raised in India and came to the United States as a young bride in an arranged marriage. She has published short fiction in literary magazines and articles in a number of publications. Writing plays in her mother tongue (Indian language?Konkani) and performing on stage at Indian-American conventions are some of her hobbies. She lives in New Jersey with her husband. Shobhan loves to hear from her readers.

Critical Praise

"Vivid, rich...expertly portrays a young woman caught between love and duty, hope and despair."

The Unexpected Son
by Shobhan Bantwal

Publication Date: August 1, 2010
Paperback: 352 pages
Publisher: Kensington
ISBN-10: 0758232039
ISBN-13: 9780758232038