

## The House I Loved by Tatiana de Rosnay- Meeting Date Tuesday, June 12 at 6:30 p.m.

### Discussion Questions

1. One of the central elements of the novel is Rose's deep and abiding love for the house in which she spent her married life, which becomes apparent from her many memories tied to every room. What does the house represent for Rose and how did it change her life? By the end of the novel, it seems as though Rose views her house as the most important thing in her life. Although others would see the house as a possession, do you think Rose views it that way? Have you ever had this experience of loving a place or a thing as deeply as if it were a living person?
2. Baron Haussmann was described by his opponents as the "Atilla of the straight line" and "the Ripper Baron", nicknames that Rose approved of. But Alexandrine, the flower girl, does not agree, and has another point of view, that of a necessary progress that Paris badly needed. How do Rose's and Alexandrine's opinions differ and why? Whose do you feel closest to?
3. Rose loves her son Baptiste deeply, despite the fact that he was associated with an extremely difficult time of her life – and more than she seems to love their natural daughter, Violette. Why do you think this is? Do you think it's true to life or even possible to love someone (or something) who comes out of intense hardship? Why or why not? Have you ever experienced or seen relationships like those which Rose has with each of her children?
4. Secrets are an important theme throughout *The House I Loved*. By the end of the novel, we learn that Rose has kept a devastating secret for her entire life from everyone she holds dear. How do you think it affects a person to keep such an important secret for so long? How did it affect Rose? Have you ever had a similar experience?
5. In a sense, Rose's letters to her husband throughout the novel are her way of finally revealing her secret. Do you see any purpose in her telling the secret at this point in her life, with her husband already gone? Does it change or help her? And if so, how?
6. Between the years of 1852 and 1870, Napoleon III and Baron Haussman remodeled major sections of Paris in an attempt to bring the city into the "modern" era. Did you know anything about this major period of time in Paris's history before reading this novel? What surprised or interested you about how Tatiana recreated that era?
7. How do you feel that Rose's secret past (the episode she hides from her husband and entourage) relates to what Haussmann, the "ripper Baron," is doing to Paris? How exactly does Rose, in the final pages, describe her personal ordeal and compare it to Haussmann's tearing down of her home?
8. Flowers play an important part in this novel. Discuss what Rose learns through the

flower-shop and Alexandrine's job as a florist. Pick out the rare roses and their names, and how Tatiana de Rosnay uses the symbol of roses and flowers throughout the book.

9. Alexandrine the flower-girl, and Gilbert, the ragpicker, are close to Rose, in different ways. Discuss the differences and similarities of their relationship with Rose, of their secret past, of how they each try to help Rose.

10. The elegant Baronne de Vresse fascinates Rose with her fashionable crinolines and the balls she attends in Paris and Biarritz. Rose loves clothes and fashion, yet she strongly disapproves of the fashionable Emperor and Empress. Why do you think this is so? How does it speak to who Rose is as a character?

11. Rose discovers the joys of reading late in life. How and when does this happen? What is the first book she falls in love with? Who are the authors she most enjoys reading? Have you read them? How did you fall under the spell of reading?

12. If you have read *Sarah's Key* and *A Secret Kept*, Tatiana's previous novels, can you pick up a couple of themes that are common to all three books?  
(*Questions issued by publisher.*)