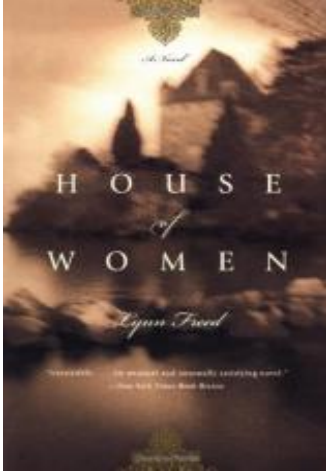

House Of Women: A Novel

by Lynn Freed



About the Book

Thea has led an oddly sheltered life, growing up as a virtual prisoner of her mother's obsessive love. When, at age seventeen, she escapes to marry a suave and mysterious friend of her father's, she soon finds herself living on a remote island, and the house in which she grew up-with its gates and padlocks and dogs-is supplanted by a prison of a different kind. At the heart of this exquisite, stark, and riveting tale of passion is the story of a mother and daughter-the secrets they share and the secrets they keep-and the story of a bond that cannot be broken, even in death.

Discussion Guide

1. As you were reading **House Of Women**, where did you think the novel was set? In what ways did the lack of specific information about the novel's setting affect your reading of the story?
2. In the novel's first chapter there are numerous references to mythological and biblical figures. Did you notice mention of Apollo, Poseidon, Prometheus, Salome, Delilah, Mary Magdalene, Cerberus, and Penelope? What role do you think these references play in the novel?
3. Discuss the issues of possession and control as they relate to the various characters in **House Of Women**. How are keys significant in the story? Do the keys, in the end, have any real effect?
4. Thea and Nalia are always conscious of how they appear to those around them. What role does the 'audience' play in the novel?
5. Discuss the ways in which Nalia's past impinges on the story.

6. How do you think desire shapes and/or defines the characters in **House Of Women**?
7. Katzenbogen tells Nalia, "Except for death, there are no mistakes in life." How is this phrase played out in the novel?
8. In classical mythology, the Fates control destiny. In **House Of Women**, who holds sway over the destinies of the characters? Discuss the role of choice in the characters' lives.
9. Identify and discuss various lies that the characters in **House Of Women** tell each other and themselves. What do these lies reveal about the people who tell them?
10. Thea has quite literally two lives - her life with her mother, locked in her house, and her life with her husband, locked on the ship. How do Thea's experiences compare to a "normal" girlhood? Are there similarities?
11. Do you think Thea's life will be any simpler once her mother is gone and she won't feel she has to choose any longer? What kind of mother do you think Thea will be? And Maude?
12. What is the "house of women" that gives the novel its title? Does the title refer to more than one "house of women"? If so, how are the houses alike? How are they different?

Author Bio

Lynn Freed was born and grew up in Durban, South Africa, where two of her previous novels--**Home Ground** and **The Bungalow**--are set. Ms. Freed's stories and essays have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *Story*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and elsewhere. She lives in Sonoma, California.

Critical Praise

"A strange, compelling story of obsessive love. . . . Riveting, right from the start. In lush and sensual prose, Freed draws us into her 'house of women.'"

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