

Discussion Questions for the historical novel: *The Corset Maker*

What was it about Rifka's father's prayer that upset her so much? Can you think of any present day parallels?

How did the Posner Gymnasium differ from typical girls' education in the 1920s? And what impact did her gymnasium education have on young Rifka?

Were you surprised by Rifka's outrageous proposal to Bronka? What obstacles did you expect on the way?

Was *Fit for Venus* the kind of business you'd find today? Why or why not? What did you think of the clientele of Fit for Venus?

What kind of conditions did Rifka's sister Golda find in Palestine? How have the conditions changed? Are there still kibbutzim such as the one in which Golda and Eli lived? If so, are they similar or different?

How did the events of 1936 impact Rifka and Bronka? How did they change the trajectories of their lives? Do you see any parallels to today?

What do you think Bronka's mother's reaction would have been if she knew about Kazio? Would her reaction have been similar or different from mothers today?

When and why did Rifka Berg become Raquela Bluestone? Can you think of other women in the nineteenth and twentieth century who used pseudonyms?

What was it about Count Aleksander Zabielski that fascinated Raquela? And why did she ultimately reject him? Had she made a fair assessment of him? Does he remind you of any present day men?

Why did Countess Zabielska feel a kinship with Raquela?

Did Uri remind you of a present day Israeli? Why or why not?

Did the description of Israel in the 1930s shed any light on the present day situation in Israel?

Was Golda pleased to see her younger sister? Did you get a sense of her personality?

Why did Count Zabielski volunteer for the International Brigades? Do you think losing Raquela had anything to do with his decision?

Did you think Bronka deceived Antoni Zak when he told he'd met a woman who was a corset maker on her way to Palestine? What emotions might she have had at that moment? Did Rifka ever discover the betrayal? Was it a betrayal in your opinion?

Why did Raquela end up working in the orphanage initially instead of being at the front?

What motivated Raquela to care for Manuel?

Had you been aware of the Jewish (Botwin) Brigade in the Spanish Civil War?

Were you surprised by the deprivation and civilian casualties during the Spanish Civil War? Which side suffered more?

Did the multiple deployments to the front remind you of similar situations?

What were the relations between Bronka and Antoni in LaRoda? How did Antoni feel about having children?

Was Bronka aware of Antoni's noble background? Was Raquela aware of it? Would that have changed anything for either woman?

Was Antoni aware of Bronka's relationship to Rifka/Raquela? How did the name changes work for or against them? Are there any analogies to name changes in America?

Did you expect what had happened at the Bodega de Serapio in Albacete? What surprised you about the meeting among Aleksander/Antoni, Rifka/Raquela and Jacob?

Did Raquela/s relationship with Jacob change over time? If yes, how did it change?

What put Bronka in danger in LaRoda? How did it influence her relationship with Colonel Javier Martinez? What made Martinez unusual?

How did Aleksander manage to escape to France from the German hospital?

What was unusual about the hotel Continental in Pau?

What were Raquela's two jobs in Pau? Why did her name change to Simone Bonheur? Did one of those jobs change her or was her extreme act in Pau a true expression of her character?

How did Fit for Venus contribute to Rifka/Simone becoming famous in Parisian couture circles?