

READING GROUP GUIDE

THE QUIET TENANT

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Introduction

In this electrifying psychological thriller, a man leads a chilling double life. Aidan Thomas is a respected figure in his town; he's also a killer, having murdered eight women and holding a ninth captive in his shed.

When he is forced to bring his captive into his home, he is counting on her to be so psychologically damaged that she stays put. He introduces her to his daughter as a "friend of a friend" who needs a place to stay. At the same time, Aidan begins grooming another victim—a local restaurant owner named Emily, who finds her new customer irresistible.

Told in the alternating voices of his captive, Rachel; his daughter, Cecilia; and Emily, *The Quiet Tenant* raises provocative questions about trauma, endurance, and the dynamics of power, including the power of women to come together to fight back.

We hope this guide will enhance your book club's experience of this riveting novel.

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. What are Emily's strengths and vulnerabilities, and how do they compare to Rachel's?
2. As Rachel tells us her rules for survival (including number one, "He always wins," and number two, "He's always right, and you're always sorry,") what is she also telling us about her state of mind, and about Aidan's shifting sense of control? Have you seen dynamics like these in any real-life relationships?
3. How does Aidan stoke Emily's crush on him? How does he manipulate her?
4. How did you react to the voices of Aidan's previous victims? What was it like to see their

personal possessions? What do the artifacts in the basement represent to Aidan?

5. Discuss Cecilia's view of the world and her place in it. What does she believe about love and security? How has she learned to cope with loss and loneliness? How does she perceive the power dynamics between men and women?

6. What portrait of Caroline, Aidan's wife, emerges? How did your impressions of her shift throughout the novel?

7. Aidan's wife's prognosis was initially good. Rachel speculates that her illness spurred Aidan's obsession with trying to control another person's body. What are your theories about his sadistic appetite? Why do you think he spared Rachel for so many months, even—potentially—giving her an opportunity to escape?

8. When Rachel is narrating, she uses second-person pronouns (you/your) and present-tense verbs. How do these techniques affect the way you view her experiences? How does her voice contrast with Emily's and Cecilia's, and with the words of previous victims?

9. While the scenes in Emily's restaurant are packed with details of preparing mouthwatering food and drink, Rachel delivers visceral descriptions of starvation. What does the novel teach us about hunger and need?

10. As Rachel reflects on her relationship with her brother, what truths emerge about the will to live? What was his legacy to her?

11. Rachel describes her abduction in Chapter 41, "The Woman Without a Number." What does that scene show us about the mindset of a predator, and the moment they trap their prey?

12. When Rachel's real name is revealed, what do we observe about her ability to stay true to her identity throughout her time in captivity? How was she affected by her memories of family, as well as the memories of her previous abuse? To what degree is our identity shaped by our innate tendencies, versus the influence of people we depend on?

13. A theme of *The Quiet Tenant* is evil hiding in plain sight. What traits allowed Aidan to move freely in his communities, even attracting the sympathy of a judge? Did the book change your perception of the world around you? Have you ever been at the mercy of a master of illusion?

Resources and Suggestions for Further Reading

- *The Testaments*, sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood
- *Hope: A Memoir of Survival in Cleveland* by Amanda Berry and Gina DeJesus with Mary Jordan and Kevin Sullivan (nonfiction)
- *My Sister, the Serial Killer* by Oyinkan Braithwaite
- *The Girls* by Emma Cline
- *Finding Me: A Decade of Darkness, a Life Reclaimed* by Michelle Knight with Michelle Burford (nonfiction)
- *The New Neighbors* by Simon Lelic
- *Women Talking* by Miriam Toews
- *The Wonder* by Emma Donoghue
- *The Disappeared: Stories* by Andrew Porter
- *Too Scared to Cry: How Trauma Affects Children . . . and Ultimately Us All* by Lenore Terr, M.D. (nonfiction)
- *The Last House on Needless Street* by Catriona Ward

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, and has many resources and programs to prevent sexual violence., help survivors, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. Learn more at rainn.org.

If you or someone you know is experiencing intimate partner abuse, the National Domestic Violence Hotline offers [free, confidential help](#).