



As Little As Nothing

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

It is 1938 and rumours of a coming war are everywhere. On a quiet morning in September outside a small town in England, a plane crashes and four people are brought together in the aftermath. Rich with historical detail, *As Little As Nothing* beautifully explores themes of resistance, the strength of new bonds, and the various ways we reinvent ourselves.

1 Instead of focusing on the war itself as so many historical novels do, Mulloy has chosen to set *As Little as Nothing* in the year leading up to World War Two, a time of held breath, of constant waiting. Why do you think she made that choice? What do you think it allowed her to do with her characters that a full wartime setting would have overshadowed? Do you think living on the edge of a catastrophe as portrayed here could be compared to any modern-day events?

2 One of the great pleasures for many readers of historical fiction is the rich historical detail. One learns all kinds of things, from fashion to social mores to, in this case, the intricacies of Gipsy Moth airplanes, and it can leave you with a better feeling for an era than non-fiction might. What did you take away from *As Little as Nothing* that allowed you to understand the novel's time period better?

3 One device the author uses to evoke the sensibility of the era is to sprinkle actual newspaper headlines and lead paragraphs throughout the book. Do you think this was successful? If so, what was it that you liked about them?

4 In this novel, Mulloy was interested in exploring early 20th century feminism. The recent overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the U.S. Supreme Court has ensured Audrey and Miriam's activism is still relevant. Were you surprised by how active, and in many ways how progressive, the reproductive rights movement was at that time? Did the Supreme Court decision cause you to read this novel differently than you might have before?

5

While Miriam's and Audrey's stories are the dominant ones, Frank's hidden love for Peter, the Canadian pilot, is a significant subplot. It reminds us that women were not the only people held back by the mores of the time. Do you think Frank will find the heart to look for love again, or do you think that he will retreat further into his solitude?

6

Edmund is not striving in the way the other characters are, content with the steady existence of his garden, his daily rituals, and his firm belief that war is not coming, yet he stands by Miriam through her grief and ambition. Is he a more progressive character than he might initially appear? In his yearning for a steady existence, how do you think he would cope with the disruption of the war?

7

What struck you most about *As Little as Nothing*: the characters, the issues, the historical setting? Did it make you want to read more about the era?