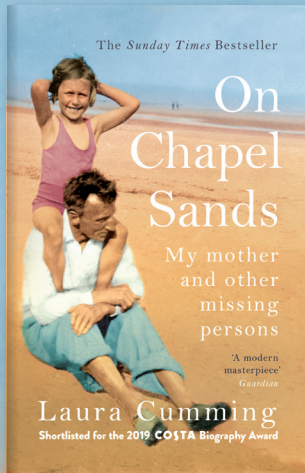


On Chapel Sands

My mother
and other
missing
persons



Laura Cumming

1. Were it not for the author's determination to find out what happened to her mother, the story this book tells might never have come to light. Is it ever possible to really know our families and ourselves if life-defining events are erased from memory?
2. Why do you think Veda and George behaved the way they did in keeping Betty's story secret from her? How would their lives have been different if Betty was in the same circumstances today?
3. What do you make of George? How do your feelings towards him change throughout the book?
4. Many people in the wider Chapel St Leonard's community know the truth of what happened. Why do they also keep quiet? How does this small village seem to you? How do you think the author feels about them – is she understanding of their actions?
5. Betty's life might have been very different had she not gone to art school. To what extent do class and social expectation have a bearing on her life?
6. *The Sunday Times* described *On Chapel Sands* as 'a moving, many-sided human story of great depth and tenderness, and a revelation of how art enriches life'. Cumming is an art critic as well as a writer and uses paintings to explore the emotions her family must have gone through (for example Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* on p. 127). What effect does this have?
7. The book is 'as much a social history of the early 20th century as it is the story of one family and its secrets', says *The Daily Telegraph*. What did you learn about 20th century rural life and Lincolnshire during the Second World War?
8. Cumming is clearly very close to her mother. Do you think Betty's relationship with Veda has anything to do with this? Why do you think she wanted to write this book?
9. '*On Chapel Sands* is a mystery solved through empathy and interpretation' (*Spectator*). Were you surprised by the ending of the book? Do you agree with Cumming's deductions? How important are the family photographs to the composition of her memoir?
10. How much do you know about your own parents' lives? Why do you think we as a nation are so interested in family history?

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