

**Book group discussion topics/questions for *The Last Winter of Dani Lancing*. By P. D. Viner**

- 1 What kind of book is this? Crime story, ghost story, revenge thriller? Does this book fit into a genre easily? Which of the main characters do you most associate yourself with and why?
- 2 Jim and Patty have markedly different relationships with Dani. How does this affect their reaction to her death? Would Patty have coped better if they had not argued before Dani's disappearance, or does it go farther back than that?
- 3 Like many couples who suffer the death of a child, Jim and Patty separate a few years after her death. Would they have separated anyway?
- 4 Tom says Dani is "the love of his life". Do you agree? What would have happened if she hadn't died?
- 5 The charity *Lost Souls* acts as a pressure group for harsher punishment for child killers and better support for families. Jim suspects that Karan and Patty are motivated by spite and bitterness. Is he right? What other options do Karan and Patty have?
- 6 In the book, Dani is a real character, although a ghost. In what sense is she real? How is the presence of someone deceased in our lives different from someone absent?
- 7 Is Dani a true character in that she exists as a ghost, or is she solely created by Jim's grief? Does your opinion as to the reality of Dani's ghost shift through the book?
- 8 If Dani is created by Jim, is he crazy to talk to her? Is it foolish to feel accompanied by the spirit of a deceased loved one?
- 9 Recent development in forensic testing plays a part in the book, how do you think the science adds to the story?
- 10 Jim has several intuitions about things that happen to Patty. Are these coincidences? Does it matter? How important is intuition for guiding our lives?

- 11 "Loss and grief sells." Is this true? Or does it make people numb to others' suffering? If newspapers didn't use people's suffering to sell, how would we become aware of other people's situations?
- 12 How could Dani's death have been avoided? Can we really protect our children against all harm? Should we want to?
- 13 The death of Dani changes the lives of Jim, Patty and Tom for ever. Can you think of events that have changed the course of your life? Of people who have done so?
- 14 How would you react to the loss of your child? How far would you go for revenge, or to know what happened?
- 15 Tom visits Patty himself to tell her about the developments in DNA testing? Are his motives entirely good?
- 16 To what extent does Tom see Jim and Patty as his second parents?
- 17 Patty feels she has been "hollowed out by grief". Is there a place for grief in our society? How do people react to other's grief?
- 18 Tom commits several illegal and even violent acts, which he justifies by his love for Dani. These range from breaking police protocol to getting someone innocent put in prison. Do you think some or any of his acts are justified? Where do you draw the line? If Dani had really been in love with him, would that change anything?
- 19 Franco is a gang-lord and yet he helps Tom and seems affected by his love for Dani. How do we respond to him? Is it possible that a character responsible for so much pain and fear can have a good heart?
- 20 Do you think Dani and Duncan planned to have a family? What would have happened if she had lived? Should a man always leave his existing wife/partner if he's having an affair and the other woman gets pregnant?
- 21 Do you have sympathy for Duncan Coburn? Could or should he have stood up to Tom? What do you think would have happened if he had, how far would Tom have gone to get Dani back?
- 22 How do you react to Audrey Coburn, first when we meet her as a

grieving widow; then later after we know what she did to Dani? Do you understand and/or condone what she did to Dani? To what degree are we entitled to fight to keep a person we love?

23 Jim knew a lot about Dani's life that he didn't share with Patty so as "not to worry her". Was he justified? When should parents keep secrets about their children from their partner?

24 Dani explores her sexual and other freedom and suffers for it. Was she foolish or just unlucky? Why do you think she doesn't tell her parents everything? Why don't more people that she meets help her? Do you think the author is making any moral points in the fact that Dani pays such a high price for her freedoms at university?

25 How does the author use violence in this book? What are the emotional and physical triggers that spark violence? How do you react to physical violence in novels – is it more or less affecting than emotional violence?

26 Many characters in the book use stimulants or drugs of one kind or another. Patty is addicted to prescription drugs. Do you think this is better than Dani's addiction to heroin? Is drug use something that can be eradicated? What would need to change for people not to want to use drugs?

27 Patty remembers saying to her own mother: "your values make me sick." Do you think that girls need to reject their mothers in order to become women?

28 Several of the characters are looking for revenge. Are they right? Does it help them? Is it inevitable that human beings want revenge?

29 Marcus Keyson transforms from helping Patty to attacking Tom. Is he justified in seeking to revenge himself on Tom?

30 Is Keyson a victim of Tom's moral polarization? He accuses Tom of knowing nothing of "true friendship or real loyalty" is that true?

31 Betrayal, in so many forms, is the key theme of this book. Do you agree?

32 Is this a book about obsession and obsessive love?

33 How important is the physical setting in this book? How does the author use Greenwich and Durham? Is the use of a Cathedral setting in the

final scenes important?

34 The novel shifts from the point of view of Dani, to Patty, to Jim and to Tom. How does this work? Do you feel closer to the main characters because of this – is your sense of empathy engaged?

Questions by Anna Cottis and P. D. Viner