

THE
READING
AGENCY

Discussion Guide



2026 Quick Reads

The Woman Next Door
by Louise Jensen

About the author

Louise Jensen has sold approaching 2 million copies of her international number 1 psychological thrillers. Her novels have also been translated into twenty-five languages and are for sale in over thirty territories. Louise's books have been featured on the USA Today and Wall Street Journal Bestseller's List and have been optioned for TV and film.

Louise's books have been nominated for various awards including the Goodreads Debut Award, The Guardian's 'Not the Booker' prize and best Polish thriller of 2018. She has also been listed for two CWA (Crime Writing Association) Dagger Awards. When Louise isn't writing thrillers, she turns her hand to penning love stories under the name Amelia Henley, along with writing short stories for magazines.



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Discussion Questions

Chapter 1

1. What does Ada notice about Meena when she first sees her moving in?
What do these details suggest about the kind of person Meena might be?
2. Why does Ada decide not to go outside to help Meena with the boxes?
What does this tell us about Ada's personality and habits?
3. Why does Ada keep binoculars by her chair and say she likes to "keep an eye on things"?
What does this reveal about her character and her role in the story?
4. What do we learn about the cottages and the people who have lived there before?
Why is Rose's disappearance and the comment about tenants "vanishing" important?
5. How does the chapter create a sense of mystery or unease by the end?
Which details make the reader feel that something is not quite right?

Chapter 2

1. What do Meena's cleaning and organising habits at the start of the chapter tell us about her state of mind?
Why does she line up tins and carefully fold the tea towel?
2. Why is Meena so anxious when someone knocks at the door?
What does her reaction suggest about her past or what she is afraid of?
3. How does the conversation between Meena and Ada show that both women are being guarded?
What questions do they avoid answering?
4. What do we learn about Meena's past through her thoughts about Starbucks and her cat Jet?
What do these memories suggest she has lost?
5. Why does Meena decide not to accept Ada's friendliness?
How does the final paragraph reinforce the idea that both women are hiding secrets?

Chapter 3

1. Why can't Ada sleep at the start of the chapter?
What do her memories of Stephen tell us about her past and her loneliness?
2. What does Ada remember about Stephen and the moon, and why does it make her feel worse now?
How does this memory show how much her life has changed?
3. What does Ada see in Meena's garden, and why does it frighten her?
What possibilities run through her mind as she watches the figure?
4. Why does Ada decide to go and check on Meena?
What does this show about her character?
5. What detail at the end of the chapter makes Ada (and the reader) suspicious of Meena?
Why do the muddy boots and the coat matter?

Chapter 4

1. Why does Meena feel so exhausted and on edge at the start of the chapter?
What does this tell us about what happened the night before and her state of mind?
2. Why does the cottage frighten Meena even in daylight?
Which details in the house make it feel unsettling and why do they affect her so strongly?
3. What makes Meena decide to go down into the cellar, and what is she expecting to find there?
What fears are already in her mind before she goes down the stairs?
4. What does Meena discover in the cellar, and why is it so disturbing?
Why are the blankets, the book, and the supplies especially worrying?
5. What do the words "RUN WHILE YOU CAN" suggest, and how does Meena react to them?
Why does she feel trapped rather than able to escape?

Chapter 5

1. How does the news about the burglary affect Ada, and why does it frighten her so much?
What does this tell us about her age, her vulnerability, and her fears?
2. Why does Ada want to check on Meena, and what does this show about her character?
What does her loneliness and desire for friendship reveal about her life?
3. What do Ada's memories about her children suggest about her family relationships?
How do these thoughts help us understand her past and her present?
4. How does the scene in the woods create tension and fear?
Which sounds, images, and thoughts make Ada feel that someone is watching her?
5. Why is the discovery of Meena's hidden car so worrying?
What does it suggest about Meena and what might be going on?

Chapter 6

1. Why does Meena lie about her car and her job, and what does this reveal about her situation?
What do these lies suggest about what she is trying to hide?
2. How does Ada's behaviour make Meena feel uneasy, even though she is being kind?
Which moments in their conversation create tension or suspicion?
3. What do Meena's thoughts about her mother and grandmother show about what she has lost?
How does this help us understand her loneliness and isolation?

4. Why are the woods such a frightening place for Meena?

What does she realise about the view from the trees, and why does that scare her?

5. Why is the mention of the previous tenant so important?

What does Ada's reaction to the name "Rose" suggest, and how does it increase the mystery?

Chapter 7

1. Why does Ada admit (to herself) that she is really working in the garden?

What does this show about her feelings towards Meena and her need for company?

2. What do Ada's memories about Stephen and the children reveal about her past?

How do these memories help us understand her loneliness now?

3. Why has Ada lied about the vegetable garden and the chest freezer?

What does this suggest about the basement and what it represents to her?

4. Why does the conversation with the man walking his dog feel uncomfortable or suspicious?

Which questions he asks and which answers he gives make him seem strange?

5. Why is the man's interest in the cottage next door important?

How does this connect to the mystery of the previous tenant and Ada's behaviour?

Chapter 8

1. Why does Meena describe herself as feeling "in a prison" in the cottage?

What does this tell us about her state of mind and her fear of being trapped?

2. Why is Meena so anxious about Ada being outside and about being seen?

What does this show about her desire to stay hidden and avoid attention?

3. What does Meena's behaviour at the window suggest about how safe she feels?

Why can't she relax even when nothing obvious is happening?

4. Why is the arrival of the man in the lane so important from Meena's point of view?

How does her perspective change the way we understand the scene from the previous chapter?

5. Why is it disturbing that the man had a lead but no dog?

What does this suggest about who he might be and what he could really be doing?

Chapter 9

1. Why does Ada think so much about the past while she is in the bath?

What do her memories of Stephen and the children show about what she has lost?

2. Why is the news about the burglaries especially upsetting to Ada?

How does this connect to her own fears and to the way she lives now?

3. Why does Ada think about how important the internet is to her?

What does this suggest about her life and the things she "wouldn't be able to do" without it?

4. Why is the single photograph on the fridge so significant?

What does it tell us about who matters most to her and what still hurts?

5. Why does the chapter end with "It's time"?

What does this suggest about Ada and the secrets she is keeping?

Chapter 10

1. Why does Meena vape and think about calling her mother?

What does this show about her stress, guilt, and the things she is trying to avoid facing?

2. Why is Meena so disturbed by hearing a man's voice in Ada's cottage?

How does this connect to her fear of the police and to her own hidden car?

3. Why is the scene with the "window cleaner" suspicious?

What about his behaviour and Ada's reaction makes the reader uneasy?

4. Why does Meena ask Ada about her children and about having company the night before?

What is she trying to find out, and why does it matter to her?

5. Why is Ada's denial at the end so important?

What does her obvious lie suggest about her secrets and what might really be happening in the cottage?

Chapter 11

1. Why does Ada choose a quiet corner table in the tea room?

What does this suggest about her personality and the kind of meeting she is having?

2. Why does Ada think of the person she is meeting as not quite a friend?

What kind of relationship do they seem to have, and why is it different from a normal friendship?

3. What do we learn about Rose and Meena from Ada's thoughts during this meeting?

How does this link the two women and suggest a pattern in Ada's behaviour?

4. What does Ada mean when she thinks that "nobody calls themselves by their real name" at Ivy Cottage?

How does this idea connect to secrets, hiding, and false identities?

5. Why is it so important that Meena doesn't know Ada knows her secret?

What does this suggest about the power Ada has and what she might be planning to do next?

Chapters 12 and 13

1. Why does Meena feel more frightened and unsettled in the cottage as time goes on instead of safer?

What does this tell us about her mental state and the effect the house is having on her?

2. Why does Meena start to comfort herself with the idea of her "fake life" as a teacher?

What does this reveal about what she has lost and what she is really longing for?

3. Why does Meena begin to see Ada differently by the end of Chapter 12?

What makes her start to trust her, and why might this be a dangerous mistake?

4. What does Ada mean when she thinks about "living a double life"?

What does this suggest about how much she is hiding and how carefully planned her actions are?

5. Why is the link between Rose and Meena so important?

What does Ada's hope that Meena "won't be the same" suggest about what happened before?

Chapters 14 and 15

1. Why is Meena so focused on cleaning and preparing the cottage for Ada's visit?

What does this show about her personality and her need for control and order?

2. Why is the discovery of the camera inside the owl so terrifying for Meena?

How does this confirm her fears and change everything about how safe she thought she was?

3. Why is it significant that every owl contains a camera except the bathroom?

What does this suggest about the person watching her and how long this has been planned?

4. Why is the name "Paul" so important when Meena realises "he's found her"?

What does this tell us about her past and the reason she has been hiding?

5. How does the calm ending of Chapter 15 from Ada's point of view increase the tension?

Why is it worrying that Ada is on her way to see Meena just as Meena is realising she is in danger?

Chapters 16 and 17

1. Why does Meena's reaction to Fred show how frightened and lonely she really is?

What do her thoughts about wanting a pet reveal about her emotional state?

2. Why is Fred's injury so important in this moment?

How does it distract Meena and pull her into doing something dangerous?

3. Why is it significant that Meena runs outside without checking if Paul is nearby?

What does this show about her priorities and how panicked she has become?

4. What does Ada mean when she thinks about being "invisible"?

How does this idea link to her age, to how others see her, and to what she is hiding?

5. Why is it chilling that Ada thinks "Meena will never know"?

What does this suggest about Ada's plans and the danger Meena may be in?

Chapters 18 to 22

1. Why does Meena follow Fred into Ada's garden even though she is terrified of being caught outside?

What does this show about her character and what she is willing to risk?

2. Why is what Meena sees through Ada's kitchen window so shocking and important?

How does this moment change her view of Ada and confirm her worst suspicions?

3. Why does Meena become determined to get into Ada's house in Chapters 20 and 22?

What does this tell us about how desperate she is for the truth?

4. How does Ada's calm, ordinary decision to go home (in Chapters 19 and 21) increase the tension?

Why is it frightening that she is heading back just as Meena is about to break in?

5. Why is Meena willing to smash her way into the house if she has to?

What does this show about how serious and how high the stakes now are for both women?

Chapters 23 to 26

1. Why is Ada thinking about the burglaries on the bus in Chapter 23 important?

How does this connect to what Meena is doing at the cottage and build tension through dramatic irony?

2. Why does Meena choose to break a window instead of the door in Chapter 24?

What does this show about her desperation and how far she is willing to go now?

3. Why is the photograph of Ada and Paul in Chapter 26 such a huge turning point?

How does it completely change Meena's understanding of both Ada and her own situation?

4. What is the significance of the binoculars in the lounge?

How do they confirm Meena's fears and reframe everything she has experienced in the cottage?

5. Why does Meena's thought that Paul "wouldn't hurt his mother's cat, only women he claims to love" matter?

What does this reveal about Paul, and how does it deepen the horror of Ada's possible role in everything?

Chapters 27 to 32

1. Why does the bus scene with the little boy (Chapters 27, 29, and 31) matter for understanding Ada?

How do these moments reveal the contrast between who Paul was as a child and who he has become?

2. In Chapter 28, why is Meena's memory of stabbing Paul such an important turning point in her backstory?

How does this change the way we see her fear, guilt, and determination to survive?

3. What is the significance of the children's bedrooms in Chapter 30 and Chapter 32?

How do the pink room and the blue room quietly tell us about Ada's family and the past?

4. Why is the laptop in Paul's room such a terrifying discovery?

How does it confirm Meena's worst fears?

5. At the end of Chapter 32, Meena realises both Ada and Paul are out and don't know she has discovered the truth. Why does this moment create a new kind of tension?

What choices does it open up for Meena — and what dangers does it still leave her in?

Chapters 33 to 35

1. What does Ada's conversation with the mother on the bus in Chapter 33 reveal about how she sees Paul?

How does her idea that "a mother's love is unbreakable" help explain her blindness?

2. Why is Meena's escape from Ada's garden so tense in Chapter 34?

What physical and emotional obstacles does she face, and how do they reflect her situation overall?

3. What is the significance of Meena discovering that her emergency supplies in the shed are gone?

How does this change her chances of escape and raise the stakes?

4. In Chapter 34, why is the moment when the front door opens so frightening?

What possibilities does it suggest, and how does it force Meena into a desperate decision?

5. At the end of Chapter 35, Paul texts Ada asking where she is. Why is this moment so ominous?

What does it suggest about Paul's movements and the danger Meena is now in?

Chapters 36 to 42

1. In Chapter 36, why is Meena's breakdown in the shed such an important moment?

What does it show about how trapped she feels?

2. Why is the escape route through the fence panels in Chapter 38 so symbolically important?

How does the fact that Meena prepared this "just in case" show her fear and her determination?

3. In Chapter 41, why does Ada choose to call Paul instead of the police when she sees the broken window?

What does this decision reveal about her priorities and her loyalty?

4. How does Meena's injury in Chapter 40 and her struggle through the woods in Chapter 42 increase the tension?

What does her determination to keep moving, despite the pain, tell us about her character?

5. Why is the discovery that the car keys are missing, followed by someone calling Meena's name at the end of Chapter 42, so terrifying?

What does this suggest about how close the danger is and how trapped Meena has become?

Chapters 43 to 46

1. Why is Meena's decision in Chapter 44 to return to the cottage such a powerful and frightening moment?

What does it show about how completely trapped she is and how few choices she has left?

2. How do Meena's memories of her mum in Chapters 44 and 46 deepen our understanding of her character?

What do they reveal about what she has lost, what she regrets, and what she is still hoping for?

3. In Chapter 45, why does Ada's concern for Fred and her decision to clean up the glass matter?

How does this moment contrast with what we know about her loyalty to Paul?

4. How does the author build tension during Meena's return to the cottage in Chapter 46?

Which details (sounds, darkness, movement, silence) make the scene so suspenseful?

5. Why is the final moment, when Meena discovers her phone is gone and Paul says "Hello, Meena," so effective?

What does this reveal about how carefully he has planned this and how much danger Meena is now in?

Chapters 47 to 51

1. Why is Ada's discovery of the moved laptop and the disturbed camera angles in Chapter 47 such a turning point?

What does it show about what Meena now knows and how the balance of power has shifted?

2. How does the flashback in Chapter 48 deepen our understanding of Meena's relationship with Paul?

What does it reveal about how abuse, control, and apology became part of a repeating cycle?

3. Why is Ada's statement in Chapter 49, "That man is not my son", so shocking and powerful?

What does this moment change about how we see Ada, Paul, and the situation as a whole?

4. In Chapter 50, how does Paul's behaviour and tone increase the sense of danger?

Why is he even more frightening now that we know he is not who Meena thought he was?

5. How does the long memory in Chapter 51 about Jane and the first meeting with Paul reframe the whole story?

What does it suggest about how easily charm can hide something much darker?

Chapters 52 to 55

1. How does Meena's realisation in Chapter 52 change the way she understands her relationship with Paul?

Why is it so important that she sees she was not the first, and not to blame?

2. In Chapter 53, what are the warning signs that Jane is being abused, and how does Paul's control mirror what he did to Meena?

Which small details (like the tins and tea towels) make the situation especially chilling?

3. Why is the fact that Paul is a police officer so significant in Ada and Stephen's inability to protect Jane?

How does this power imbalance trap Jane even further?

4. In Chapter 54, how does Ada's confrontation with Paul reveal the full scale of what he has destroyed?

What has he taken from her family, and why does this make Ada's determination so frightening?

5. What does Chapter 55 reveal about Ada's true purpose in running Ivy Cottage and watching the women?

How does this chapter change the way we judge her actions?

Chapters 56 to 59

1. How does Paul's explanation of how he found Meena make his power and control seem even more frightening?

Why does the fact that he used his job and experience to track her make escape feel almost impossible?

2. Why is Ada's decision to physically attack Paul such a turning point in the story?

What does it show about how far she is willing to go to stop him?

3. What is the significance of Ada's line about owls being Paul's "downfall"?

How does this connect Jane, Meena, and the hidden purpose of the objects in the cottage?

4. How does Meena's act of killing Paul differ emotionally from when she stabbed him in the past?

Why does this moment feel less like panic and more like finality or survival?

5. How do you feel about Ada's reaction in Chapter 59 when Paul is dead and hidden away?

Why do you think she feels relief instead of guilt?

Epilogue

1. Why is the calm, beautiful setting at the start of the epilogue so important after everything that has happened?

How does the garden and the birds reflect the emotional state of Ada and Meena now?

2. Why do you think Ada has finally decided to leave Ivy Cottage and move by the sea?

What does this show about how she is choosing to live with her memories rather than inside them?

3. How has Meena changed by the end of the story, and why does she choose to stay and continue Ada's work?

What does this say about healing, purpose, and taking control of her own future?

4. What is the significance of the freezer being "empty" and Ada saying it's better that Meena doesn't know?

How does this line tie up the darker part of the story while allowing a hopeful ending?

5. Why is the final image of the bird flying away a powerful way to end the novel?

How does it connect to Jane, to captivity and freedom, and to both women finally being able to move on?