

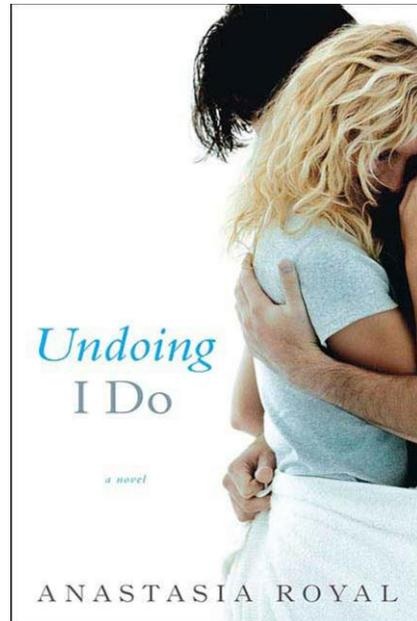
READING GROUP GUIDE

Undoing I Do

By Anastasia Royal

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Undoing I Do* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Undoing I Do*.

About the Book

Undoing I Do is a poignant novel about the convergence of love and divorce. Claire McCloud, musician, artist, actress and eccentric free spirit, suddenly finds herself a single mom in the new traditional American family--the divorced couple with two children.

Wild, hilarious, and unconventional, Claire never thought she would meet anyone who could domesticate her. She never imagined a man who could be her partner forever. But then came He Who Wears Scarves in Summer: a handsome German artist named Tobin Kleinherz. It's the 1980s, and he claims Claire's heart and soul at a hip gallery opening. After a whirlwind courtship, Tobin proposes and Claire amazes herself by accepting.

Years later, after a beautiful wedding, two adorable children and countless adventures, Claire and Tobin come face to face with their marital demons. Claire moves from morning sickness to mourning sickness as she realizes her dashing Tobin is leaving, and she must face her future alone. After her marriage unravels, Claire revisits the crucial moments when love and dreams began to shatter and spiral out of control.

With refreshing humor and the hard-won wisdom of a survivor, Claire grapples with lawyers, an empty bank account and myriad jobs to make ends meet. Almost miraculously, she pulls a new



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life from the wreckage and starts again on the road to happiness. Through a unique structure of interlocking vignettes, *Undoing I Do* examines the demise of love, uncovering its early symptoms, mysterious connections and powerful conclusions.

This beautiful novel is much more than the anatomy of a divorce. It's the compelling tale of one woman's struggle to transcend a bitter break up, protect her children from the fallout, and live life on her own terms. Using humor and a distinctive lyrical writing style, Anastasia Royal has created a soul-baring story that will have you laughing, crying, and enjoying every beautifully crafted sentence.

About the Author

Anastasia Royal is an artist, musician, composer, poet, playwright and actress. She received her B.A. in English Literature from Barat College and an art scholarship to the Art Institute of Chicago. Ms. Royal is a classical pianist, has been a radio and television voice-over actor, and was recently featured in the independent film STASH. *Undoing I Do* is her first novel.

Discussion Questions

1. The novel opens with the consummation of the romance between main character, Claire McCloud and her German lover, Tobin. The next chapter leaps to the future when Claire's husband, Tobin is moving out for good. What was your reaction to the contrast of these opening scenes?
2. Do you have a strong impression of Claire? Is she similar to anyone you know?
3. What is your opinion of her husband Tobin? What did you like about him? What did you dislike?
4. Who was your favorite character in the book?
5. Did you think the subject of divorce was treated with seriousness? What was your reaction to the humor in the book?
6. Royal has said that the real tragedy in divorce is not who did what horrible thing to whom, but the loss of love. Nothing trumps that. Do you agree?
7. Why do you think Claire and Tobin fell in love?
8. Was there a turning point in the marriage? Why do you think they fell out of love? Did it bring back memories of a divorce or a break up you experienced?
9. Do you think Claire still loves Tobin at the end of the book? What about Tobin's love for her?



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10. This story is told from Claire’s viewpoint, but do you still get a sense of Tobin’s viewpoint? How do you think his book would differ?

11. We learn about Claire’s children through their mother and through their diaries. Do you think the children’s plight was taken into account by Claire? By Tobin?

12. Does Claire’s family of origin explain anything about her character?

13. How are Claire’s friends important to the story?

14. How do you think the scenes of Claire’s past add to the layers of this story? How do they shape Claire’s character and inform her way of looking at the world. How do they help you understand her action later on?

15. Royal has called her book “a treasure chest of lost love where memory—with all its flaws—is one of the most valuable things we possess.” As we sort through the chest we come upon old photos, objects and artifacts and try to piece together what happened. Even though the photos are torn and the artifacts damaged, the story emerges and seems to become clear. Do you think Claire would have perceived the past differently if her marriage hadn’t fallen apart? Do memories change with hindsight?

16. Did you find yourself reflecting on your own story about *your* personal loss of love?

17. How does the nonlinear structure of the narrative—the many, short chapters that weave back and forth in time—contribute to the story? Does it remind you of the way memories and thought come into you own mind?

18. What issues about divorce did slamDUNK, the book within a book, illuminate for you? Did you identify with the issues mentioned?

19. The clues were part of the scaffolding of the novel. Did you find yourself wondering about your own relationship in regard to the clues?

20. What are the most vivid images and why? Do the key themes such as the lake, the trees, floods, the orange balls, burns, injuries, and the piano develop your understanding of the situation in which Claire finds herself? What do the images mean? For example: the orange balls.

21. What purpose does the train station scene serve? What would it mean if Claire hadn’t acted as she did there?

22. Is the issue of money in Claire’s marriage significant?



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23. How does the relationship between Tobin and Claire deteriorate from the first flood in Tobin's apartment to the second flood in the basement?
24. Claire's piano teacher often brings up the metaphysical aspects of the novel. What did Mimi teach, besides piano?
25. What happens to Claire at the end?
26. Did you like the way this story ended? Did you expect it to end differently?
27. Should men and women meet in beautiful rooms, stroke each other for hours, and then go back to their separate lives?

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