The Perfect Nanny by Laila Slimani

A U.S. release of an award-winning best-seller from Morocco follows the relationship between a working French-Moroccan couple and their too-good-to-be-true nanny, whose devotion to their children spirals into a psychologically charged cycle of jealousies, resentments and violence.

Why you'll like it: Psychological suspense. Compelling.

About the Author: Leila Slimani is the first Moroccan woman to win France's most prestigious literary prize, the Goncourt, which she won for The Perfect Nanny. Her first novel, Adèle, won the La Mamounia Prize for the best book by a Moroccan author written in French.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you see this novel as guilt trip for working mom – inspiring a sense of maternal inadequacy?
2. What do you think of Myriam and her husband, Paul? In what way would you call them needy?
3. Why doesn't Myriam, who is Moroccan-French, want to hire a North African nanny? She admits that she would worry about "immigrant solidarity." What does she mean?
4. Myriam tells friends, "My nanny is a miracle worker." What does that statement suggest a) about Myriam and ... b) about her relation with Louise?
5. What do you think of the fact that when Myriam goes shopping "she hides the new clothes in an old cloth bag and only opens them once Louise has gone." Paul praises her for being "tactful." What is your take on Myriam's tactfulness?
6. How are mothers in general portrayed in this novel? Consider the description of mothers sitting on park benches "starring into space" or the mother who has just given birth and who still carries around "her body of pain and secretions...This flesh that she drags around with her, which she gives no care or rest."
7. Follow-up to Question 6: If you are a mother, do the narrator’s depictions of motherhood resonate with you – the desire to continue a career outside the home, the feeling of guilt … or perhaps the opposite: the feeling that you shouldn’t stay at home, that you should pursue a career?
8. How do you feel about Louise (absent the fact that we know she has murdered two children)? What do we learn about her background: why she’s so obsessive, for instance, about her own mothering skills?
9. Follow-up to Question 8: Talk about this observation of Louise by Myriam: I had the feeling that she was like a plate that you put every day on the table, and she breaks every day a little bit. And one day you put it on the table and she breaks into pieces." What does Myriam mean? Is it a fair assessment of Louise?
10. Talk about the first sentence in the novel, even the first paragraph. How did it make you feel as you read it?
11. Toward the end of the book it was emphasized that Louise was destitute. Why didn’t she have any money? She was paid and they mentioned Louise didn’t spend much on clothes (accepting hand-me-downs) and she at the the Massies’ house.

12. How would you describe the narrative voice in *The Perfect Nanny*? In what way does it contribute to a sense of dread … or horror?

13. Does knowing that this novel is based on a real case of child murder by a nanny (in New York City) affect your reading experiences?

14. This isn’t a whodunnit. It’s a whydunnit. Why does Louise murder the children? Is her motivation ever fully explained?

*(Questions provided by the litlovers.com)*