

The Cartography of What Remains

A book-club discussion guide · Eva Schep

Twelve questions in three movements, the content notes, and what a club needs to know. Free to use, adapt or ignore. Request copies for your group at eva.schep.eu/book-clubs.

What a club needs to know

Length	47,334 words. A short novel, about three and a half to four hours' reading.
Chapters	15, evenly weighted. Splits cleanly at Chapter 8 for a two-session club.
Format	Kindle ebook. Free copies for every member, epub or PDF, whichever each reader prefers.
Print	Paperback and hardcover editions exist but are not on general sale yet. This is a digital read for now.
Author participation	Written Q&A only. No video calls, no phone calls, no live sessions.
Turnaround	Questions answered in writing within a week, ready to read aloud or circulate.
Setting	An unnamed canal city. Readers in the Low Countries tend to recognise it immediately.
Language	English, written in British English.

Content notes

The book is quiet and contains no violence, but it sits inside bereavement throughout. Worth flagging to a group: the sudden death of a partner from undiagnosed heart disease, including a hospital phone call; sustained depiction of grief, withdrawal and self-blame; a character concealing symptoms of serious illness; and a brief mention of the death of a child, historical and off-page, in an archive record. No sexual content, no on-page violence, mild language.

Discussion guide

Opening · 1–4

1. Lena keeps the chipped cup on the left of the sink with the chip turned towards the wall. On the last page she washes it and sets it down with the chip facing out. What has actually changed between those two gestures — and is it enough to count as an ending?
2. She says she goes back 'to gather evidence'. Evidence for a prosecution, or evidence for a defence? Who is standing trial in that kitchen, and who appointed the judge?
3. The going-back has two rules. Nothing there can be changed. And every return wears the memory thinner — the shelf above the radiator goes, then the calendar, then the street beyond the window, while Tomas's face stays clean. If your own memories were spendable like that, would you still go? How often?
4. The city is never named. Did that make it feel more real to you or less? Did you place it somewhere anyway — and if so, where, and what put it there?

The argument · 5–9

5. 'Later had been their most used promise by then.' Later for the form, the market, the leaking tap, the walk while the evenings still held light. Is 'later' a cruelty, or is it just what ordinary tiredness sounds like? Does the book let Lena off, and should it?
6. Tomas's carefulness — receipts under magnets, keys returned to the blue dish, cups dried with space around them — annoyed Lena when he was alive and is unbearable to her now. Why is care so often only legible after the fact? Is there someone whose care you are currently failing to read?
7. Halfway through, Lena finds the folded bus ticket in his coat: a hospital appointment for chest pain that he never told her about. Does that change the ledger? Does it make her failure smaller, or only differently shaped?
8. Noor, describing her mother, refuses to draw a moral: 'She did not make the dead child useful.' The novel does the same thing — it never converts Lena's grief into a lesson. Did you want it to? Is a book that refuses to console you being honest, or withholding?
9. Three living people keep offering Lena something: Mrs Smit's blunt neighbourliness, Pieter's dry kindness, Noor's silence that doesn't need filling. Which offer is hardest for her to take, and why that one?

Closing · 10–12

10. Near the end Lena realises that not going back could become its own ritual — 'another court, another room', a discipline she could be proud of. Is her final state recovery, or is it a truce? Does the distinction matter to her? To you?
11. 'The present was not a reward. It was only where consequence continued to happen.' Is that a bleak sentence or a hopeful one? The group will split on this; find out where the line falls.
12. The book ends without ceremony: 'She could go back... She did not.' No scene, no speech, no forgiveness. Was that the right ending — and if you'd have written one more page, what would have been on it?

Short on time? Run 3, 7 and 10 in sequence. That's the whole book: the cost of returning, the fact that arrives too late to help, and whether stopping is healing or just a better-managed grief. Forty minutes, and nobody has to have finished the last chapter.

Free copies for your whole group, and a written Q&A with the author: eva.schep.eu/book-clubs · eva@schep.eu