

# **BOOK CLUB To Go!**

## **The Pilot's Wife**

### **By Anita Shreve**

#### **Introduction**

Who can guess what a woman will do when the unthinkable becomes her reality? Until now, Kathryn Lyons's life has been peaceful if not extraordinary: a satisfying job teaching high school in the New England mill town of her childhood; a picture-perfect home by the ocean; a precocious, independent-minded fifteen-year-old daughter; and a happy marriage whose occasional dull passages she attributes to the unavoidable deadening effect of time. As a pilot's wife, Kathryn has learned to expect both intense exhilaration and long periods alone—but nothing has prepared her for the late-night knock that lets her know her husband has died in a crash.

As Kathryn struggles with her grief, she descends into a maelstrom of publicity stirred up by the modern hunger for the details of tragedy. Even before the plane is located in waters off the Irish coast, the relentless focus on her husband's life begins to bring a bizarre personal mystery into focus. Could there be any truth to the increasingly disturbing rumors that he had a secret? Fighting the impulse to protect herself and her daughter from the details of the crash and the mystery surrounding it, Kathryn sets out to learn who her husband really was—whatever that knowledge may cost. The search will lead her to shocking revelations, testing both the truth of her marriage and the limits of her ability to face it.

*(anitashreve.com)*

## About the Author

Anita Shreve grew up in Dedham, Massachusetts (just outside Boston), the eldest of three daughters. After graduating from Tufts University, she taught high school for a number of years in and around Boston. In the middle of her last year, she quit (something that, as a parent, she finds appalling now) to start writing. "I had this panicky sensation that it was now or never." Switching to journalism, Shreve traveled to Nairobi, Kenya, where she lived for three years, working as a journalist for an African magazine. One of her novels, *The Last Time They Met*, contains bits and pieces from her time in Africa. Returning to the United States, Shreve was a writer and editor for a number of magazines in New York. Later, when she began her family, she turned to freelancing, publishing in the *New York Times Magazine*, *New York* magazine and dozens of others. In 1989, she published her first novel, *Eden Close*. Since then she has written 12 other novels, among them *The Weight of Water*, *The Pilot's Wife*, *The Last Time They Met*, *A Wedding in December*, and *Body Surfing*.

([anitashreve.com](http://anitashreve.com))

## **Author Interview by Rachel Deahl (Boston Globe Magazine)**

**Deahl:** When did you realize you wanted to be a writer?

**Shreve:** I sort of felt it all along except that, you know, in my family I was encouraged to do something more practical. So I don't think I ever thought about it realistically when I graduated from Tufts.

**Deahl:** Is that why you decided to teach English after college?

**Shreve:** I taught for five years, first in Reading and then in Hingham. I actually liked teaching a lot, but I vividly remember thinking that I had to devote myself full-time to my writing and I had a sense of urgency about it, so I quit midyear to write short stories.

**Deahl:** *The Pilot's Wife* was selected for Oprah's Book Club. How did you get the news?

**Shreve:** I was out, and when I got back to my office I saw I had all these missed calls. It was Oprah's assistant, and he was pretending to be part of a small literary group in Chicago. When I called back, he said, "My boss wants to speak to you." The next thing I knew, Oprah was on the other end of the line; her voice is unmistakable. She just said, "Anita." I responded, "Hello." Then she said, "I loved your book." I said, "Thank you."

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## **Reviews**

"Gripping....You don't want to stop turning the pages once Kathryn has opened her door." —*Washington Post Book World*

"Compulsively readable....To create both sympathetic characters and an enticing plot is no small feat, but Shreve does it seamlessly." —*Orlando Sentinel*

"An absorbing, inventive tale rendered in fine, original prose." —*Houston Chronicle*

"Kathryn's emotional quest is masterfully rendered....We go where Shreve leads because the writing is so sure." —*San Diego Union-Tribune*

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## **Further Reading**

*Midwives* by Chris Bohjalian

*The Weight of Water* by Anita Shreve

*While I Was Gone* by Sue Miller

*Fortune's Rocks: A Novel* by Anita Shreve

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#### **Possible Discussion Questions**

1. The complex relationship between secrecy and intimacy is an important theme of *The Pilot's Wife*. Consider the secrets kept by the following characters: Kathryn, Jack, Mattie, Robert, Muire. In each case, what motivates the deceiver? Who is protected and who is harmed by the secret?
2. Does Shreve's use of flashbacks to Jack and Kathryn's marriage reveal the changes occurring between Jack and Kathryn? In what way did Jack and in what way did Kathryn each contribute to the marital problems? How did they each react to the difficulties?
3. Was Robert's betrayal the worst of all, as Kathryn thinks to herself? Who betrayed whom in this novel? Can you ever love someone who has betrayed you?
4. When Kathryn throws her wedding ring into the ocean, she thinks to herself: To be relieved of love is to give up a terrible burden. Do you agree?
5. Regarding Jack's religion or lack of it, he appeared to be quite divided. Was he assuming religious beliefs just to please the women he was with? How does his religious division give us clues to his character?
6. How do the memories and thoughts Jack and Kathryn each have about their respective mothers influence their views of marriage?
7. "and she thought then....such a thing of beauty." Could this passage also be used at the end of the book? Is there beauty in disaster?
8. What devices does Shreve use to make her novel such a compelling read? Consider the flashbacks, the action, the style of language and word choice, and character painting.

9. At what point in the story did you figure out that Jack was having an affair? Were you suspicious when Kathryn found the receipt for the bath robe, or the note in his pocket? Did you want to believe Kathryn's suspicions?
10. Do you think *The Pilot's Wife* would make a good film? If so, why? Who would you cast as the major characters in the film version? Why?

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