



The Mirrored World

By Debra Dean
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Questions for Discussion

1. The novel opens with a striking dream. What is its portent?
2. Talk about Xenia as a child, a wife, and a widow. What adjectives would you use to describe her? Was she too sensitive for the difficulties of the material world? How does Xenia compare to her sister, Nadya and her cousin, Dasha?
3. Talk about Xenia's relationship with her husband, Andrei. Can someone love too much? Is love itself a form of madness?
4. What about Dasha and Gaspari's relationship? What are the most important components of a successful marriage? Is passion necessary?
5. What are your impressions of life in eighteenth-century Tsarist Russia? How does Debra Dean bring this time and place to life?
6. After Andrei's death, Xenia tells Dasha, "I have let people starve that I might wear that lace. But I shall be naked before God." Was Xenia right to feel guilty over her privilege while so many of her fellow citizens starved?
7. Is Xenia blessed by God, or is she mentally disturbed, driven mad by inconsolable grief? Is it "crazy" for a person to give up all material possessions as she did?
8. Was there anything that Dasha or anyone could have done to help Xenia or was her transformation the true purpose of her life? Do you think Xenia found peace in her transformation?
9. Compare the Tsarist Russia of Xenia's time with our world and our own society. Despite the obvious differences, do you see any similarities?
10. How would a person like Xenia be viewed today? Is most of the modern world too cynical to believe in miracles? Do you believe in miracles? Xenia has become one of Russia's most revered saints. What makes someone a saint? What do you think of Xenia?
11. What are the challenges and rewards of long friendship? Have you had a friend who changed dramatically, and how did you handle that?