

# EXPOSURE

## HELEN DUNMORE

### Reading guide

'A gripping, subtle, emotional novel'  
Sadie Jones, Author of *The Outcast*

Helen Dunmore delivers a deceptively simple masterpiece, a new take on the lives of the men and – particularly – the women caught up in the cold war . . . Exposure is magnificent -

*Independent on Sunday*

#### Synopsis

By the Sunday Times bestselling author of *The Lie*. Forbidden love, intimate betrayal and the devastating power of exposure drive Helen Dunmore's remarkable new novel.

London, November, 1960: the Cold War is at its height. Spy fever fills the newspapers, and the political establishment knows how and where to bury its secrets.

When a highly sensitive file goes missing, Simon Callington is accused of passing information to the Soviets, and arrested.

His wife, Lily, suspects that his imprisonment is part of a cover-up, and that more powerful men than Simon will do anything to prevent their own downfall.

She knows that she too is in danger, and must fight to protect her children. But what she does not realise is that Simon has hidden vital truths about his past, and may be found guilty of another crime that carries with it an even greater penalty.

#### About Helen Dunmore

Helen Dunmore is the author of fourteen novels. Her first, *Zennor in Darkness*, explored the events which led to D H Lawrence's expulsion from Cornwall (on suspicion of spying) during the First World War. It won the McKitterick Prize. Her third novel, *A Spell of Winter*, won the inaugural Orange Prize, now the Bailey's Prize for Women's Fiction. Her bestselling novel *The Siege*, set during the Siege of Leningrad, was described by Antony Beevor as 'a world-class novel' and was shortlisted for the Whitbread Novel of the Year and the Orange Prize. She has also written a ghost story, *The Greatcoat*, under the Hammer imprint.

She is fascinated by the Cold War era, which was also the era of her childhood, and is the setting for *Exposure*, and by the secrets, betrayals, loves, lies and loyalties which make up the period's intimate history.

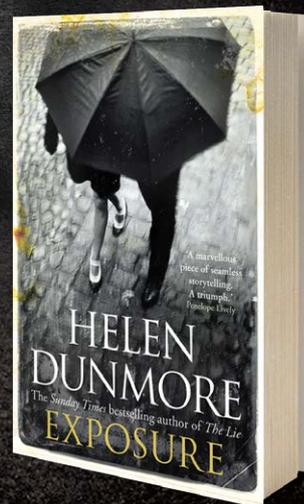
Helen Dunmore's work has been translated into more than thirty languages and she is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

'An electrifying and original talent.'

*Guardian*

'Everyone should read her work.'

*Independent on Sunday*



## Reading Group Questions

1. 'Lily gets up, puts the file back inside the briefcase, and clicks it shut. It's no good just getting rid of the file. The whole thing must completely disappear. No one must know that it ever came into the house.' (p. 114) What would you have done if you were in the same position as Lily? Do you think Lily was right to hide the briefcase in the back garden?
2. What are the different levels of exposure in the novel?
3. Do you think Lily should have asked Simon's parents for help? Or do you think Simon should have insisted his parents help his wife and children financially?
4. Do you think Lily made the right decision by moving to East Knigge with the children? How far would you go to protect your family?
5. 'She doesn't understand anything. I bet she thinks Dad's gone on holiday. She thought custody was custard.' (p. 199) How much do you think the children understand what is going on?
6. 'Tolstoy gave his wife his diary to read, just before their wedding.' (p. 324) Do you think Simon should have been honest with Lily about his relationship with Giles before they married? Are we lying if we don't reveal information to do with our past to our loved ones?
7. 'But probably, thought Simon, they all had their own secrets. You keep your secrets, and I'll keep mine. That was the way things worked.' (p. 98) There are many different levels of secrets in *Exposure*. What are the secrets revealed in the novel? And those that will remain hidden/buried?
8. Were you surprised by the meeting between Lily and Julian Clowde? How would you have reacted if you were in Lily's situation?
9. Do you think Lily's past experiences had an influence on how she handled the situation?
10. What did you think of Lily? Do you think she is a likeable character? How sympathetic is she as a central protagonist?
11. 'Is it true what they're saying, your ma's a German?' (p. 196) Lily is often seen as an outsider. How does this reflect our attitudes towards people who are different in today's society?
12. What did you think of the ending? How do you think Lily will react to Simon's return? Do you think she will forgive him? How do you think his deception might change their relationship?
13. Why do you think Helen Dunmore chose to set her novel during the Cold War?
14. Would you call *Exposure* a spy novel and why?

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