

Discussion Questions

The Sun Down Motel by Simone St. James

1. Why do you think the author chose to tell this story across two time periods and two points of view? Do you think it was effective? Why or why not?
2. Discuss how each of the victims were described in the media. Do you think the way the media characterized these women played a role in the overall investigation—and the failure by the police to catch the killer? How does their characterization compare to how victims are described by the media today?
3. From the beginning, Viv is determined to uncover who the female ghost is and why she's haunting the motel. Why do you think this was so important to her? Why do you think she didn't just flee Fell, New York, and the motel?
4. Viv, Carly, and Heather all have a somewhat morbid curiosity surrounding both the Fell, New York, murders and true crime in general, which reflects the fact that young women tend to be the biggest consumers of true crime content. Why do you think this is?
5. Discuss the ghosts that haunt the motel, especially Betty. What do you think each of them represented, if anything?
6. There are multiple instances where the women of this novel discuss what women should be doing to protect themselves, although as Viv notes: "It was always girls who ended up stripped and dead like roadkill.... It didn't matter how afraid or careful you were—it could always be you." What do you think the author is saying about the experience of being a woman? Do you think the novel might have been different if Viv and Carly were men? If so, how?
7. How are the concepts of female rage and empowerment explored in this novel, if at all?
8. Consider Alma and Marnie, and the relationships they formed with Viv and with each other. Why do you think they allowed themselves to become involved with Viv's investigation?
9. Multiple characters throughout this novel end up returning to the small town of Fell, New York, or choose to remain there despite many reasons—and opportunities—to leave. Why do you think they are drawn to the town?
10. Building off the previous question, why do you think the author chose a remote town—and an even more remote roadside motel—for the setting of this novel? How do you think the story would have changed with a different setting?

11. Discuss the way the killer was finally stopped. Do you think those involved did the right thing? Do you think, especially with consideration of the time period, that they could have done anything differently?

(Questions issued by the publisher.)

