



## Book Discussion Questions



1. Rita's childhood could be considered sheltered, even enchanted. There's no question her parents had wealth and status, moving in some of the most rarified social circles. How did her childhood prepare her for the real world? Or did it? Do you think Rita would have been a successful actress if not for the initial support of Pauline?
2. The Jolivet sisters shared a deep and abiding bond, but Rita was always the leader. Was it fair of her to drag her little sister along with her to London, just to get her own way?
3. Rita's first experience acting in live theatre was a disappointment. In real life, she would allude to it when pressed, but never openly discuss it. Even so, she didn't give up her dream. Would you have?
4. Rita enjoyed what could be called a bohemian lifestyle for her time, flouting convention if it didn't suit her. She was a famous, divorced woman who lived happily alone but had no problem inviting her lover into her home. She had a strong publicity machine at her back to smooth over any

transgressions, but should she have been more circumspect regarding her private life?

5. Inez defends her decision to marry George by stating simply: "I am at home in his heart." Do you believe she actually fell in love with him that quickly, or was becoming Mrs. Vernon more of a new version of herself that she couldn't wait to experience, especially since Rita had vanished into her own world?
6. Even as she began to fall in love with Giuseppe, Rita would tell herself, *I want him, but I don't want to need him*. Considering her past divorce and her thriving career, was she wise to guard her heart against the count?
7. Rita decided to take the *Lusitania* despite all the public warnings. Do you think she was too trusting of the official mantra that the ship was too fast to be torpedoed? Or was she justified in feeling that her need to reach her brother before he left for the front outweighed the risk? Would you have boarded the ship?
8. In 1918, Rita was summoned as a witness for a Limitation of Liability hearing for the *Lusitania*. She described her last moments aboard the ship and the hours after, in clear, calm detail, including the fact that she clung for hours to an upside-down boat, bearing witness to the death and destruction all around her. How do you think you would have fared in her place? In those frantic minutes after the liner went under, would you have let the panicked people still in the water climb up the lifeboat, even at the risk of capsizing it?
9. Inez was clearly devastated to lose George, her husband of twelve years and the love of her life. Did Rita and her family do enough help her in those weeks after the sinking? Or do you think Inez was deliberately as emotionally hidden as she needed to be to conceal her true intentions?

Do you think her decision to end her life was entirely premeditated, or was it more a last-minute act of despair?

10. Do you agree with Rita's decision to make *Lest We Forget*? Was it cathartic for her or more of a publicity grab? Why do you think Rita agreed to the government's request that she travel around the country to speak about the sinking while selling Liberty Bonds, even though it caused her anguish?
11. What do you think of Rita's deliberate, unspoken message to her enemies: *I'm still here*?
12. "Talkies" came about in the late 1920s and changed the ways films were made forever. But before that, the silent stars of the silver screen were considered fascinating, remote, glamorous, untouchable. And no one even knew what they sounded like! Have you ever imagined what it would be like to be a part of that world, a fêted star of that era, like Rita or Mary Pickford or Rudolph Valentino? What would your stage name be?