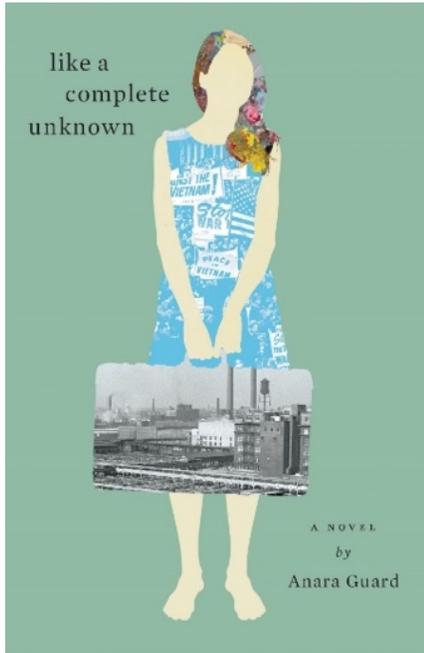


Reading Guide

Like A Complete Unknown

A novel by Anara Guard



ABOUT THE BOOK

A runaway on the streets of Chicago faces great risks.

Dr. Robert Lewis knows this all too well.

Katya Warshawsky is about to find out.

In 1969, a girl's life is not her own. Katya's parents demand she drop out of school to join a cleaning crew. She runs away instead—but the counterculture isn't as welcoming as she dreamed. Starry-eyed, barefoot, and in trouble, she turns to widowed Dr. Lewis for help at his women's clinic, then disappears again. The aging doctor's rash impulse to save her could rejuvenate his melancholy life. While Katya hunts for freedom and Robert searches for her, they each encounter beauty and chaos as they brave the unknown. A compelling and evocative portrait that speaks to our own complex social times.

Paper	\$18.99	978-1-929777-25-9	376 pages
	Literary women's fiction		2022
E-book	\$8.99	978-1-929777-27-3	New Wind Publishing

TOPICS and QUESTIONS for DISCUSSION

- 1) What does the title of the novel mean? What does “the unknown” mean to each of the characters, both externally and internally? What do they not know about the world and about themselves?
- 2) Did the sayings/epigrams at the beginning of each chapter mean anything to you? In what way?
- 3) Why did Katya run away? Did she have other choices? How has life changed for young women since 1969?
- 4) Discuss the structure of LIKE A COMPLETE UNKNOWN. What is the effect of having different points of view (Katya, Robert, Mrs. Watkins, Hanna)? Why was chapter 5 told in second person? What effect did that have on your reading experience?
- 5) Katya thinks she “is a stain on the Warshawsky name” (p. 275). Was she right in thinking that her circumstance would shame the family? How else did shame appear in the novel?

- 6) Why did Robert agree to help at the free clinic? What was the risk he took? How did this expand his life?
- 7) Were you surprised to learn that Louise had a secret? How did it change your view of her?
- 8) How did you experience the Vietnam War? Reading about it, living through it, attending protests? Did you know anyone who was drafted or who evaded being drafted?
- 9) The novel is bookended with glimpses into Katya's life thirty years later. How did knowing how her life turns out affect your experience of the novel? What do you think happened next for Robert and Louise? For Huck? For Harlow?
- 10) Did you find Huck to be trustworthy? How did his character compare with Harlow's?
- 11) Is the city itself a character? What impression did you have of Chicago during this time period?
- 12) For a long while, Robert does not know why he searches for "Cathy." Huck asks (p. 146), "How badly you wanna find her?" What do you think motivated the doctor to leave his office and hunt for her?
- 13) False names are used throughout the novel, by Huck, by Katya/Cathy/Laura, by Glorious when she bestows a new name on Katya. Have you ever used a pseudonym in your life? How does using a false name benefit someone? How does it get in the way?
- 14) For much of the book, Katya has an unwelcoming attitude toward her pregnancy. When does this change and why? How does it affect her decision to give Jesse up? Do you think this was the right decision for her to make?
- 15) Idealism runs throughout the book--in Harlow's political views, Katya's wish to become an artist, Mrs. Watkins' brief fantasy to keep Katya. How do the characters' dreams motivate them? Which dream or ideal most appealed to you?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anara Guard grew up in Chicago. Her short story collection, *Remedies for Hunger*, was named by Chicago Book Review as a Best Book of 2015. She received the John Crowe Ransom Poetry Prize from Kenyon College. Her work has been published in *Gold Man Review*, *California Quarterly*, *The Ear*, *Twenty Twenty: 43 stories from a year like no other*, and elsewhere. *Like A Complete Unknown* is her first novel. She is available to speak to book clubs and other groups. Visit her website at www.anaraguard.com