

A stylized illustration of a woman with voluminous, wavy red hair, wearing a bright red blazer over a white blouse with a bow at the neck. She is shown in profile, looking towards the right. The background is a deep blue night sky with small white stars. In the lower half, there are silhouettes of several tall, modern skyscrapers in a lighter blue color. The title "THE DARKNESS KNOWS" is written in large, white, serif capital letters, with the word "THE" on the first line, "DARKNESS" on the second line, and "KNOWS" on the third line. The word "KNOWS" has a long, elegant tail on the letter 'S' that extends to the right.

# THE DARKNESS KNOWS

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# READING GROUP GUIDE



1. Vivian tells Charlie that she'll do anything to succeed as an actress. Do you think that's true? Why or why not?
2. A career woman, of any kind, was a fairly unusual thing in the late 1930s. Why do you think Vivian is so focused on being a radio star? Where do you think that drive comes from?
3. Vivian claims to be an independent woman, and she is to a point, but she also lives with her wealthy mother and doesn't fully support herself. How do you think she justifies these dualities? Does she think about it at all?
4. Vivian certainly isn't a shrinking violet, yet she's mortified of her mother finding out what she's been up to with Charlie. How do you think societal pressures were different in Vivian's day? How were they the same as today?
5. Vivian and Charlie clearly come from different classes and backgrounds. How do you think this affects their relationship?

6. Compare and contrast Vivian's relationship with Imogene to her relationship with Frances. Why do you think she relates to the two women so differently?
7. Radio has famously been called the "theater of the mind." How do you think the medium of radio drama compares to that of novels or movies? How would a story be told differently depending on the medium? How would this story be told differently as a radio play? As a movie?
8. Vivian's father died at a very impressionable time in her life (her late teens). How do you think his death affected her? How do you think it affected her relationship with men? With her mother? If you have experienced the death of either of your parents, how has it affected your life?
9. What do you think draws Vivian to Charlie? Charlie to Vivian?
10. What do you think draws Vivian to Graham? Graham to Vivian?
11. The murderer in this story turns out to be someone fairly unlikely. How do you feel about this character? Can you sympathize with the murderer in any way?
12. What traits do both Vivian and Frances share? Do you think Vivian is proud or ashamed of these? How do these two women differ?

13. Vivian has feelings for both Charlie and Graham. How do the two differ? Have you ever been in such a situation?
14. What does the author use to create realism in the story? How does she make the time period authentic? How would this story differ if it were to take place in present time?
15. What do you think is in the future for Vivian and Charlie?

# A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

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**How old were you when you wrote your first story?  
What was it about?**

I started writing stories as soon I could read. I used to have my dad haul out our ancient manual Underwood typewriter to the dining room table so I could hunt and peck out my stories about cats. My dad called me the Mad Typist. The first real story I can remember writing and finishing was called *The Mouse That Didn't Believe in Santa Claus* in the third grade. I illustrated it as well. I still have it.

**What do you love most about writing?**

I love world building and doing historical research. I got really involved in figuring out the particulars of what Chicago looked like in October 1938—how it would have felt to walk down the street; how it would have sounded, smelled; what was playing at the movie theaters. It's a way of time traveling. Writing is also a way of living vicariously through my characters. I can make them do anything...to a point.

**What inspires you the most as a writer?**

I'm a curious person by nature. I'm always on the lookout for interesting stories (especially historical), and I love learning.

I never really know what little tidbit of information will strike my fancy or spark a story idea.

**Who are some of your favorite authors? Why are they your favorites?**

*My Antonia* by Willa Cather was the first real grown-up book I read. It had a major impression on me since it's not a romance and it doesn't have a (completely) happy ending. I read Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* during a short story writing class in college. It has such perfectly specific detail you'd think it was a memoir and not fiction. In the historical romance genre, I love Anya Seton. Then, on the complete other end of the spectrum, I really love a good Stephen King book. I read *It* as a twelve-year-old (likely *way* too early in the grand scheme of things), and it thrilled and terrified me. The setting/world he created is so intricately detailed. Basically, I just like to be entertained, no matter the genre.

**When do you know the story is finished?**

I think the mystery genre is a little easier than others—the bad guy/girl gets caught or the mystery is solved. But in my head, the story is never really over. The characters keep going, keep interacting, keep having adventures. But I suppose, in a story's structure, you just feel that the time is right to wrap this particular chapter up.

**What advice would you give to aspiring writers?**

Write what you want to read. And let yourself get bored.

My best ideas are born from boredom, when I just let my mind wander and I'm forced to entertain myself.

**What is one thing you know now that you wish you knew when you started your writing career?**

Patience is required. Getting published is not a quick or easy process. If someone had told me when I started to write this book that it would take seven years for it to be published, I may have quit then and there. There were so many times in this long process that I could have given up, but I didn't. It's not the published book that I'm most proud of—it's not quitting.

**Did you always want to be a writer, or did you start off in a different career?**

I've always wanted to be a writer, but by virtue of having to pay the bills, I've found myself in a career completely unrelated to writing. The reality of it is that very few people are lucky enough to make their living as a writer. I've never wanted to be a starving artist. I like to eat too much, and health care is a nice thing to have.

**If you could spend one day with an author, dead or alive, who would it be, and why?**

Probably Dorothy Parker or Mark Twain—someone who doesn't take themselves too seriously.

**What are your favorite genres to read?**

I love historical suspense/mystery with a touch of romance



(obviously). But I also love horror, YA, historical fantasy. Really, I'm just a sucker for good storytelling.

**How would you describe your writing style in one word?**

Light.

**What is the most challenging part of being a writer?**

Keeping at it and not getting discouraged by failure or rejection. Writing is a very solitary thing, and it's easy to convince yourself that no one will like what you're putting down on paper. Letting people read what you write and getting feedback is terrifying, but necessary.

**What research or preparation did you engage in before writing this book?**

I'm a huge fan of old-time radio shows. I have been since I saw Woody Allen's *Radio Days* in the eighth grade, but it was hard to get access to them back then. Then a little thing called the Internet came around, and I realized I could listen to old radio shows whenever I wanted, which meant at my desk at work. The time period and the speech, I think I learned through osmosis from all that listening to old radio shows and watching old movies. I also really delved into how radio shows were produced and the radio scene in Chicago, trying to find firsthand accounts if I could. I found old *Radio Guides* on eBay and poured over the gossip articles—"The Tattler" in the *Radio Guide* was a real thing! I learned so much from those about what things were like for actors and actresses, as well as listeners. I also researched what Chicago was like in 1938. The



Loop was a much more vibrant and lively place then. People came downtown to go shopping. There were movie palaces everywhere. There were streetcars clanging down State Street. Chicago 1938 is very much alive in my head.

**Which character do you feel most closely connected to?**

Vivian. She's everything I'd like to be myself—sassy and confident...and petite. I've always wanted to be petite.

**Are any of your characters inspired by the people around you?**

Not overtly, but I suppose I subconsciously use the personality traits of people around me for my fictional friends.