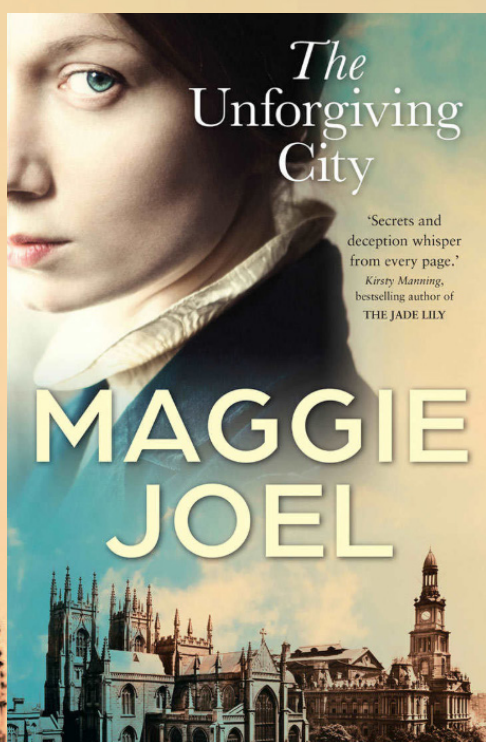


# ALLEN & UNWIN'S

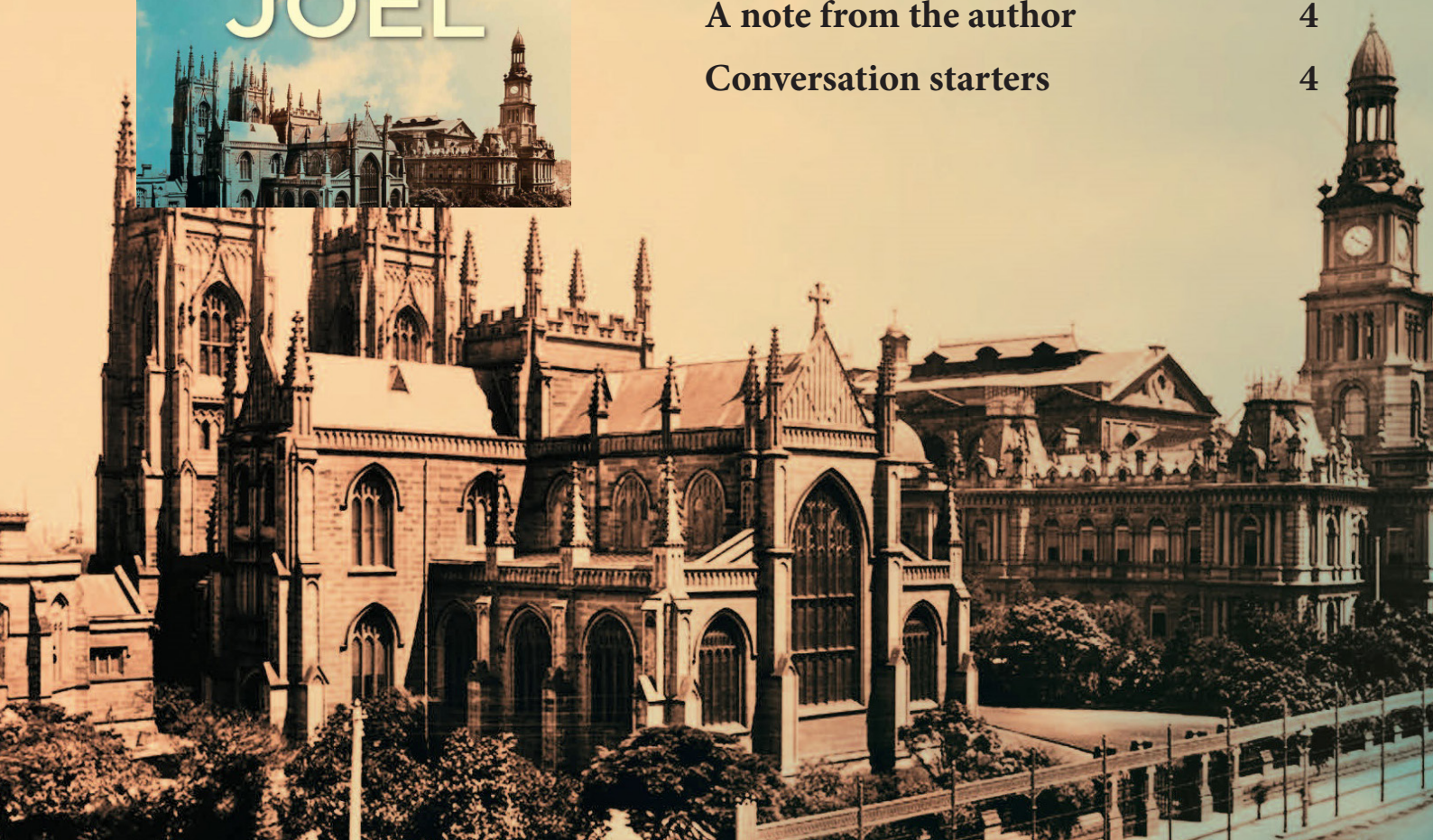
# *Book Group Guide*

## Conversation Starters



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## ABOUT THE BOOK

### *Secrets and lies throw three lives into chaos in the last days of the nineteenth century.*

Colonial Sydney in the final weeks of the nineteenth century: a city striving for union and nationhood but dogged by divisions so deep they threaten to derail, not just the Federation, but the colony itself. There are chasms opening too when a clandestine note reaches the wrong hands in the well-to-do household of aspiring politician Alasdair Dunlevy and his wife Eleanor. Below stairs, their maid Alice faces a desperate situation with her wayward sister.

Despite sharing a house, Eleanor, Alice and Alasdair are each alone in their torment and must each find some solution, but at what cost to themselves and those they love? Evocative, immediate and involving, this is the sweeping story of three people, their passions and ambitions, and the far-flung ripples their choices will cause.

## IN CONVERSATION WITH MAGGIE JOEL

Watch Maggie Joel discuss *The Unforgiving City*





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Maggie Joel has had four novels published. The first, *The Past and Other Lies*, was published to critical acclaim in Australia in 2009 and in the United States in 2013. Her second novel, *The Second-Last Woman in England*, was published in Australia in 2010, in the United States in 2011 and in the United Kingdom in 2013. This book was awarded the 2011 Fellowship of Australian Writers' Christina Stead Award for Fiction. Maggie's third novel, *Half the World in Winter*, was published in 2014 and in the United Kingdom in 2015. Her fourth novel, *The Safest Place in London*, was published in 2016.

Maggie lives in Sydney and works as the operations manager at a federal government agency.

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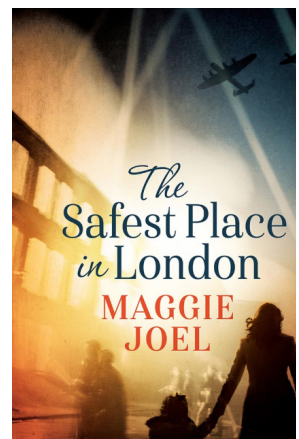
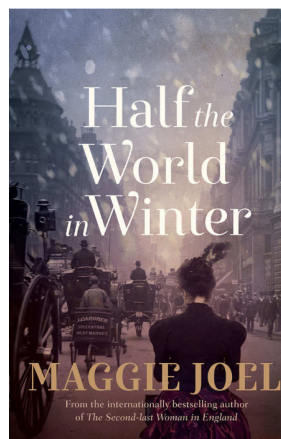
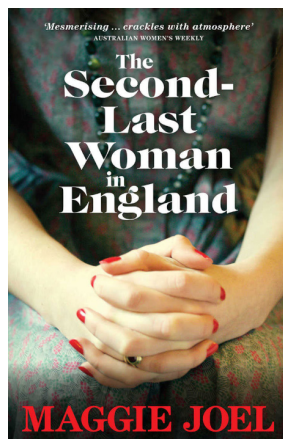
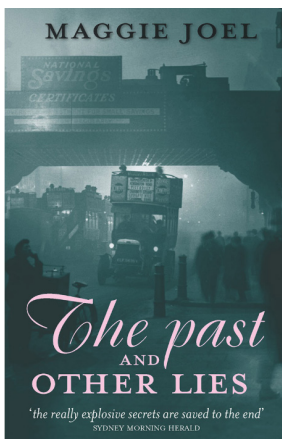
## ALSO BY MAGGIE JOEL

*The Past and Other Lies*

*The Second-Last Woman in England*

*Half the World in Winter*

*The Safest Place in London*



## A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

This novel represents a seismic shift for me as a writer. I was born in London, though I have been an Australia citizen for almost thirty years, and my previous four published novels were all set in London and other parts of the UK. A perceived lack of knowledge and a sense of being, still, after nearly three decades, an outsider has always held me back from writing at any length, or with any confidence, about my adopted country.

I live in Sydney, and I have a love of history. My previous novels have all had historical settings, so I do have a certain level of confidence at researching and recreating a particular time and place from the past. This is my first attempt to tackle Australian history, and I started from Ground Zero in terms of my knowledge of this subject.

The basis for the story is the Federation Referendum in 1899, an event I didn't even know had taken place, let alone what the events were surrounding it, or indeed what Sydney was like at the time. Everything I have since learnt and put into the book is from the extensive research I undertook, and my wonderings around the city during the period of the writing the manuscript. At first being an outsider, a migrant, to this country, caused me some unease. In terms of my lack of historical and cultural knowledge, and even my right to write about this country's past, but having completed the novel I now believe this sense of being an outsider gave me a certain distance, an objectivity. It really was a voyage of discovery and has given me a new version of, and an appreciation for, this beautiful city that I did not have before.

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

- 💬 Why do you think the book is entitled *The Unforgiving City*?
- 💬 What was the most surprising thing you learnt about pre-Federation Sydney, Australia?  
[Click here to hear the author's answer](#)
- 💬 *The Unforgiving City* is told from three very different perspectives; which one did you most identify with and why?
- 💬 What secrets/lies were revealed in *The Unforgiving City*? Did you find any particularly shocking? Which ones and why?
- 💬 Alice, Eleanor and Alasdair belong to three very different classes in 1899 society. How do you think this affected each character's actions? Do you think these class structures exist today in Australia?
- 💬 Did you guess where central characters, Alice, Eleanor and Alasdair, would be at the end of the novel?
- 💬 If you could ask any of the characters a question at a point in the novel, what would you ask?

- ☞ The pivotal characters in the novel are entirely fictional, however, there are a few minor characters who are based off real people and events. Did you spot them? (Hint: read the author's note at the back of the book for the answer.)
- ☞ If you were in colonial Sydney, how would you have voted in the referendum, and why?
- ☞ In the first chapter, Alasdair has the following internal dialogue while giving a pro-Federation speech.

*'Gentlemen . . .' (And, yes, there were women in the audience, but none of them had questioned the Federation, had they? None of them had questioned his sound reasoning. Besides, none of them had the vote.)*

What do you think about the attitudes towards women's rights from both men and women in the book? How do you think they have/haven't changed?