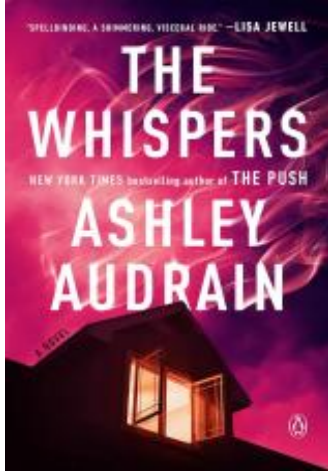


# The Whispers

by Ashley Audrain

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## About the Book

**From the author of *THE PUSH*, a page-turner about four suburban families whose lives are changed when the unthinkable happens --- and what is lost when good people make unconscionable choices.**

The Loverlys sit by the hospital bed of their young son who is in a coma after falling from his bedroom window in the middle of the night; his mother, Whitney, will not speak to anyone. Back home, their friends and neighbors are left in shock, each confronting their own role in the events that led up to what happened that terrible night: the warm, altruistic Parks, who are the Loverlys' best friends; the young, ambitious Goldsmiths, who are struggling to start a family of their own; and the quiet, elderly Portuguese couple who care for their adult son with a developmental disability, and who pass the long days on the front porch, watching their neighbors go about their busy lives.

The story spins out over the course of one week, in the alternating voices of the women in each family as they are forced to face the secrets within the walls of their own homes, and the uncomfortable truths that connect them all to one another. Set against the heartwrenching drama of what will happen to Xavier, who hangs between death and life, or a life changed forever, *THE WHISPERS* is a novel about what happens when we put our needs ahead of our children's. Exploring the quiet sacrifices of motherhood, the intuitions that we silence, the complexities of our closest friendships and the danger of envy, this is a novel about the reverberations of life's most difficult decisions.

## Discussion Guide

1. So much of *THE WHISPERS* is about women's relationships with each other. Whitney and Blair each seek something different in their friendship. What role do you think envy plays in their dynamic? In what ways do you think they misunderstand each other?
2. Whitney and Blair reflect on their mothers while trying to make sense of their own experiences of motherhood.

Whitney seems determined to live differently from the way her mother did, while Blair feels obligated to sacrifice in the same ways her mother did. What are the consequences of these choices for each woman?

3. Three of the main characters are women entering midlife. We often associate the idea of a midlife crisis with men, but rarely discuss the emotional challenges for women at this stage. What do you think these challenges are for Whitney, Blair and Rebecca?

4. Whitney struggles with maternal rage and the shame associated with it. Why do you think society is so uncomfortable with mothers feeling angry?

5. The title *THE WHISPERS* alludes to the intuitive knowledge a woman has about herself and her life. Discuss the ways in which Whitney, Blair, Rebecca and Mara confront or ignore these "whispers" and what the outcome is for each of them. Have you experienced this sense of a whisper in your own life?

6. Blair feels conflicted about what she wants to uncover in her marriage --- she struggles with the decision to confront Aiden about an affair, and then she struggles to accept his response. Do you think she finds true conviction at the end?

7. At several points in the novel, the women decide to hide knowledge from one another to avoid facing the consequences of the truth. Meanwhile, Whitney begins to have a sense that Jacob might know more than he's telling her. What do *you* think Jacob knows?

8. Female desire, in different forms, is a theme explored throughout the novel. Discuss how each woman experiences desire, and the consequences of her indulging or denying herself.

9. Mara, the all-knowing eyes of Harlow Street, is judgmental of Whitney and Blair as women and as mothers. Do you think she's right in her judgments, and why do you think she stayed quiet about everything she knew?

10. In today's world, women are considered more independent and empowered than ever, and yet there remains strong expectations of women's behavior in the roles of mother and wife. How does this apply to the characters in *THE WHISPERS*?

11. The novel explores the idea of the narratives we create around ourselves and others based on what we share and what we protect. Do you relate to this idea in your own life and your own social circle?

12. Xavier reveals something jaw-dropping in his conversation with Whitney at the end. What do you think Whitney does next?

## Author Bio

Ashley Audrain's debut novel, *THE PUSH*, was a *New York Times*, *Sunday Times* (UK) and #1 international bestseller, and a "Good Morning America" Book Club pick. It has sold in more than 40 territories, and a limited television series is currently in development. Audrain previously worked as the publicity director of Penguin Books Canada, and prior to

that she worked in public relations. She lives in Toronto, where she and her partner are raising their two young children. THE WHISPERS is her second novel.

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