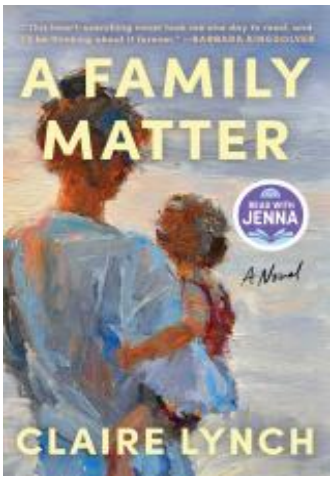
A Family Matter

by Claire Lynch



About the Book

A young wife following her heart. A husband with the law on his side. Their daughter, caught in the middle. Forty years later, a family secret changes everything in this ?perfect? (Elin Hilderbrand) debut novel.

1982. Dawn is a young mother, still adjusting to life with her husband, when Hazel lights up her world like a torch in the dark. Theirs is the kind of connection that?s impossible to resist, and suddenly life is more complicated, and more joyful, than Dawn ever expected. But she has responsibilities and commitments. She has a daughter.

2022. Heron has just received news from his doctor that turns everything upside down. He?s an older man, stuck in the habits of a quiet existence. Telling Maggie, his only child --- the person around whom his life has revolved --- seems impossible. Heron can?t tell her about his diagnosis, just as he can?t reveal all the other secrets he?s been keeping from her for so many years.

A FAMILY MATTER is a heartbreaking and hopeful exploration of love and loss, intimacy and injustice, custody and care, and whether it is possible to heal from the wounds of the past in the changed world of today.

Discussion Guide

1. A FAMILY MATTER begins with two poetic epigraphs: ?Peanut Butter? by Eileen Myles and ?What Kind of Times Are These? by Adrienne Rich. Read these poems again. How do they introduce the novel and help contextualize its themes and historical issues?

2. After a difficult diagnosis, Heron continues his daily routine and goes grocery shopping, where he finds temporary comfort climbing into a freezer --- confusing customers and staff. How does this scene foreshadow Heron?s journey throughout the novel and his reactions to challenging moments?

3. Discuss Dawn?s first meeting with Hazel in July 1982 and the relationship that blossoms in the months that follow. Why does Dawn fall in love so quickly? How is Dawn different around Hazel than she is with her husband, Heron?

4. When we meet Maggie in 2022, her life appears ?normal? from the point of view of her children, husband, coworkers and even herself at times. And yet, Maggie is a little bored and senses something unresolved about her life. How are Maggie?s experiences similar to Dawn?s desires as a young woman?

5. This novel beautifully interweaves narrative through two time periods. This style creates a dramatic structure in which we learn about Dawn, Heron and Maggie through their actions over the years. How do jumps in time influence your discoveries as a reader? How does learning about actions taken (or not taken) by our ensemble cast alter our opinions of them?

6. Discuss the scene where Dawn confesses to Heron in ?Words are said? and its fallout. What are their initial and long-term concerns about the family, their jobs, their community?

7. At the solicitor?s office, Heron ?keeps making mistakes...small errors of judgment that spoil things.? Why do you think Heron resorts to the tactics suggested by the solicitor to build a case against Dawn? How does Heron reckon with what this will do to the relationship between his wife and daughter?

8. Discuss Dawn?s meeting with the support group and the stories these women share. How does attending the group help Dawn?

9. In ?It?s all for the children, really,? what is the source of Maggie?s lingering tension? How does the author infuse drama into what Maggie discovers, and what is said and not said, at this Christmas gathering?

10. How do the courtroom scenes illustrate the dehumanization of queer people in the 1980s and the UK?s unjust system at the time?

11. Discuss Heron?s reaction in the courtroom during the custody battle. What do we learn about him from these moments, and how is this portrayal different from the Heron in 2022? Do his actions in the past change your opinion of him in the present?

12. Discuss Maggie and Dawn?s relationship in 1982, and their reunion in 2023. What is Maggie?s impression of Dawn, and what do you think Dawn feels about Maggie? Do you think they find closure from this visit? What do you think is next for them?

13. How do the chapter titles shape our expectations of each piece? Sometimes there are single words, sometimes longer phrases. Do these titles have double meanings?

14. How does the novel?s taut, polished style layer the complexity of the narrative, and what effect does it have on you

as a reader?

Author Bio

Claire Lynch has a doctorate from the University of Oxford and is a professor of English and creative writing. Her work has appeared in *The Washington Post* and on BBC Radio. She lives in Windsor, England, with her wife and three daughters.

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