

Long Island Compromise

by Taffy Brodesser-Akner



About the Book

An exhilarating novel about one American family, the dark moment that shatters their suburban paradise, and the wild legacy of trauma and inheritance, from the *New York Times* bestselling author of *FLEISHMAN IS IN TROUBLE*.

?Were we gangsters? No. But did we know how to start a fire??

In 1980, a wealthy businessman named Carl Fletcher is kidnapped from his driveway, brutalized and held for ransom. He is returned to his wife and kids less than a week later, only slightly the worse, and the family moves on with their lives, resuming their prized places in the saga of the American dream, comforted in the realization that though their money may have been what endangered them, it is also what assured them their safety.

But now, nearly 40 years later, it's clear that perhaps nobody ever got over anything, after all. Carl has spent the ensuing years secretly seeking closure to the matter of his kidnapping, while his wife, Ruth, has spent her potential protecting her husband's emotional health. Their three grown children aren't doing much better: Nathan's chronic fear won't allow him to advance at his law firm; Beamer, a Hollywood screenwriter, will consume anything --- substance, foodstuff, women --- in order to numb his own perpetual terror; and Jenny has spent her life so bent on proving that she's not a product of her family's pathology that she has come to define it.

As they hover at the delicate precipice of a different kind of survival, they learn that the family fortune has dwindled to just about nothing, and they must face desperate questions about how much their wealth has played a part in both their lives' successes and failures.

LONG ISLAND COMPROMISE spans the entirety of one family's history, winding through decades and generations, all the way to the outrageous present, and confronting the mainstays of American Jewish life: tradition, the pursuit of

success, the terror of history, fear of the future, old wives' tales, evil eyes, ambition, achievement, boredom, dybbuks, inheritance, pyramid schemes, right-wing capitalists, beta-blockers, psychics, and the mostly unspoken love and shared experience that unite a family forever.

Discussion Guide

1. Have you ever known a family like the Fletchers? What were they like? What myths were built around them?
2. Reflecting on the Fletcher family's story, how do you think the title *LONG ISLAND COMPROMISE* relates to the novel's exploration of trauma, wealth, family dynamics and the pursuit of happiness? What does the idea of 'compromise' signify in the context of the family's journey?
3. The Fletcher family is portrayed as resuming their 'prized places in the saga of the American dream' after Carl's return. Discuss how the novel examines the concept of the American dream through this family's experiences. Do you think their understanding of the dream changes over time? How has your family defined the American dream?
4. What elements of satire did you notice in the portrayal of suburban life, wealth and family dynamics? How do these satirical elements contribute to the novel's commentary on American society?
5. How does money stunt each character? How does it enable them? How have feelings about money influenced you and your own relatives?
6. 'But all that money was like the white-picket fence around the Fletcher estate: It obscures the view. You couldn't see the Fletchers clearly through the mist of their fortune.' What do you make of this statement? What are other traits or factors that can make it hard to see people clearly?
7. The family fortune dwindling to almost nothing forces the Fletcher family to confront their past and future. Discuss how wealth (or the lack of it) influences each family member's sense of identity and success. How does the discovery at the end of the book complicate this even further?
8. The theme of survival is recurrent throughout the novel, with the family hovering 'at the delicate precipice of a different kind of survival.' Discuss the different forms of survival depicted in the book and what they reveal about the characters and their values.
9. 'A dybbuk was a miserable soul that could not progress to a heavenly rest and instead stayed on Earth and infested something --- a person or a thing --- or it took on a life as a disembodied ghost, in order to do its final bidding and cause as much chaos as possible.' Do you believe there was a dybbuk in the works in the Fletcher family? Discuss. Is there a curse or haunting in your own family line?
10. A major question this book asks is whether or not money can ever buy you security and safety. Do you think it can?
11. Does your family have shared heritage --- or shared trauma --- that manifests in different ways in different family members? What factors do you think contribute to this difference?

12. If the family had taken time to process the kidnapping after it happened, what do you think might have changed for the Fletchers?

13. By the end of the story, did you arrive at an answer to one of the novel's central questions: Is it better to be born with money or without?

Author Bio

Taffy Brodesser-Akner is a staff writer for *The New York Times Magazine* and the *New York Times* bestselling author of *FLEISHMAN IS IN TROUBLE*, which has been translated into more than a dozen languages. She is also the creator and executive producer of its Emmy-nominated limited series adaptation for FX. *LONG ISLAND COMPROMISE* is her second novel.

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