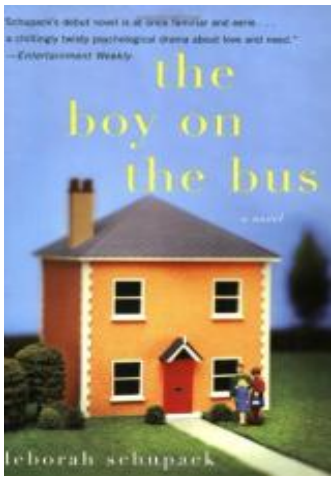
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The Boy on the Bus: A Novel

by Deborah Schupack



About the Book

Meg Landry expected it to be a day like any other -- her asthmatic eight-year-old son would step off the bus, home from school. But on this day, the boy on the bus doesn't seem to be Meg's son. Though he shares Charlie's copper hair, tea-brown eyes, and slight frame, there is something profoundly, if indefinably, different about him. In the wake of Meg's quiet alarm, her far-flung family returns home, and unease sets in. Neither Charlie's father nor Charlie's rebellious teenage sister can help Meg settle the question of the boy. They look to her for certainty -- after all, shouldn't a mother know her own child?

Deborah Schupack has crafted an extraordinary tale of a mother's love for her son and the mystery that may ultimately rip them apart. Tense and atmospheric, this debut offers a rare combination of intellectual sophistication and gripping suspense.

Discussion Guide

1. By blending the ordinary with the extraordinary, **The Boy on the Bus** transforms what is most familiar-family and home-into something strange and unsettling. What makes the first encounter between Meg and the boy so unusual and mysterious?

2. By blending the ordinary with the extraordinary, **The Boy on the Bus** transforms what is most familiar-family and home-into something strange and unsettling. What makes the first encounter between Meg and the boy so unusual and mysterious?

3. What is your initial impression of Meg? Do your feelings about her remain the same as the story progresses? What are her strengths and weaknesses as a mother?

4. The Boy on the Bus upends the maxim that "mother knows best." Even Meg remarks, "Sometimes what other people say shows a truth you cannot see yourself. Because you're always too close to your own life" (p. 10). Why is so difficult for Meg to positively identify her own son? Should mother always know best?

5. Early in the story, Meg reflects, "Each time your child returned home, he was an approximation of who you had sent out into the world that morning" (p. 30). Discuss this idea of children as "approximations."

6. Why do you think Meg and Jeff decided not to marry, and how has that decision contributed to the events that have unfolded? How do you interpret Jeff's comment that he sees her body as "a screen" (p. 156)? What has driven them apart and what, if anything, holds them together?

7. Why does each character experience such a sense of claustrophobia in this home, and how is each in some way trying to escape?

8. What effect has Charlie's asthma had on his relationship with his mother-and, vice versa, what possible effect has their bond had on his health? How might her son's improving health impact their relationship in the future?

9. By contrast, where do you think Katie gets her strength, and why does her own mother seem so hesitant around her, almost afraid of her?

10. How reliable a narrator is Meg? In what instances are her interpretations of situations and signals-especially from "the boy"-faulty? (For an example, see pages 176-77.) How does her shifting perspective shape her relationship with her son-and with the reader?

11. The sickness and death of Meg's father still weighs heavily on her mind. How does the guilt she continues to carry influence the choices she makes?

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13. Late in the story, Meg hops onto the school bus with Sandy and quickly asks him to drive off when she sees the boy running toward them. When asked what he wanted, she responds, "Whatever it was, it was too much" (181). What do you think she means?

14. Discuss the role of the goose that appears throughout the story. What meaning does it hold for Charlie and Meg, and what does its eventual fate signify? Why does he give the goose the name Charlie Carroll?

15. How have your perceptions changed over the course of the story? Looking back to the novel's opening scene on the bus, do you now interpret the events in the same way?

Author Bio

Critical Praise

"This is my favorite book this year -- an incredible page-turning idea, written with grace, style, and deep, true emotion."

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