ReadingGroupGuides
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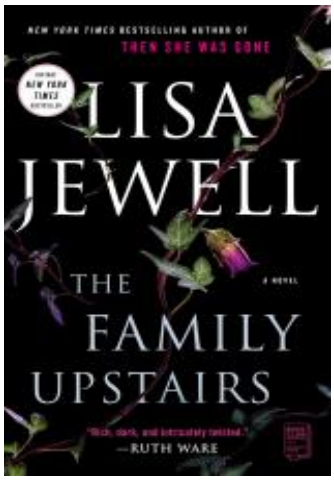
The Family Upstairs

by Lisa Jewell



About the Book

From the *New York Times* bestselling author of THEN SHE WAS GONE comes another page-turning look inside one family?s past as buried secrets threaten to come to light.

Be careful who you let in.

Soon after her 25th birthday, Libby Jones returns home from work to find the letter she?s been waiting for her entire life. She rips it open with one driving thought: *I am finally going to know who I am.*

She soon learns not only the identity of her birth parents, but also that she is the sole inheritor of their abandoned mansion on the banks of the Thames in London?s fashionable Chelsea neighborhood, worth millions. Everything in Libby?s life is about to change. But what she can?t possibly know is that others have been waiting for this day as well --- and she is on a collision course to meet them.

Twenty-five years ago, police were called to 16 Cheyne Walk with reports of a baby crying. When they arrived, they found a healthy 10-month-old happily cooing in her crib in the bedroom. Downstairs in the kitchen lay three dead bodies, all dressed in black, next to a hastily scrawled note. And the four other children reported to live at Cheyne Walk were gone.

In THE FAMILY UPSTAIRS, the master of ?bone-chilling suspense? (*People*) brings us the can?t-look-away story of three entangled families living in a house with the darkest of secrets.

Discussion Guide

1. THE FAMILY UPSTAIRS is told from three perspectives: Henry, Lucy and Libby?s. Was there one character in

particular whose point of view you especially enjoyed? What is the effect of having Henry?s sections told in first person narration and Lucy and Libby?s told in third person narration? Why do you think Lisa Jewell structured her novel this way?

2. Henry, rightfully, hates David. Yet, Henry and David share many similar tendencies and qualities. Compare and contrast the two men.

3. There are many intriguing characters who do not directly narrate the novel. Is there a character whose point of view you?d have liked to had included? What do you think Martina, for example, thought about David and Birdie?s choices?

4. What is the effect of characters calling Libby ?the baby? throughout the novel? How does this inform your opinion of Libby and her role in the story?

5. Which of adult Henry, Lucy and Clemency?s behaviors can you directly trace back to their harrowing experiences as children? How do you see the influence of their abuse in their grown up lives?

6. The relationship between Henry and Phin is pivotal to the plot, but we aren?t told as much about the friendship between Lucy and Clemency. What details do we glean about their relationship from Henry and Lucy?s memories and Clemency?s account toward the end of the novel?

7. What types of power are wielded in this novel? Who has power, who loses it and who wants it? Is there a character without any agency?

8. Do you think Henry?s lies and violent acts were born out of his need to survive an unimaginable situation, or do you think there is, as Clemency states, ?a streak of pure evil? (page 280) in him?

9. Lucy and Clemency experienced unspeakable abuse as children, but, miraculously, they managed to break the cycle and become good mothers to their children. What are their relationships like with their children? What makes them good moms?

10. After Clemency tells Henry that her father tried to con his own family once, Henry decides he must act against David. As he remembers his conversation with Clemency, he thinks, ?It was a fork in the road, really. Looking back on it there were so many other ways to have got through the trauma of it all, but with all the people I loved most in the world facing away from me I chose the worst possible option? (page 274). While Henry claims he would have resorted to less violent ways of escaping the Lamb house, do you really believe him? Or do you think part of him wanted revenge?

11. Libby finds many disconcerting traces of the house?s previous inhabitants when she tours it. Which artifacts did you find the eeriest? Which intrigued you and made you want to find out what had happened inside the house?

12. In your opinion, who is the most tragic figure in this novel? Do they experience healing or redemption?

Author Bio

Lisa Jewell is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of 25 novels, including IT COULD HAVE BEEN HER, DON'T LET HIM IN, NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, THE FAMILY UPSTAIRS and THEN SHE WAS GONE, as well as INVISIBLE GIRL and WATCHING YOU. Her novels have sold more than 15 million copies internationally, and her work has also been translated into over 30 languages.

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