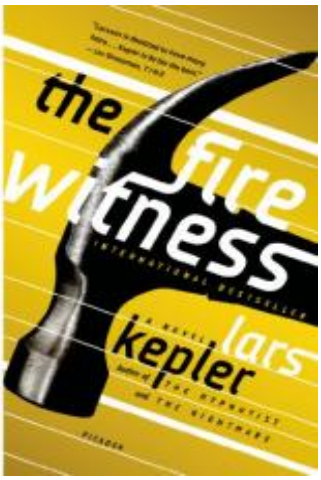
The Fire Witness

by Lars Kepler



About the Book

Flora Hansen calls herself a medium and makes a living by pretending to commune with the dead. But after a gruesome murder at a rural home for wayward girls, Hansen begins to suffer visions that are all too real. She calls the police, claiming to have seen a ghost, but only one detective puts aside his skepticism long enough to listen: Joona Linna.

Linna has spent more time at the scene of the crime than any other detective would. The case seems obvious on the face of it: One of the girls at the home escaped in the middle of the night, leaving behind a bloody bed with a hammer under the pillow. But why does Hansen insist that the murder instrument was a stone, not a hammer? And what?s the story behind the dark red grain of sand, almost like a splinter from a ruby, stuck beneath the dead girl?s fingernail? As Linna refuses to accept easy answers, his search leads him into darker, more violent territory, and finally to a shocking confrontation with a figure from his past.

As the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* put it, you start the thriller ?on the subway home, keep reading at the dinner table, and then don?t stop until well into the wee hours.? Kepler writes with the force of Stieg Larsson and the plotting of Jo Nesbø. THE FIRE WITNESS is an unflinching page-turner, sure to become an international sensation.

Discussion Guide

1. As you read the opening scenes, who was your first suspect? What did you think Elisabet had seen?

2. The authors define a medium as ?someone who claims to have paranormal talent.? Do you agree? Did Flora do any harm when she staged séances? What does her story indicate about the very real power of memory?

3. In THE FIRE WITNESS, how does evil come into being? What allows it to flourish?

4. Which is Linna?s greater strength: his intellect or his empathy? Why do his mind and his heart also get him in trouble with authority?

5. In the opening scene, we learn that Elisabet often says, ?It?s the nice girls who end up here.? What fears do the girls of Birgittagården have in common? What determines whether they will be drawn to someone like Tobias, who sees them as easy prey, or someone like Elin, who wants to protect them at any cost?

6. As Vicky?s case was brought before a judge, whose testimony did you believe? How did your opinion of Vicky change throughout the novel?

7. Flora was failed by the many adults who were entrusted with caring for her. What did they hope to gain by making her a scapegoat? In punishing her and making her the target of their continual suspicion, how did they transform their own sense of reality, and her perception of herself?

8. When you discovered how Dennis became a refuge, what did this reveal about the connection between Vicky and her mother? What was her mother able to provide despite her hardships?

9. What was the killer?s greatest advantage in gaining trust and staying above suspicion? Ultimately, what motivated these crimes? Who was responsible for them?

10. Discuss the novel?s title and the horrific lie it refers to. How does Flora?s childhood echo the experiences of other courageous witnesses captured in the novel?

11. Discuss the power struggles among the Birgittagården girls. How do they perpetuate the broken bonds they?ve experienced? Why was Elin successful in reaching past Vicky?s pain?

12. How did the story line of Pia and Dante --- and the vulnerability of innocent bystanders --- affect you?

13. Just as the novel?s girls are separated from their families, Linna?s daughter grows up without a father. Did Linna make the right decision in creating a new identity for Lumi and Summa? Would you have made the same choice?

14. As you read the closing scene, what did you predict for Jurek Walter? Linna thinks of him as the Devil: how is his evil different from what was revealed in this book? How does it underscore the past evil Linna has seen in THE HYPNOTIST and THE NIGHTMARE?

Author Bio

Lars Kepler is the pseudonym of the critically acclaimed husband and wife team Alexandra Coelho Ahndoril and Alexander Ahndoril. Their internationally bestselling Joona Linna series has sold more than 14 million copies in 40 languages. The Ahndorils were both established writers before they adopted the pen name Lars Kepler, and have each published several acclaimed novels. They live in Stockholm, Sweden.

Critical Praise

Praise for the novels of Lars Kepler

"Action-oriented, inventive, with over-the-top plots and larger-than-life heroes and criminals."

? *Los AngelesTimes Magazine*

"[Kepler?s] ability to inhabit the workings of psychotic psyches is authentically shocking. Larsson is destined to have many heirs . . . Kepler is by far the best."

? Lev Grossman, *Time*

"Outrageously entertaining . . . Methadone for readers suffering from Stieg Larsson withdrawal."

? Laura Miller, *Salon*

"Kepler?s characters are admirably flawed . . . It?s a smooth collaboration . . . with frequent surprises and grace notes amid the carnage. With any luck, we?ll hear more of Lars Kepler."

? Patrick Anderson, *The Washington Post*

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