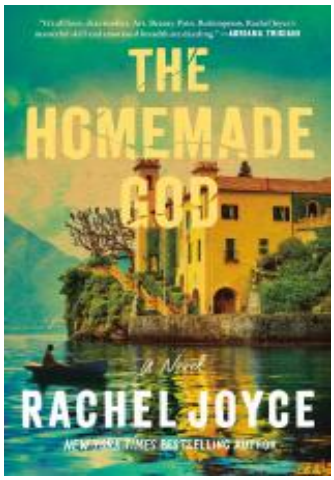
The Homemade God

by Rachel Joyce



About the Book

With sparkling wit and insight, this powerful novel from the bestselling author of THE UNLIKELY PILGRIMAGE OF HAROLD FRY reminds us that family is everything, even when it falls apart.

There is a heatwave across Europe, and four siblings have gathered at their family?s lake house to seek answers about their father, a famous artist, who recently remarried a much younger woman and decamped to Italy to finish his long-awaited masterpiece.

Now he is dead. And there is no sign of his final painting.

As the siblings try to piece together what happened, they spend the summer in a state of lawlessness: living under the same roof for the first time in decades, forced to confront the buried wounds they incurred as his children, and waiting for answers. Though they have always been close, the things they learn that summer --- about themselves and their father --- will drive them apart before they can truly understand his legacy. Meanwhile, their stepmother?s enigmatic presence looms over the house. Is she the force that will finally destroy the family for good?

Wonderfully atmospheric, at heart this is a novel about the bonds of siblinghood --- what happens when they splinter and what it might take to reconnect them.

Discussion Guide

1. How do the relationships between the siblings --- Goose, Susan, Iris and Netta --- evolve throughout the story? What events or revelations most significantly impact their dynamics? Which sibling did you most identify with, and why?

2. How does Goose?s journey reflect the novel?s broader themes of family and self-discovery? What are some pivotal

moments for him?

3. The lake house in Italy is a significant setting in the narrative. How does this environment influence the characters? interactions and the unfolding of the plot? What setting is significant to you and your family? What memorable events have transpired there?

4. Discuss Bella-Mae?s role in the story. How does her presence affect the siblings? quest for answers about their father?

5. Their father?s missing painting is a crucial plot point. How does the search for this painting symbolize the siblings? search for understanding and closure? Have any objects taken on outsized significance for you in the throes of grief?

6. How does the novel explore the themes of loss and reconciliation? What moments particularly highlight these themes?

7. How does Susan?s character change from the beginning to the end of the narrative? What did you make of her relationship with Netta and how it changes in the wake of Vic?s death? What are the key factors that drive her transformation?

8. What secrets are revealed about the siblings? father, and how do these revelations affect their perceptions of him and each other? Have you ever discovered something about a family member that changed your perception? Discuss.

9. Iris has a complex relationship to her past. How does her journey over the course of the novel reflect her attempts to reconcile with her history?

10. Discuss the scene where the siblings use stickers to claim items from the villa. What does this moment reveal about their personalities and relationships?

11. How did you feel about THE HOMEMADE GOD?s conclusion? Did it provide a sense of closure or leave you with lingering questions?

12. What do you imagine happens to the siblings after the events of the novel? How might their experiences at the lake house influence their futures?

13. How important do you think reconciliation and forgiveness are in maintaining family relationships? Are there situations where reconciliation might not be possible or advisable?

Author Bio

Rachel Joyce is the author of the international bestsellers THE UNLIKELY PILGRIMAGE OF HAROLD FRY, PERFECT, THE LOVE SONG OF MISS QUEENIE HENNESSY, MAUREEN, THE MUSIC SHOP, MISS BENSON?S BEETLE, THE HOMEMADE GOD, and a collection of interlinked short stories, A SNOW GARDEN & OTHER STORIES.

Rachel?s books have been translated into 37 languages and have sold millions of copies worldwide. THE UNLIKELY PILGRIMAGE OF HAROLD FRY was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Book Prize and longlisted for the Man Booker Prize. The critically acclaimed film of the novel, for which Rachel also wrote the screenplay, was released in 2023. MISS BENSON?S BEETLE won the Wilbur Smith Adventure Writing Prize in 2021. Rachel was awarded the Specsavers National Book Awards New Writer of the Year in December 2012 and was shortlisted for the UK Author of the Year in 2014. In 2024, she was awarded an honorary doctorate by Kingston University.

Rachel has written over 20 original afternoon plays and adaptations of the classics for BBC Radio 4. She lives with her family near Stroud.

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