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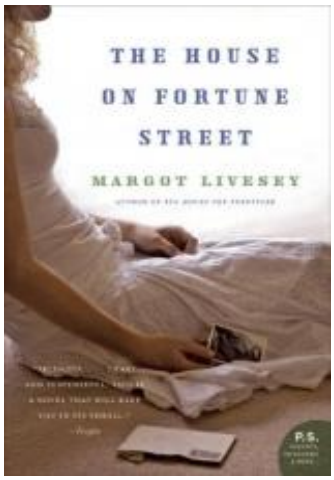
The House on Fortune Street: A Novel

by Margot Livesey



About the Book

It seems like mutual good luck for Abigail Taylor and Dara MacLeod when they meet at university and, despite their differences, become fast friends. Years later they remain inseparable: Abigail, the actress, allegedly immune to romance, and Dara, a therapist, throwing herself into relationships with frightening intensity. Now both believe they've found "true love." But luck seems to run out when Dara moves into Abigail's downstairs apartment. Suddenly both their friendship and their relationships are in peril, for tragedy is waiting to strike the house on Fortune Street.

Told through four ingeniously interlocking narratives, Margot Livesey's **The House on Fortune Street** is a provocative tale of lives shaped equally by chance and choice.

Discussion Guide

1. Sean is characterized as someone who would rather not revisit "uncomfortable memories," and, as the anonymous letter says, "see what's right in front of [his] face." Is this tendency particular to Sean alone, or do other characters in the book suffer from the same myopia?

2. When Cameron takes Dara to the Charles Dodgson exhibit, he is trying to share something of himself with her. What makes him step back and, once again, refrain from divulging more of his inner life? Would telling her have helped Dara?

3. Is Dara deluding herself in her belief that Edward will leave his wife? How do Edward's intentions look through the eyes of other characters?

4. What role does coincidence play in the stories of all four characters? What role does it play in bringing the threads of these stories together?

5. Several characters in this book are profoundly affected by a past event, which they're never able either to come to terms with, or to fully understand. What is Livesey saying about the nature of childhood memories, particularly traumatic ones?

6. What role do letters play in the novel? What kind of information do they contain and, in each instance, how do they change the course of the narrative?

7. Each main character in the book has an affinity with a specific literary figure: Sean with John Keats; Cameron with Charles Dodgson; Dara with Charlotte Brontë; and Abigail with Charles Dickens. How do these "literary godparents" complement the reader's understanding of each character and his or her situation?

8. Abigail's story comes last. How does our view of Abigail?both in her dealings with Sean, and her dealings with Dara?change when we see events play out through her eyes? What part of Abigail's background is most influential in the formation of her character?

9. The story of **The House on Fortune Street** comes to us, piece by piece, through the perspectives of four characters. How does the order of the voices affect your reading of the novel as a whole?

Author Bio

Margot Livesey was born and grew up on the edge of the Scottish Highlands. She is the author of a collection of stories and 10 novels, including EVA MOVES THE FURNITURE, THE FLIGHT OF GEMMA HARDY, THE BOY IN THE FIELD and THE ROAD FROM BELHAVEN. She has received awards from the NEA, the Guggenheim Foundation and the Radcliffe Institute. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts and is on the faculty of the Iowa Writers? Workshop.

Critical Praise

"Structurally daring and compulsively readable, **The House on Fortune Street** illuminates the complexities of love in some of its most difficult guises, and of loss in all of its immensity. "

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