



The Lodger

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READING GROUP GUIDE

About the book:

Dorothy Richardson is existing just above the poverty line, doing secretarial work at a dentist's office and living in a seedy boarding house in Bloomsbury, when she is invited to spend the weekend with a childhood friend. Jane has recently married a writer who is hovering on the brink of fame. His name is H.G. Wells, or Bertie, as they call him.

Bertie appears unremarkable at first. But then Dorothy notices his grey-blue eyes taking her in, openly signaling approval. He tells her he and Jane have an agreement which allows them the freedom to take lovers, although Dorothy can tell her friend would not be happy with that arrangement.

Not wanting to betray Jane, yet unable to draw back, Dorothy free-falls into an affair with Bertie. Then a new boarder arrives at the house—beautiful Veronica Leslie-Jones—and Dorothy finds herself caught between Veronica and Bertie. Amidst the personal dramas and wreckage of a militant suffragette march, Dorothy finds her voice as a writer.

The Lodger is a beautifully intimate novel that is at once an introduction to one of the most important writers of the 20th century and a compelling story of one woman tormented by unconventional desires.

Discussion Questions

1. Dorothy's mother commits suicide before *The Lodger* begins. To what extent does this traumatic event shape the action of the novel?
2. How has her father's social fall and bankruptcy shaped Dorothy's character? What effect does it have on how she reacts to people and situations?



3. Initially, Dorothy tries not to give in to her attraction to Bertie, because she doesn't want to betray Jane. Do you think she could have resisted falling in love? Can you resist such a thing?
4. Could you forgive infidelity, as Jane does, and continue in your own relationship? Do you think open relationships work?
5. Do you think that possessing exceptional talent excuses Bertie's adulterous behavior? Should allowances be made for exceptionally creative people, or not?
6. Is Bertie a sympathetic character? Is Dorothy?
7. *The Lodger* contrasts Bertie's writing routine – a whole household devoted to catering to his needs and nurturing his talent – and Dorothy's – snatched in nooks and gaps of the day. What conditions, or criteria, might encourage creativity? What might discourage it?
8. How do Dorothy's encounters with Bertie help her to find and give shape to her voice as a writer?
9. Many of the issues Dorothy faces in *The Lodger*, such as the work/life balance, women's independence, sexual double standards, settling down, and the challenges of living in a big city are still relevant today. How much have things changed for women since her time? In what ways have they stayed the same?
10. In what ways was Dorothy a pioneer of the early twentieth century? What can women today learn from her?
11. In 1895, Oscar Wilde was convicted of gross indecency and given a prison sentence: something Dorothy was fully aware of. What do you think it meant to be a bisexual woman in the early part of the twentieth century? What penalties would Dorothy have faced if her affair with Veronica had been discovered? It may be helpful to think about the treatment of same-sex love in novels of the period, such as Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*.
12. If Dorothy had given birth to Bertie's child, what would her life as an unmarried mother have been like? How would the baby have changed her relationship with Bertie? Would it have affected his career? Do you think that Bertie would ever leave Jane?



13. In her fight for the vote, Veronica chooses the militant path. Is this brave or foolhardy? Do you think that violent protest is effective? What sacrifices would you make for a cause you believe in?

14. Dorothy falls in love twice during the novel. Do you think that a person finds true love only once in a lifetime, or can one find love many times? Does one ever fully recover from a passionate and intense relationship?

15. Did you find the novel's ending positive, or negative, or a mixture? Would you change the ending?

16. To some extent, *The Lodger* expresses the view that you can't have everything in life at the same time. In the end, Dorothy sacrifices personal relationships for a career as a writer. Do you think it's possible to have it all?

Want to learn more about Louisa Treger?

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