

Reading Group Gold

The Night Stages: A Novel by Jane Urquhart

ABOUT THE BOOK

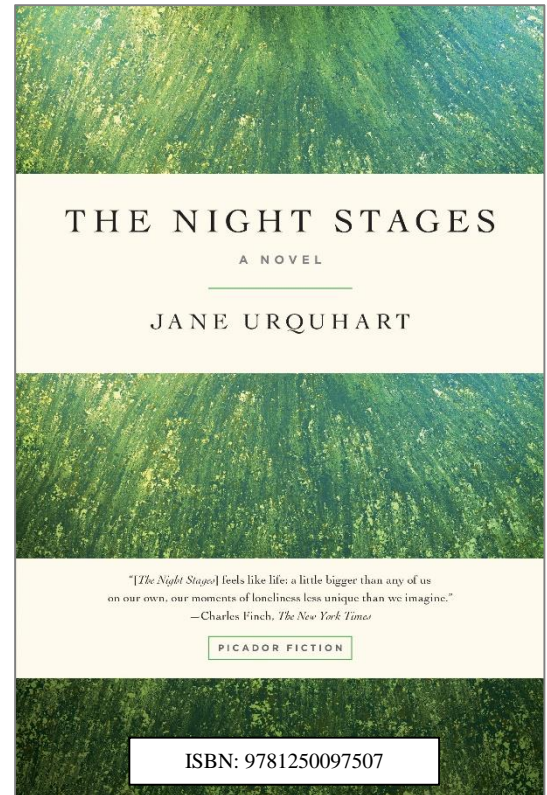
From one of Canada's bestselling authors comes a stunning new novel of unusual emotional depth and compassion. Jane Urquhart's richest, most rewarding novel to date.

Tam, an Englishwoman who served in World War II as an auxiliary pilot, was living on the remote, westerly shores of Ireland. But she's decided to leave her lover, the meteorologist Niall, for New York City. During the journey, the airliner she is traveling on becomes grounded by heavy fog at Gander Airport in Newfoundland. Waiting for the fog to clear, she notices an enigmatic mural that moves her to revisit not only the circumstances that originally led her to Ireland but also her intense relationship with Niall and his growing despondency over the disappearance of his younger brother, Kieran, who, as a child, was separated from the family and taken in by a widowed countrywoman living in the mountains.

The Night Stages powerfully explores the meaning of separation, the sorrows of fractured families, and the profound effect of Ireland's wild and elemental landscape on the lives shaped by its beauty.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Kieran learns the nature of his mother's death many years after the fact, and in trying to come to grips with it he thinks, "It might not be the tragedy itself, but rather the intensity of reaction to the tragedy that mattered." What do you think Kieran means by this? How might you apply this idea to the ways in which other characters act and react in the novel?
2. Weather plays a significant role in *The Night Stages*, both on a literal level— Niall pursues a career as a meteorologist—and figuratively. How do you think the many references to weather impact the mood of the novel?
3. Flight imagery also figures heavily in the novel. Tam serves as a pilot in the war, and many characters flee their partners, families, and homes. Why do you think references to flight are paired with weather imagery throughout the novel?
4. How does the tragic death of their mother impact Kieran and Niall's lives? In what ways does it affect them differently?



5. As a reader, you are privy to both Kenneth and Tam’s perspectives—as creator and observer—of the mural at the airport. How do their interpretations of the painting differ? How do they align?
6. Niall feels responsible for the course of Kieran’s life. In what ways do you think he is responsible? In what ways is he not?
7. Tam notes, “each episode of the mural bleeds into its neighbour’s territory . . . there are no disparate parts.” How does this statement also pertain to the characters in the novel?
8. Tam has a propensity to flee various situations in her life; she’s a self-described “bolter.” When she leaves Niall, however, she feels that “in spite of her sudden departure from Ireland, it was she, not he, who had been abandoned.” What do you think about Tam’s assessment of the dynamic between her and Niall? Do you agree with her? Why or why not?
9. As a meteorologist, Niall’s job is to predict weather. In what ways does he also play this role in his personal life?
10. Tam’s father once said, “Anything that moves forward, anything at all progressive, leaves something raw and wounded behind it.” Kieran’s travels take him from his native Ireland to London, and then to America. How do you see this quote play out in Kieran’s trajectory? How does this idea manifest on a national level—in Ireland—as well?
11. The novel’s title, *The Night Stages*, refers to the nightly drinking sessions in which the participants in the bicycle race indulge as “an antidote of sorts to the day’s suffering and . . . an acknowledgement of more come.” How can that notion be extrapolated to other aspects of the novel?
12. When the war ends, Tam notes, “It was a sad observation . . . that war was more palatable to her than peace.” Tam is a young woman when she makes this remark. Do you think her present-day character would agree? Are there ways in which you think her attitude toward life changes over the years?

Guide written by Laura Chasen



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