



Edgar and Lucy

Victor Lodato

ISBN: 9781250096982 * Hardcover * St. Martin's Press * March 2017

READING GROUP GUIDE

"I tore through the luminous pages of *Edgar and Lucy* as if possessed. Edgar's journey from boy to man is that rare tale that's both epic and intimate, as joyful and startlingly original in its language as it is a pleasure to read. The tender, funny, living immediacy of its characters and what is revealed to us about human nature through their twists of fate took my breath away. What this book has to say about love and truth will stay with me for a very, very long time.

-Sophie McManus, author of *The Unfortunates*

Introduction

Eight-year-old Edgar Fini's loyalty is torn between the two women in his life. There's his mother, Lucy, who, though she loves him, often disappears at night with her various "suitors." And then there's his grandmother, Florence, who dotes on him, nearly to the point of suffocation. Often, the two women are at each other's throats, and Edgar must navigate the tension between them—though he's too young to understand what's really going on. There are family secrets of which he knows nothing. He knows only that his father is gone, his mother has a limp, and his grandmother believes in ghosts.

After Florence suddenly dies, Lucy is thrown into the role of main caretaker, but is hopeless at the job.

As she begins an affair with Ron, a local butcher, Edgar befriends a troubled man named Conrad, whose intentions are stranger and more sinister than the boy could ever know. In order to save Edgar, Lucy has no choice but to confront the demons of her past.

At turns heartbreaking and hilarious, this is an unflinching look at a shattered family struggling to find grace. The topics and questions that follow are designed to enhance your reading of *Edgar and Lucy*.



We hope they will enrich your experience of this extraordinary novel from one of America's "rising literary stars."

Discussion Questions

1. The author considers this book "a love story." Would you agree? If so, what are the various love stories represented? How would you define each of them? As triumphs or tragedies?
2. Look at the epigraphs throughout the book. Read them again and discuss how they relate to that particular part of the novel.
3. Think about Edgar's relationships with the two women in his life. Does his extremely close bond to his grandmother Florence seem healthy, or problematic? As for Lucy: What do you think of her as a mother? Is she doing the best she can? Do you feel differently about her by the end of the book?
4. Think about the element of grief in this book. How does it affect the characters' lives? How does it affect their decisions—and, ultimately, their fates?
5. Consider Edgar's relationship with Conrad. What did you think, at first? Did your feelings change by the end of the book?
6. (*SPOILER ALERT*) Does Edgar run away from home, or is he kidnapped?
7. The author has referred to this book as "a New Jersey gothic." Would you agree? If so, discuss the gothic elements in the novel. For instance: Do the characters have a complicated relationship to the past? Is there a sense of the past as a malignant influence? Do you think the dilapidated Fini house at 21 Cressida Drive or the cabin in the Pine Barrens could serve as updated version of the haunted or ruined castle of gothic literature?
8. Think about Lucy and Frank's romance. Why do you think they were so drawn to each other? What is your opinion of Frank? What is his illness, exactly?
9. (*Spoiler Alert*) What do you think of Edgar's decision to return to the Pine Barrens? Why does he do it? How is he different when he's finally reunited with his family.
10. How do you think the moments of comedy add to the storytelling?



11. (*SPOILER ALERT*) Discuss the reunion between Edgar and Lucy at the end of the novel. Why do they not go to each other immediately at the police station? What do they communicate to each other without words?

12. Consider Edgar's personality: his shyness; his odd habits, such as hiding in tight spaces; his propensity for magical thinking. Do you think the doctor who suggests he might be "borderline autistic" is correct—or do you think something else is going on?

13. Discuss Edgar's albinism. How does it affect his character? And what do you think is going on when his skin changes color after the fire—and then becomes white again at the end of the story?

14. Why do you think Conrad risks the closed world he's built with Edgar to take him out to the café for pie?

15. How much sympathy (or lack thereof) do you have for Conrad?

16. Who really rescues Edgar from the fire—Conrad or Florence?

Discuss the spiritual aspects of the book, including the idea of afterlife and/or limbo. Is the medium, Maria di Mariangela, fake or real? What about Florence's ghost?

17. Why do you think the narration changes from third to first person toward the end? Who is really telling this story?

18. Think of all the secondary characters, such as Henry and Netty Schlip, Honey Fasinga, Thomas Pittimore, Jarell Lester, Jimmy Papadakis. What does Edgar's disappearance mean to them? Does it reflect things from their own lives, their own sadnesses and longings? What is each person really looking for?

19. The author was born and raised in New Jersey. What did you think of his portrayal of the state and its inhabitants? Did you know much about the Pine Barrens before reading the book? Did you know the myth of the Jersey Devil?

20. Throughout the book, there are numerous descriptions of tunnels and water: Pio in the Lincoln Tunnel, the tunnels and aquifers under the Pine Barrens, Frank's submerged car below Shepherd's junction, even the waters of Consolidated Laundry where Florence worked. What do these waters and tunnels signify?

21. Did Edgar have three fathers: Frank, Conrad, and the butcher? Or no father?



22. Discuss the unfinished carving on the tree: *Edgar loves...* What is the meaning of this unfinished epitaph?

About the Author

Want to know more about Victor Lodato? Check out his website: <http://victorlodato.com/>

