

NIGHTFIRE READING GROUP GUIDE

THE LAST HOUSE ON NEEDLESS STREET

by Catriona Ward

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What were your initial theories about Lauren's disappearance? How did your impressions of the characters shift as the chapters unfolded?
2. Discuss the many forms of love and attraction that emerge in *The Last House on Needless Street*. Where is the line between love that protects and love that suffocates? Where is the line between healthy trust and blind faith?
3. Discuss the house that is the focus of the book's title. In what way is Ted's outer world a reflection of his inner world?
4. Ted's mother denounces her father in the village church, and Olivia tries to interpret scripture. How do the novel's strands of religion enhance the storyline?
5. Dee demonstrates incredible resilience in the quest to rescue her sister, in part because she is racked by guilt. Is her guilt misplaced? Ultimately, who (or what) is to blame?
6. What impressed you the most about Olivia? How does she balance her power with her limitations? How would your pets have responded in a similar situation?
7. What does Ted's alcoholism demonstrate about addiction when it's an attempt to mask unbearable emotional pain?
8. How did you react to Ted's sessions with his self-absorbed therapist? Who are the true healers in the novel?
9. Ted's mother tells him that he has inherited his grandfather's bloodthirst. Are the cycles of violence she describes inevitable? Are they the product of nature or nurture?
10. The natural world is a key element in the novel, with richly drawn creatures, landscapes, and weather. What is different about the anthropomorphized animals who experience these spaces? Is the behavior of the humans primal, or is it unnatural?
11. What does the novel tell us about illness, wellness, and the path to overcoming traumas that flourish in secrecy?
12. What was it like for you see the viewpoints of multiple narrators as you pieced together their versions of the story? How did their observations differ and converge?
13. How did the Afterword enhance your understanding of the mind's eye, particularly the way a child's comprehension of the world can be shaped?

