



COME HOME

Lisa Scottoline

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*A
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Selection*

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 ST. MARTIN'S GRIFFIN



A Letter from Lisa Scottoline

“The highest and best purpose of fiction is to connect us, one to the other, and to reinforce the commonality of human experience.”

I’m so happy to have the chance to talk with you more informally, outside the four corners of this book, to tell you something about what inspired the novel. Not every author is as confessional as I am but I find that the more I write—for twenty years, now—the more I connect with my readers; I bring the emotions that I’ve experienced in real life to power my fiction and to give it greater dramatic impact. More importantly, if the novel is powered by real emotions, from life-changing events like this one, I think the reader *feels* it, which gives the book a deeper meaning of its own. To me, the highest and best purpose of fiction is to connect us, one to the other, and to reinforce the commonality of human experience. At bottom, great fiction tells you that you’re not alone in the world—you feel that at soul-level, in the most subtle of ways, through plot, character, and narrative drive. So here’s a little background on what inspired me to write *Come Home*.

Many of my more recent novels, probably starting with *Look Again* and continuing to *Save Me* and, now, *Come Home*, have explored the parameters of motherhood. I’ve been a single mother for most of my life and my relationship with my daughter Francesca means so much to me in so many ways, but now that she’s up and out of the house I find myself pondering the subject of motherhood more and more. Part of this is because I’m a mother, and part is because I’m a daughter, too. Those of you who have read the humorous memoirs that Francesca and I write together, like *Best Friends*, *Occasional Enemies*, will know that I was raised by a strong, feisty, and funny mother, who I call Mother Mary; and she has been, in many ways, my loving, if occasionally cranky, lodestar for this examination.

But I have a life experience that Mother Mary never had, in that after almost ten years of being a single mother I got married again—to a man with three daughters. And so I became stepmother to three children. Two of my stepdaughters lived with us and getting to know them, love them, and become their stepmother was an amazing



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and interesting, if occasionally challenging, experience. Unfortunately, the marriage didn't last, ending in divorce; by that point, my stepdaughters were in college, but suffice it to say that my period of stepmotherhood has effectively ended.

Now that's an interesting experience, for someone who regards herself as a mother, first and foremost. It led naturally to all sorts of questions that you will find lurking in the subtext of *Come Home*, such as: Is it possible to be an ex-mother? Do you ever really stop being a mother? What are the boundaries of stepparenthood? How does it begin, and how does it end, if it does? Do you trade past for present, where children are involved? Do you owe a stepchild the same duty you owe your children, beyond the marriage? How can a tie that grows organically from love be influenced by law, much less severed?

I don't think these questions are often discussed in public, or in fiction, though becoming a stepmother, and becoming an ex-stepmother, is a common experience these days. For better or for worse, marriages aren't lasting through better or worse, and children are always affected, albeit in varying degrees. This underlying uneasiness with families reconfiguring and recombining has been called *blending*, but as you can see in *Come Home*, trying to blend a family can sometimes turn it into a dog's dinner, especially when the unexpected happens, as it does in the novel.

And somehow, when there are disparate elements to be reconciled in families, my experience has been that it's usually the mother who provides the glue. It isn't an easy task, and in *Come Home*, Jill struggles mightily with it, not only when she has to choose to fit her former stepdaughter Abby back into her life, but also later, when she has to deal with Sam's apparent resentment over the fact that she hasn't been making time for his son. Consider that Jill is a mom with a child of her own, former stepchildren, and a current stepson. Anybody who's been in that position knows that that's more plates in the air than most moms can handle. I suspect, too, that if you haven't been in that

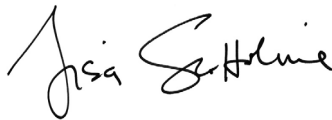
“Books enable us to go deeper into our emotions and [our] everyday crises.”

position, you can relate to it anyway; because, in my experience, women are somehow always making sure that everybody in the room is happy and healthy, whether they're tied by blood, by law, or not at all. Myself, I am generally responsible for the health and welfare of most of the tri-state area, and I bet you are, too.

So that's the secret thinking behind *Come Home* that led me to want to explore the subject more deeply, and in fiction. As I said in the Acknowledgments of the novel, the characters in *Come Home* are not my own family, or ex-family, or real people at all, and that, again, is the great merit of fiction. Books enable us to go deeper into our emotions and the everyday crises that keep us on the telephone with our girlfriends, with our mothers, or even with the other members of our book clubs. I always think that as society becomes increasingly more complex and spread out, the explosion of book clubs proves that people look to fiction to bring them together, not all only to each other, but ultimately to themselves.

I feel honored that you are reading *Come Home* and I'm very grateful for your support. Thank you for your time. I hope that you enjoyed reading it, and that you will give my other books a try.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Scholme". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "L" and "S".



Ideas for Book Groups

I am a huge fan of book clubs because it means people are reading and discussing books. Mix that with wine and carbs, and you can't keep me away. I'm deeply grateful to all who read me, and especially honored when my book is chosen by a book club. I wanted an opportunity to say thank you to those who read me, which gave me the idea of a contest. Every year I hold a book-club contest and the winning book club gets a visit from me and a night of fabulous food and good wine. To enter is easy: all you have to do is take a picture of your entire book club with each member holding a copy of my newest hardcover and send it to me by mail or e-mail. No book club is too small or too big. Don't belong to a book club? Start one. Just grab a loved one, a neighbor or friend, and send in your picture of you each holding my newest book. I look forward to coming to your town and wining and dining with your group. For more details, just go to www.scottoline.com.

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Tour time is my favorite time of year because I get to break out my fancy clothes and meet with interesting and fun readers around the country. The rest of the year I am a homebody, writing every day, but thrilled to be able to connect with readers through e-mail. I read all my e-mail, and answer as much as I can. So, drop me a line about books, families, pets, love, or whatever is on your mind at lisa@scottoline.com. For my latest book and tour information, special promotions, and updates you can sign up at www.scottoline.com for my newsletter.

Lisa Scottoline



The Wednesday Evening Ladies' Literary Guild of Mineola, New York, submit their photo for Lisa's book-club contest.



Reading Group Questions

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1. *Come Home*, at its heart, is the story of family, and more specifically, the blending of families. What are the dynamics in your own family like? What do you think the greatest challenge is in blending two families?
2. One of the main themes in this book is leaving home and “coming home.” In which ways have each of the main characters (Jill, Abby, Megan, Victoria) left home or come home?
3. Do you understand Jill’s emotional response to Abby when she first sees her after several years? Why or why not?
4. Describe Sam’s response to the dynamics between Abby and Jill. Do you agree with him? Do you relate to his response? Do you feel he acted appropriately?
5. Have you ever had a situation where you were forced to be estranged from someone you cared about?
6. How do you think Abby’s and Victoria’s separation from Jill affected them? What do you think Jill could have done differently, given the circumstances?
7. How would you describe William? Why do you think Jill was so easily fooled by him?
8. What rights do you think a person should have if he or she was instrumental in helping raise a child? What do you think is better for the child? How do you think the legal system will deal with this issue in the future given the growing number of blended families?

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9. Oftentimes a parent must give the majority of their attention to the child that needs it the most. Do you feel like Jill was neglecting Megan in favor of helping Abby? What would you have done if you were Jill?

10. Now, for fun: Would you help solve the murder of your ex-husband? Go easy—at least until the second glass of wine has been served...