

Before She Was Helen

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DISCUSSION GUIDE



READING GROUP GUIDE

1. Dom and Clemmie aren't the only two characters that live double lives. Discuss the duality of the other characters in the book. Do you think who everyone has hidden identities? Outline the different ways that people can lead "secret lives."
2. Bentley's message to Boro on Instagram triggers the events of the book. What are your views on social media? Discuss the pros and the cons.
3. A lot of these characters are everyday but morally complex people. Did you find yourself sympathizing with any of them? What did you like about them?
4. How do you feel about Clemmie exploiting the death of a childhood friend? Is it justifiable?
5. How would you characterize the younger characters—like Harper and Bentley—in this book? Did you like them? How are they different from the older characters?
6. Johnny and Joyce both crave excitement in their quiet lives, which leads to some serious consequences. Have you ever felt this way? What did you do about it?
7. To protect her own secrets, Clemmie's main goal is to get Boro his money and help him escape—even though he's a violent drug dealer. Do you think her motivation is selfish? How would you handle the situation?
8. If you discovered that someone close to you had a second identity, how would you react?
9. Carol-Lee was the only victim of Rudyard's who tried to report his crime, but her accusations were met with derision. Do you think she was right to speak up? Or do you agree with Barbara and Clemmie's strategy of running away from him?
10. When Clemmie is raped as a young woman, no one believes her, and when the accusations resurface in the present day, police officers don't take the matter seriously. How much do you think the ideas surrounding rape have changed?
11. How do you think the reunion between Clemmie and Billy goes? Do you think she should be entirely honest about her history? How do you think he would handle the information?
12. Clemmie seems to think that her age has protected her from any more suspicion. Do you agree? Will anyone discover her secret?

