



A READING GROUP GUIDE FOR

# MIRRORLAND

A NOVEL

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*This reading group guide for **Mirrorland** includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.*

## INTRODUCTION

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Cat lives in Los Angeles, far away from 36 Westeryk Road, the imposing gothic house in Edinburgh where she and her estranged twin sister, El, grew up. As girls, they invented Mirrorland, a dark, imaginary place under the pantry stairs, full of pirates, witches, and clowns. These days, Cat rarely thinks about their childhood home, or the fact that El now lives there with her husband, Ross.

But when El mysteriously disappears after going out on her sailboat, Cat is forced to return to 36 Westeryk Road, which has scarcely changed in twenty years. The grand old house is still full of shadowy corners, and at every turn Cat finds herself stumbling on long-held secrets and terrifying ghosts from the past. Because someone—El?—has left Cat clues in almost every room: a treasure hunt that leads right back to Mirrorland, where she knows the truth lies crouched and waiting . . .

A twisty, dark, and brilliantly crafted thriller about love and betrayal, redemption and revenge, *Mirrorland* is a propulsive, page-turning debut about the power of imagination and the price of freedom.

## TOPICS & QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

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1. In the prologue, we meet twin sisters Cat and El, who've run to the harbor at night to join a pirate ship. How do we begin to sense that this is more than a childish lark? What about the dynamic between the girls? What can you tell about their relationship?
2. Describe your first impression of 36 Westeryk Road. Why is Cat unnerved to see the same furniture from when she was a child? How do the features of the house—the echoing bell pulls, the fantastically named bedrooms—create a particular atmosphere? Is there a moment that frightened you caused by something in the house?
3. When Cat first returns to Mirrorland, she says, “As the creak of that old wood settles and suffocates, I wonder if my nervous excitement is merely the ghost of the child I once was” (page 46). Why did Cat and El create Mirrorland? What were they trying to find there?
4. The girls' mother, Nancy, explains to her daughters that they are mirror twins. How does this shape their sense of self? How do they seem the same, and how are they different, physically and psychologically?
5. Loving and fierce, Nancy is a complicated figure throughout the course of the novel, a woman who's always thinking one step ahead and yet sleeps in a frilly room called the Princess Tower. How did your initial impression of her change as more of the girls' childhood was revealed?
6. On page 77, we meet many of the characters of *Mirrorland*: “El and Ross were sitting cross-legged in the Captain's Quarters. In the stern stood Annie, Mouse, Belle, and Old Joe Johnson, the barkeep of the Three-Fingered-Joe Saloon. The Clown representative, to my dismay, was not Dicky Grock, but Pogo.” How did you imagine these characters visually? Did you feel they were there to harm or help?
7. How do Ross's experiences as a young boy affect how he behaves with Cat and El? Why do you think he became a psychologist? How did the way you felt about Ross change throughout the book?
8. On page 107, Cat says about Mouse, “Because she'd always been my friend, not El's. The Mouse to my Cat. My creation.” As the character of Mouse evolves, how does Cat's perception of Mouse shift? What do you make of Mouse in the end?
9. At first, we see El from almost entirely Cat's perspective. Does Cat seem like a reliable narrator? How does El's voice make itself heard?
10. “But this house and our mother and her stories turned our imagination into a melting pot, a forge. A cauldron. And, I'm beginning to realize, I can trust nothing that came out of it,” Cat observes about their childhood (page 135). As the treasure hunt clues force Cat to confront buried truths and

secrets, were you surprised by how much was revealed and how successfully she'd managed to live a lie for so long? Did it make you question any of your own memories?

11. Rafiq is determined to solve the mystery of El's disappearance; Cat is determined to solve the mystery of their past. How did the narrative balance those two quests? When did they start to overlap?
12. *Mirrorland* offers several twists and turns. As a reader, which one was the most shocking to you? Which developments did you expect, and which ones took you by complete surprise?

## ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB

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1. *Mirrorland* is in some ways a novel of escape. Read Stephen King's novella *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* or Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo* and compare and contrast their escape narratives. Why were these stories so inspiring to Cat and El? Why do you think the author chose quotes from these two works for *Mirrorland*'s epigraph?
2. *Mirrorland* features a grand old house with such a strong, haunting presence that it almost becomes a character in the story. Compare and contrast 36 Westeryk Road with the house in *Rebecca* or *The Haunting of Hill House* or *The Witch Elm* or another film or novel of your choosing featuring a spooky, atmospheric house.
3. Much of *Mirrorland* is devoted to the idea of how children use imaginative play to understand mature, adult situations. Were there concepts or situations that you created myths or misunderstandings around when you were young and that you had to revisit when you grew older?