

***The Turn of the Key* by Ruth Ware**

Discussion questions from the publisher

- 1.** The book opens with Rowan Caine's desperate plea for help from prison. If you received this letter as Mr. Wrexham, would you keep reading? Is there anything she could say that would persuade you to represent her?
- 2.** Rowan describes the Elincourt estate in detail when she visits for her interview. What is your first impression of the house? What aspects were appealing or unappealing to you?
- 3.** The interview with Sandra is standard but revealing. What do we learn about Rowan as she tries to come up with the perfect answers? Would you say Rowan is trustworthy? What do you learn about Sandra during this initial interaction?
- 4.** Maddie, the second oldest girl, has an unexpected reaction to Rowan's departure and makes a terrifying proclamation: "Don't come here. It's not safe" (p. 74). After everything Rowan saw and learned in the previous 24 hours, should she have heeded Maddie's warning? Would you have listened to Maddie?
- 5.** Rowan has a very negative first impression of Bill Elincourt and their relationship only gets worse from there. Why is her initial reaction so strong? How would you handle the ensuing harassment by an employer?
- 6.** Sandra and Bill leave Rowan on her first day with the kids and she struggles to reign them all in. Discuss the kids' behavior and how Sandra's constant check-ins affect Rowan's authority in the house. Look specifically at the interactions on page 131 and 158.
- 7.** Rowan believes she is finally building a relationship with Maddie and Ellie when they show her their secret garden. But when their malicious intent is exposed, Rowan, Maddie and Ellie all react intensely. Describe each of their reactions and the emotions behind them.
- 8.** After the house goes haywire in the middle of the night, Rowan is sleep-deprived, on edge and paranoid, and she jumps to several rash conclusions. Are these thoughts reasonable possibilities or delusions based in fear? Imagine how you might respond in her situation.
- 9.** The Elincourts' housekeeper, Jean McKenzie, immediately dislikes Rowan, but it seems to run deeper than their negative first encounter. Why? Could Jean be the one tormenting Rowan at night, as she suspects?
- 10.** Rowan is deeply disturbed by the girl in Maddie's drawing. "Tears were streaming down her face, her mouth was open in a despairing wail, and there were red scribbles of blood on her face and on her dress" (p. 228). What do you think it represents? Do you think Rowan should have addressed this directly?

11. When Jack and Rowan break into the attic, it is much worse than they expected. Discuss their ensuing conversation. What answers does Rowan have now and what questions remain? How do you think the doll head came to be in Rowan's lap?

12. Rowan's opinion of Jack changes repeatedly in her short time at Heatherbrae. He began as her confidant, became her lead suspect, and finally seemed to earn her trust. Do you think he is trustworthy? Why or why not?

13. We finally learn who Rachel Gerhardt is and of her personal connection to the family. Were there any clues that led you to suspect this before the big reveal? Do you believe Rachel's version of events as she explains them to Mr. Wrexham?

14. In the last chapter, the truth of what happened to Maddie is finally revealed. How does Ellie's letter align with Rachel's retelling of that night? What, if any, questions remain?