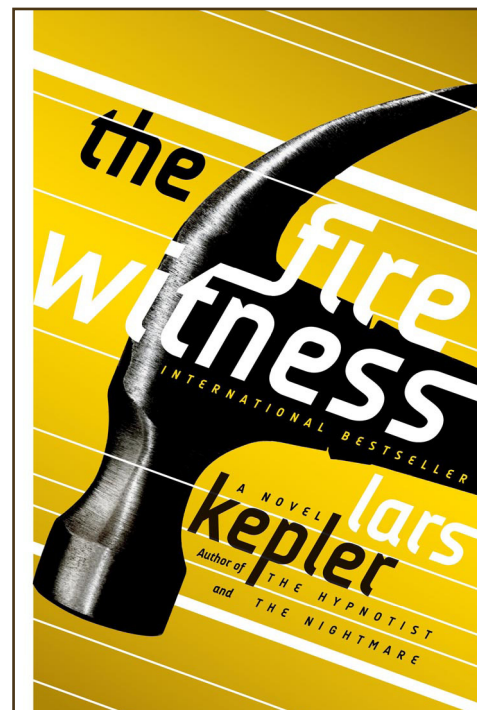


Reading Group Gold

The Fire Witness

by Lars Kepler

Translated from the Swedish by Laura A. Wideburg



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Taking the page-turner to new heights, *The Fire Witness* has drawn thousands of captivated readers into the world of Swedish police detective Joona Linna (who is now under investigation himself). The third book in Lars Kepler's pulse-pounding series opens with a gruesome death at a home for troubled girls. When one of the patients escapes, leaving behind a bloody bed with a hammer under the pillow, the case seems to be solved. But Linna refuses to accept easy answers as he follows a trail of even more sinister evidence—ultimately leading to a confrontation with the madman who destroyed Linna's family. As he tries to piece together the facts, Linna connects with a “medium” who falsely claims she can communicate with the dead. But when she begins receiving disturbing, all-too-real visions of the crime scene, the very essence of eyewitness testimony is turned on its head.

Brimming with provocative questions about the mind's eye and its power to heal and to destroy, *The Fire Witness* is sure to spark intriguing conversations. We hope that the following discussion topics will enrich your reading group's experience.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. As you read the opening scenes, who was your first suspect? What did you think Elisabet had seen?

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2. The authors define a medium as “someone who claims to have paranormal talent.” Do you agree? Did Flora do any harm when she staged séances? What does her story indicate about the very real power of memory?
3. In *The Fire Witness*, how does evil come into being? What allows it to flourish?
4. Which is Linna’s greater strength: his intellect or his empathy? Why do his mind and his heart also get him in trouble with authority?
5. In the opening scene, we learn that Elisabet often says, “It’s the nice girls who end up here.” What fears do the girls of Birgittagården have in common? What determines whether they will be drawn to someone like Tobias, who sees them as easy prey, or someone like Elin, who wants to protect them at any cost?
6. As Vicky’s case was brought before a judge, whose testimony did you believe? How did your opinion of Vicky change throughout the novel?
7. Flora was failed by the many adults who were entrusted with caring for her. What did they hope to gain by making her a scapegoat? In punishing her and making her the target of their continual suspicion, how did they transform their own sense of reality, and her perception of herself?
8. When you discovered how Dennis became a refuge, what did this reveal about the connection between Vicky and her mother? What was her mother able to provide despite her hardships?
9. What was the killer’s greatest advantage in gaining trust and staying above suspicion? Ultimately, what motivated these crimes? Who was responsible for them?
10. Discuss the novel’s title and the horrific lie it refers to. How does Flora’s childhood echo the experiences of other courageous witnesses captured in the novel?
11. Discuss the power struggles among the Birgittagården girls. How do they perpetuate the broken bonds they’ve experienced? Why was Elin successful in reaching past Vicky’s pain?
12. How did the story line of Pia and Dante—and the vulnerability of innocent bystanders—affect you?
13. Just as the novel’s girls are separated from their families, Linna’s daughter grows up without a father. Did Linna make the right decision in creating a new identity for Lumi and Summa? Would you have made the same choice?
14. As you read the closing scene, what did you predict for Jurek Walter? Linna thinks of him as the Devil: how is his evil different from what was revealed in this book? How does it underscore the past evil Linna has seen in *The Hypnotist* and *The Nightmare*?

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PRAISE FOR THE NOVELS OF LARS KEPLER

“Action-oriented, inventive, with over-the-top plots and larger-than-life heroes and criminals.”
—*Los Angeles Times Magazine*

“[Kepler’s] ability to inhabit the workings of psychotic psyches is authentically shocking. Larsson is destined to have many heirs . . . Kepler is by far the best.” —Lev Grossman, *Time*

“Outrageously entertaining . . . Methadone for readers suffering from Stieg Larsson withdrawal.”
—Laura Miller, *Salon*

“Kepler’s characters are admirably flawed . . . It’s a smooth collaboration . . . with frequent surprises and grace notes amid the carnage. With any luck, we’ll hear more of Lars Kepler.”
—Patrick Anderson, *The Washington Post*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lars Kepler is a pseudonym for the literary couple Alexander and Alexandra Ahndoril. Their novels, including *The Nightmare* and *The Hypnotist* (soon to be a motion picture directed by Lasse Hallström) have been number one bestsellers in more than a dozen countries. *The Fire Witness* is the third book in their Joona Linna series. Visit www.larskepler.com for more information.

Guide written by Amy Clements