

Book Review: The Family Upstairs, and The Family Remains
By Lisa Jewell

If you're a psychological thriller enthusiast, you might want to check out this two-installment series from author Lisa Jewell. If nothing else, you'll never again think of your own family as weird.

In 'The Family Upstairs' published in 2019, we meet Libby Jones, who was adopted when she was a baby. She's just turned 25 and receives a solicitor letter informing her that she has inherited a huge house from the estate of her birth parents. It blows her world apart and sets her on a course to learn all she can about her biological family.

The house – a mansion, actually – sits on the banks of the Thames in London's fashionable Chelsea neighborhood. It's certainly seen better days, but it's still worth millions. And it has some sinister stories to tell. Starting with nearly 25 years ago when police received an anonymous phone call summoning them to the house. They found a 10-month-old baby (Libby) in a crib, and three dead adults in what appeared to be a cult-type suicide.

But was it?

The up-tempo narrative soon reveals that while the house was owned by Libby's birth parents, Henry and Martina Lamb, it became inhabited by three families comprised of six adults and four children. Told from three points-of-view, the story encompasses events past and present as the mysteries of the house at 16 Cheyne Walk are slowly unraveled.

The ending does become a bit convoluted, but it's somewhat fitting given the murders, mysteries and obsessions unfolded in the storyline.

In the sequel, "The Family Remains" published three years later in 2022, the story opens early one morning on the shores of the Thames when Detective Inspector Samuel Owusu is called to the scene of a gruesome discovery: a bag of human bones. And further investigation and

forensic analysis reveals they are connected to a cold case where three adults were found dead in a Chelsea mansion several decades earlier.

Thus, the door that Libby and the other children who lived in that house assumed had long been closed has now been reopened. What follows is a narrative written from multiple (four) perspectives that is a true slow-burn mystery. The pace is slower than the first book, but no less engaging. And the intricate family dynamics are on full display.

I give “The Family Upstairs” 4.5 stars, and its sequel a solid four. And I highly recommend reading them in order, despite the promo that calls “The Family Remains” a standalone sequel. Jewell’s writing is pretty thorough in providing backstory, but you’ll appreciate it more reading the first book, first.