

Eva Moves the Furniture

By Margot Livesey

Henry Holt and Company

A Reading and Discussion Guide

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SUMMARY:

Eva Moves the Furniture, the fourth novel by the widely celebrated Margot Livesey, combines the beauty and simplicity of a fairy tale with the complexity and passion of a supernatural coming-of-age novel. Eva McEwen, born in 1920 in the small town of Troon, Scotland, grows up motherless, lonely, and isolated. Although raised by a loving aunt and heartsick yet amiable father, Eva’s childhood is frequently interrupted by visits from two “companions”—a woman and a girl—who are invisible to everyone but her. As Eva grows older, these companions continue to visit her, but their intentions become increasingly unclear: Do they wish to protect or harm her? Livesey offers us a novel about family and friendship, loss and loneliness, motherhood and magic—about the loves, legends, and legacies that comprise a lifetime, and how we all live our lives alongside the living and the dead. As noted in *The New York Times Book Review*, the novel “enters the reader’s life in much the same way that the companions come to Eva... If you give Eva McEwen just a little space in your own imagination, she will start moving the furniture.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Is this novel a ghost story? If so, how does it compare with other ghost stories you may have read?
2. Early in the story, Eva, our narrator and protagonist, makes the claim: “Some parts of this story are true in one way, some in another.” What does she mean by this remark? How does it apply throughout the novel?
3. Author Margot Livesey, in an interview about this book, admitted: “It took me a long time to realize that just because I didn’t remember my mother, didn’t mean she hadn’t been important in my life. I think it was learning how to understand that feeling which enabled me to write the novel.” How are these comments echoed in the pages of *Eva Moves the Furniture*—and especially in the relationship between Eva and Barbara?

4. In the wake of her mother's death, Eva effectively acquires two different sets of surrogate parents: Lily and David (gentle country folk from the Scottish village of Troon) and the woman and the child (mysterious yet friendly visitors from another realm of existence). Discuss the larger purpose that each couple serves in Eva's life. When and why does each couple help Eva, and when and why—if at all—do they hinder her?
5. Describe the omens that occur on the day Eva is born; then discuss how, over the course of the novel, these omens turn out to be true or false. Also, talk about the presence and function of fate in this novel. How is the idea of fate or destiny represented by the two characters known as the companions?
6. Barbara, Lily, and Eva are all women who need to earn their own living. What does the novel suggest about the roles and possibilities for women in the first half of the twentieth century?
7. Describe the character of Samuel, and his attitude towards his patients and towards reconstructive surgery. Why does Eva liken her experiences with the companions to Samuel's being Jewish? And why, in turn, does she refuse to marry him?
8. What sort of picture does *Eva Moves the Furniture* give to life and work during wartime? Discuss the ways in which the depiction of the infirmary enhanced or changed your understanding of the Second World War.
9. This is a story in four parts, each with its own title. What do the four titles, and their progression, show us about Eva? Were you surprised by the title of Part IV: You? Can (and if so, does) this "you" interact with the companions in the same manner as Eva?
10. In her efforts to come to terms with her situation, Eva explores various aspects of the supernatural: local legends, Judaism, lives of saints, and legends from other cultures. Do you believe in the supernatural? Have you ever had experiences that you regard as supernatural? How have you dealt with them and explained them to other people?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

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Margot Livesey is the award-winning author of the story collection *Learning by Heart* and the novels *Homework*, *Criminals*, and *The Missing World*. Born in Scotland, she now lives in the Boston area, where she is a writer-in-residence at Emerson College.

HELPFUL LINKS:

[Profile](#) of Margot Livesey

[Henry Holt and Company](#) on *Eva Moves the Furniture*

New York Times [book review](#) on *Eva Moves the Furniture*



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