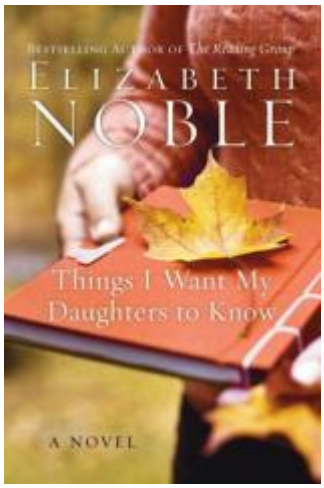
bookreporter

Things I Want My Daughters to Know

by Elizabeth Noble



About the Book

How do you cope in a world without your mother?

When Barbara realizes time is running out, she writes letters to her four daughters, aware that they'll be facing the trials and triumphs of life without her at their side. But how can she leave them when they still have so much growing up to do?

Take Lisa, in her mid-thirties but incapable of making a commitment; or Jennifer, trapped in a stale marriage and buttoned up so tight she could burst. Twentysomething Amanda, the traveler, has always distanced herself from the rest of the family; and then there's Hannah, a teenage girl on the verge of womanhood about to be parted from the mother she adores.

But by drawing on the wisdom in Barbara's letters, the girls might just find a way to cope with their loss. And in coming to terms with their bereavement, can they also set themselves free to enjoy their lives with all the passion and love each deserves?

This heartfelt novel by bestselling author Elizabeth Noble celebrates family, friends... and the glorious, endless possibilities of life.

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Discussion Guide

1. What would you say in a letter to your daughter? What advice would you give?

2. How does the author succeed in portraying a main character who never actually appears in the novel?

3. Is it selfless or selfish for Barbara to reveal what she does?

4. What does each character learn about herself and what do they learn from Barbara?

5. How does each character handle grief?

6. What does it mean to have a "good death?"

7. How is each sister's relationship with her mother different?

8. Do you think it is important to keep a journal? Why or why not?

9. Is it ok to read another person's diary, letters, journal after they die? Why or why not? If you found someone's diary, would you read it?

10. What is the best advice your mother gave to you or what do you wish she'd told you?

11. Does birth order play a role in family dynamics and did the sister's here display characteristics that you'd expect from the eldest, middle, and youngest? Why or why not?

12. How do you think Barbara's daughters have been affected by their mother's romantic/marital history, and what role may her divorce have played in their own development and attitudes?

13. How do you view the author's portrayal of men within the narrative? In particular, how does Mark's reaction to his wife's death, in the context of his role as father and stepfather, affect you?

Author Bio

Elizabeth Noble was born in High Wycombe, Bucks, and now lives in New York with her husband and two daughters. She studied English at Oxford University and after graduating embarked on a career in publishing before taking up writing full time. She is the author of seven novels: THE READING GROUP, THE TENKO CLUB, ALPHABET WEEKENDS, THINGS I WANT MY DAUGHTERS TO KNOW, THE GIRL NEXT DOOR and THE WAY WE WERE, which were all *Sunday Times* Top Ten bestsellers. THE READING GROUP reached Number One. Her new novel, BETWEEN A MOTHER AND HER CHILD, is out now.

Critical Praise

Noble hits her stride in her tearjerker fourth novel. Before Barbara Forbes, a mother of four, succumbs to terminal cancer, she leaves words of wisdom for her four daughters in the form of letters to each of them… Though Barbara's life-is-short aphorisms are nothing new, her sharp wit and distinctive voice is a nice complement to the four nuanced stories of coping with death.

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