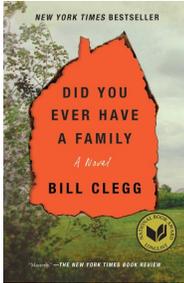


Books by the Stack



Did You Ever Have a Family by Bill Clegg

On the eve of her daughter's wedding, June Reid's life is complete devastated when a disaster takes the lives of her entire family, all gone in a moment. And June is the only survivor. Alone and directionless, June drives across the country, away from her small Connecticut town. In her wake, a community emerges, weaving a beautiful and surprising web of connections through shared heartbreak.

Why you'll like it: *Multiple perspectives. Heartwrenching. Candid. Thoughtful.*

About the Author: Bill Clegg is an American literary agent and author. Clegg's first two memoirs detail his addiction to crack cocaine. His debut novel, *Did You Ever Have a Family*, received offers from four publishers and was longlisted for the 2015.

Questions for Discussion

1. After June has had an argument with her daughter, Lolly, the night before Lolly's wedding, "Pru asked if she was okay, and June answered with a question that seemed to Pru more of a comment on June's struggles with Lolly: *Did you ever have a family?*" (p. 131) Why do you think Clegg choose this line as the title of his novel? What does being part of a family mean to each characters in the novel? Do any of their perspectives change?
2. When a particularly pushy news anchor asks June how she is "surviving" the loss of her loved ones following a house fire, she answers, "No one has survived" (p.12). Explain June's statement. Do you agree with June that, although she is alive, she has not survived? How are June and the others affected by the tragedy are coping with their grief?
3. Rebecca says, "Funny how you think people are one way or the other and most of the time you end up completely wrong" (p.66) when describing her initial assessment of Cissy. What causes Rebecca to change her mind? Apply Rebecca's statement to the other characters in *Did You Ever Have a Family*. Were you wrong about any? If so, how?
4. Discuss the structure of *Did You Ever Have a Family*. What is the effect of having multiple narrators? Do the differing points of view help to deepen your understanding of the main characters, particularly June and Lydia? If so, how? Why do you think that June's and Lydia's sections are told in the third person.
5. At a local bar, Lydia remembers hearing a patron say "Some trees love an ax," and "Something in what he said rang true, but when she later remembered what he'd said, she disagreed and thought instead that the tree gets used to the ax, which has nothing to do with love" (p.78). How does this statement apply to Lydia's relationship with Earl? Are there any other relationships in *Did You Ever Have a Family* where this statement could apply? Compare and contrast Lydia's relationship with Earl to the other relationships in the book, taking a look at June's relationships with Adam and Luke.
6. What did you think about June and Lydia's friendship? When Lydia sees June on the morning of the fire "June turned her face away as if avoiding a hot flame and...flicked her hand toward Lydia, the way you

wave away an unwanted animal or a beggar” (p.80). Why is this so hurtful to Lydia? Were you surprised to learn the reasons for June’s actions? What were they?

7. Of Lydia, George says “though she was troubled, she was also tough in ways that let me know she’d be okay” (p. 174). Do you agree with George? Discuss Lydia’s relationship with George. Why are the two of them drawn to each other?

8. When the narrator first introduces June it is with the line “She will go” (p.9). Does this introduction affect how you think of June? In what ways? Why is June so set on severing all ties with Wells? Do you agree with her decision to do so? Why or why not?

9. Of Lolly, Dale, her future father-in-law, says “Lolly seemed unformed to us” (p.129). Did you get a sense of her character, and, did you think, like Dale “that despite her girlish manner, something was broken in her” (p.210). Explain your answer. What is the effect of including Lolly’s letter to June in the story? Did it help you understand both Lolly and her relationship with June? Explain your answer.

10. George says of his son Robert that when his wife Kay would “tell me it wasn’t [his son’s] job to be interested in me, it was my job to be interested in him” (p.170). Do you agree with Kay? What role do you think a parent should fill in his or her child’s life? Do you think that Lydia and June are good mothers to Luke and Lolly respectively? Give examples to support your answer.

11. Cissy says, “Rough as life can be, I know in my bones we are supposed to stick around and play our part” (p. 289). What part has Cissy played in the lives of those around her? Talk about the way each of the characters in *Did You Ever Have a Family* affects the lives of those around them. Was anything particularly surprising to you? What?

12. Who is Winston? Although Lydia distrusts him, “she’s still not ready to step away” (p. 143), she continues to take his calls. Why? What prompts Lydia to share her life story with Winston? Were you surprised by what she revealed? How do you think Winston’s presence has changed Lydia?

13. When June finds Lolly’s notebooks she remembers cataloging canvases by a deceased client and finding an old Boy Scout manual of his filled with drawings. “Very likely no one had ever seen these drawings, and she she remembers having the fleeting instinct to steal the book and keep it herself” (p. 179). Why does June think about hoarding the book? Why do you think finding Lolly’s notebooks has triggered this memory for June? How does June react to Lolly’s work?

14. Almost everyone in Wells has an opinion of Luke, particularly after he dies. Edith calls him “that doomed Luke Morey” (p. 28), Rick remembers him as being “too big, too handsome, too something for the likes of us” (p. 52) and many of the locals gossip that he was a “local thug” (p. 40). What did you think of Luke? Why do you think he was such a controversial figure in Wells?

15. Silas “thinks of himself as [Lydia’s] guardian, her shadow” (p. 265). Why does Silas think that Lydia needs protecting? Silas ultimately decides to tell Lydia the truth about the role he thinks that he has played in Luke’s death. What makes him confess? What is the effect on Lydia?

(Questions from the author)

