

## Burning Girls Discussion Questions

by CJ Tudor

### Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & Authors Website)

CJ Tudor lives in Sussex, England with her family. Over the years she has worked as a copywriter, television presenter, voice over and dog-walker. She is now thrilled to be able to write full-time, and doesn't miss chasing wet dogs through muddy fields all that much.



Her first novel, *The Chalk Man*, has sold in over forty countries and will be developed into a six-part drama with BBC Studios Production. *The Burning Girls* is coming to Paramount+ in 2023.

### Characters:

- **Reverend Jack Brooks** – Female Vicar moved to Chapel Cross, a new parish, after an “incident.” Has a daughter Flo. Her deceased husband was Jonathon.
- **Flo Brooks** – Jack’s 15-year-old teenage daughter. Likes to take pictures.
- **Burning Girls** – Twig figures from English village of Chapel Croft which are burned each year to commemorate the deaths of 8 villagers who were martyred during Queen Mary’s Protestant purge.
- **Merry Lane & Joy Harris** – Two 15-year-old girls who disappeared within a week of one another in 1990 in Sussex, England.
- **Reverend Blake** – Jack’s mentor. Rescued Jack from the streets when she was younger. He died 5 years ago.
- **Bishop John Durkin** – Bishop in charge of North Notts diocese. He sends Jack and Flo to Chapel Cross when there is an “incident” at Jack’s inner city parish.
- **Reverend Matthew Fletcher** – Former Vicar at Chapel Cross. Committed suicide. Jack is his replacement at Chapel Cross church.
- **Benjamin Grady** – Young priest trainee when Joy and Merry disappeared. He performed exorcisms. Grady disappeared about the same time that Joy and Merry did.
- **Poppy Harper** – Little girl covered in blood at beginning of book. Daughter of Simon and Emma Harper. Rose Harper is her older sister.
- **Rose Harper** – The Harper’s oldest daughter. Teenager. Bullies Flo with her cousin Tom’s help.
- **Simon Harper** – Farmer. One of the most influential people in Chapel Croft. Wife is Emma. Daughters are Rose and Poppy.
- **Tom Harper** – Rose Harper’s cousin. Teenager. Bully. Flo breaks his nose. Has a pellet gun.
- **Doreen Harris** – Joy Harris’ mother. Has dementia now.
- **Joan Hartman** – Older member of the Chapel Cross parish. Used to be a reporter.

- **Kirsty** – Woman who runs the youth group and helps out at the Village Hall. She is also a stonemason.
- **Jacob Lane** – Former drug user. In and out of prison for the past 14 years and is now on parole. Is looking for someone he once knew.
- **Aaron Marsh** – Church warden/caretaker. (30s) Father was a former Vicar at the church. Aaron is taking care of his father who is dying of Huntington's.
- **Reverend Brian Rushton** – Reverend covering 3 churches in Sussex. Been Vicar at Warblers Green for 30 years.
- **Clara Rushton** – Working temporarily as the church Administrator. Reverend Rushton's wife. Former teacher.
- **Ruby** – Child from Jack's old church. Died. Fostered by her aunt Lena and her aunt's partner Demi. Abused.
- **Mike Sudduth** – Reporter. Has a son. His daughter died last year when visiting Poppy Harper.
- **Saffron Winter** – Teen author. Recently moved to the village.
- **Lucas Wrigley** – Teenage boy about Flo's age. Likes to draw. Has Dystonia, a neurological disease that causes twitching.

#### Missing or deceased:

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|----------------------------------|---|
| • Merry Lane (Missing)           | • Reverend Matthew Fletcher (Deceased. Suicide.)      |
| • Joy Harris (Missing)           | • Ruby (Deceased. Abuse.)                             |
| • Merry Lane's brother (Missing) | • Mike Sudduth's young daughter (Deceased. Accident.) |
| • Merry Lane's mother (Missing)  |   |
| • Benjamin Grady (Missing)       |   |

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. The story is told from multiple points of view and covers a couple of different timelines. Did you like the way the story was set up or did you find it confusing?
3. Most libraries have **The Burning Girls** shelved in the Mystery section, but a few have it shelved in Horror. What genre do you think best fits this book? Why?
4. How do secrets and hidden identities affect the characters and their actions? When is keeping a secret better than telling it?
5. Religion is central to **The Burning Girls**, from Jack's job as a vicar to the legend of the burned martyrs of Chapel Croft. How does religion and its past – both recent and far away – influence the future?

6. Jack is not the traditional vicar and says she secretly enjoys watching people realize that she is, in fact, Jack. In what ways did the characters challenge your expectations?
7. Jack says, "Bad things do not happen because of God... Bad things happen because life is a series of random, unpredictable events." What do you believe?
8. Fire can be a destructive or purifying thing, and there is an old saying, "baptized by fire," to describe people learning and growing through very difficult experiences. How was fire used throughout the book?
9. Chapel Croft is a tiny, remote village with an insular community that does not want to challenge the way things have always been (especially where the Harper family is concerned). How does village's burning martyrs legend and its small-town gossip work against Jack? How does it help her, if at all?
10. Jack's choices as a young woman led her down a dangerous road before she found the church. Can you understand or empathize with her actions? Why or why not? What would you have done in her position?
11. Do you think the burning girl ghosts that Flo and Jack kept seeing were trying to help or harm them? Why do you think that?
12. One of the main plots of the story is bullying - teenage bullying, adult bullying, etc. Were you surprised by who the bullies were? Did any of them surprise you more than others?
13. What did you make of the shocking revelations about Jack's past and Wrigley's true self? What clues did the author leave to let us know not everything is as it seems?
14. Did you know what happened to Reverend Matthew Fletcher before it was revealed? What clues were given?
15. Did you know what happened to Merry before it was revealed? What clues were given?
16. Did you know what happened to Benjamin Grady before it was revealed? What clues were given?
17. Did you know what happened to Joy before it was revealed? What clues were given? The story never tells us what happened to Joy's killer in the end. Do you think Jack turned them in to the police or do you think she let them go? Why or why not?
18. In the well there was the body of an older woman. Who do you think she was and how do you think she got there?
19. Do you think Jacob was responsible for what he did? Why or why not? What do you think about what happens to Jacob at the end of the story?
20. What did you think about the ending? What do you think is next for Jack and Flo in Australia?
21. Did this story surprise you? In what way? Was it a good or bad surprise? Why do you think that?
22. CJ Tudor has written other books. Will you read any of them?

## References:

- CJ Tudor Website – <https://www.cjtudor.com/>
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/t/c-j-tudor/>
- GoodReads – <https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/53387949>
- Novelist – <https://web-s-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=9d822c51-b274-4cf4-9da1-33fdb6c73152%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=10944556&db=neh>
- Penguin Random House – <https://issuu.com/prhlibrary/docs/burning-girls- book-club>

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## CJ Tudor's Books

### Stand-Alone Novels

- The Chalk Man (2018)
- The Hiding Place (aka The Taking of Annie Thorne) (2019)
  - The Other People (2020)
  - The Burning Girls (2021)
    - The Drift (2023)
  - The Gathering (2024)

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### If you liked Burning Girls, try...

- Lying in Wait – Liz Nugent
  - The Girls in the Garden – Lisa Jewell
  - The Lost Village – Camilla Sten
  - The Devoted – Blair Hurley
  - The Breakdown – BA Paris
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