

Home Before Dark Discussion Questions

by Riley Sager

Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & website)

A native of Pennsylvania, Riley Sager is a writer, editor and graphic designer. Riley now lives in Princeton, New Jersey. In addition to writing, Riley enjoys reading, movies, and baking.



Riley's first novel, **Final Girls**, has been published in 30 countries and won the ITW Thriller Award for Best Hardcover Novel.

Characters:

Present Day:

- **Maggie Holt** – (30) – Designer – Flips and renovates houses with business partner Allie. Cannot remember anything about what happened when she lived in Baneberry Hall. Still has nightmares from childhood.
- **Tess Alcott** – Police Chief in Bartleby. Woman. She was the officer Ewan told about the haunting.
- **Allie** – Flips and renovates houses with Maggie, her business partner.
- **Hannah Ditmer** – Lives with her mother in the housekeeper's cottage of Baneberry Hall. Helps with the housekeeping of the hall when asked. (Her mother, Elsa, has Alzheimer's.)
- **Dane Hibbits** – (40s) – Current caretaker of Baneberry Hall. Walt's grandson.
- **Arthur Rosenfeld** – Lawyer. Handling the estate of recently deceased Ewan Holt.

House of Horrors (25 years ago)

- **Ewan Holt** – Freelance writer. Wrote "*House of Horrors: A True Story*" which is a story about the haunting of Baneberry Hall. Married to Jess. (Divorced Jess later in life.) Daughter is Maggie. Returned the Baneberry Hall once a year - on July 15th.
- **Jessica "Jess" Holt** – Teacher. Married to Ewan. Daughter is Maggie. Grew up in Boston. After her divorce, she married Carl, a real estate developer.
- **Maggie Holt** – (5) – Tomboy. Lives in Baneberry Hall. Sees ghosts.
- **Janie June** – Real estate agent who sold the Holts Baneberry Hall.
- **Curtis Carver** – Used to live in Baneberry Hall. Married to Marta Carver. Daughter is Katie Carver. Curtis killed Katie then himself. Marta was only one left in family.
- **Katie Carver** – Sickly child of Curtis and Marta Carver who lived in Baneberry Hall the year before the Holts moved in. She was killed by her father (smothered with a pillow).
- **Marta Carver** – Baker. Used to live in Baneberry Hall. Married to Curtis Carver. Daughter is Katie Carver. Curtis killed Katie then himself. Marta was only one left in family. She moved out of the Hall, but stayed in Bartleby.

- **Elsa Ditmer** – Housekeeper of Baneberry Hall. Has 2 daughters – Petra (16) and Hannah (6). Petra disappeared around the time of the incident at Baneberry Hall. Very religious.
- **Petra Ditmer** – (16) – Beautiful, older daughter of Elsa Ditmer. Would occasionally babysit Maggie Holt and Hannah, her younger sister.
- **Walt “Hibb” Hibbets** – Caretaker of Baneberry Hall.
- **Mrs. Pennyface** – The female ghost that talks to 5-year old Maggie at Baneberry Hall.
- **Mr. Shadow** – The scary ghost that talks to 5-year old Maggie at Baneberry Hall and tells her she is going to die.

Other Characters:

- **Baneberry Hall** – Grand old house located in Bartleby, Vermont. Built by William Garson. The Holt’s buy this house approximately 200 years later and live there for 20 days before leaving in the middle of the night. Became a famous haunted house after the book, *House of Horrors*, came out.
- **Callum Auguste** – Indigo’s boyfriend. Artist. Painter.
- **Indigo Garson** – William Garson’s 16-year-old daughter. Died (poisoned) from eating Baneberry berries. Suicide.
- **William Garson** – Built Baneberry Hall in 1875. His daughter, Indigo, died at 16. He had 4 sons.
- **Brian Prince** – Current editor/owner of the Bartleby Gazette. He was the reporter Ewan first talked to about the haunting.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. This book alternates between Ewan Holt’s written account “House of Horrors” regarding the past and Maggie’s story set in the present. Did it work? Why or why not?
3. How did the setting and description of the house affect the atmosphere of the story? What were your thoughts on the house?
4. *Home Before Dark* has a supernatural and creepy feeling which is different than most of the novels we usually discuss. What did you like about it that was different? What did you not like? Did you appreciate this twist on the genre?
5. Are ghost stories your thing? What do you love about them? How about if they turn out to NOT be ghost stories?
6. How did you feel about the relationship between Maggie and her parents? Did you understand Maggie’s anger?
7. In essence, this book is about memories, the truth, and lying. Even when someone is telling the absolute truth, it often happens that their story will conflict with the stories of other people who were there. If two people remember the same event differently, what is the truth? How can you tell what really happened? Has this ever happened to you?

8. Maggie says of the child Maggie in the *House of Horrors*, “That wasn’t me. I am brave, not shy and scared.” How can people’s idea of self be so different from reality? What is the truth – the person you believe yourself to be or the person you present to the world?
9. Ewan takes **The Sound of Music’s** “*Sixteen Going on Seventeen*” and makes a hopeful and cheerful song into something that is scary and creepy. How does he do that?
10. Why do you think Ewan Holt returns to Baneberry hall each year on July 15th?
11. Maggie says that she initially comes to the Hall to forgive her father. Then she finds Petra. Why do you think she continues to stay at the hall? What does she hope to accomplish?
12. What clues indicated Ewan Holt’s book, *House of Horrors*, was composed of lies based on the truth?
13. Do you think William Garson killed his daughter, Indigo? Did Indigo commit suicide? Or do you think that there was some different truth? Why do you think that?
14. Did you know the identities of Mrs. Pennyface and Mr. Shadow before it was revealed? What clues gave it away? What do you think of that reveal?
15. Did you know who killed Petra before it was revealed? What clues gave it away? What do you think of that reveal?
16. Ewan Holt wrote *House of Horrors* to protect Maggie. Do you think it helped or hurt her in the end? Why? What should the Holts have done?
17. Who is the most “wrong” character in the book? Ewan Holt? Jess Holt? Marta Carver? Dane Hibbs? William Garson? Why do you think that?
18. Did you like the way the story ended? Why or why not?
19. What was your favorite part of the book? What was your least favorite? Why?
20. Riley Sager has written other books. Will you read them?

References:

- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/s/riley-sager/>
- Goodreads – <https://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/21629308-home-before-dark-chapter-15---the-end>
- Here’s the F** Twist – <https://heresthefuckingtivist.com/2021/11/11/review-home-before-dark-by-riley-sager/>
- Mom of the Year – <https://www.themomoftheyear.net/2020/10/home-after-dark-book-club-discussion.html>
- Novelist – <https://web-s-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=05edf599-3034-4caa-b828-1f3a618c6551%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=10892510&db=neh>
- Reddit – https://www.reddit.com/r/horrorlit/comments/mw5iep/home_before_dark_by_riley_sager/
- Riley Sager website - <https://www.rileysagerbooks.com/>

Riley Sager's Books

Stand Alone Novels:

- Final Girls (2017)
- The Last Time I Lied (2018)
 - Lock Every Door (2019)
 - Home Before Dark (2020)
 - Survive the Night (2021)
- The House Across the Lake (2022)

If you liked Home Before Dark, try...

- Theme Music – Marie Vandelly
- Amityville Horror – Jay Anson
- Head Full of Ghosts – Paul Tremblay
- The Invited – Jennifer McMahon
- Elsewhere – Peter William Blatty

Lyrics for Sixteen Going On Seventeen

<https://www.musixmatch.com/>

You wait, little girl
On an empty stage
For fate to turn the light on
Your life, little girl, is an empty
page
That men will want to write on
To write on

You are 16 going on 17
Baby, it's time to think
Better beware
Be canny and careful
Baby, you're on the brink
You are 16 going on 17
Fellows will fall in line
Eager young lads
And roués and cads
Will offer you food and wine

Totally unprepared are you
To face a world of men
Timid and shy and scared are
you
Of things beyond your ken

You need someone older and
wiser

Telling you what to do
I am 17 going on 18
I'll take care of you

I am 16 going on 17
I know that I'm naïve
Fellows I meet may tell me I'm
sweet
And willingly I believe
I am 16 going on 17
Innocent as a rose
Bachelors dandies, drinkers of

brandies
What do I know of those?

Totally unprepared am I
To face a world of men
Timid and shy and scared am I
Of things beyond my ken

I need someone older and wiser
Telling me what to do
You are 17 going on 18
I'll depend on you