One Great Book: Volume III, Episode 2
The Likeness by Tana French

One Great Book Volume III, Book 2: The Likeness

[UPBEAT INTRO MUSIC]

Hey readers, I'm Anne Bogel, and you're listening to *One Great Book*, the short-form podcast from the team behind *What Should I Read Next?*, where each week I pull one stand-out selection off my personal bookshelves and tell you all about it in ten minutes or less.

[MUSIC]

"Some nights, if I'm sleeping on my own, I still dream about Whitethorn House." Seasoned readers of psychological suspense know that opening sentence echos another, older novel, Daphne du Maurier's 1938 novel *Rebecca*: "Last night, I dreamt I went to Manderley again." The resemblance to that great gothic mystery is not coincidental, alerting the reader that they've just begin an equally atmospheric and brooding mystery.

That first line is from a contemporary master of the mystery genre, the First Lady of Irish Crime, Tana French, who's built her reputation on intricately-plotted mysteries that probe human nature. "I write mysteries and I like mysteries," French says. "And human beings are the most amazing, fascinating mystery of all: how we work and how we turn into who we are." Her novels focus on what's happening inside her characters' minds—and frequently that means not the mind of the murder victim, but the detective investigating the case.

French is best known for her Dublin Murder Squad series. Readers love the series for its brilliant interior characterization and unputdownability, as well as the fact that the books don't have to be read in order. While the books are set in the same universe, each is told from the point of view

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of a different detective, and covers a wholly independent investigation. You can jump in anywhere.

I jumped in at book 2; whether because it's objectively the best or the first cut is the deepest, it remains my favorite French novel. I've recommended this title countless times over the years, and when I do, sometimes readers scoff at the premise. I'll admit, the premise may sound implausible—in fact, French says even her own fiancé was highly skeptical when she first told him the idea—but she's always up for a challenge she said, and she loved her premise too much to let it go, so she sought to construct a solid, believable reality that delivered an immersive reading experience. She thinks she pulled it off, and I concur: *The Likeness* is One. Great. Book.

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Readers, one of my favorite library hacks is requesting new titles BEFORE their release date. That way, I can be first on the library holds list. For every One Great Book *episode, I also record One Great BONUS episode, where I talk about an exciting upcoming release, so that you can get a jump on the holds list. Bonus episodes are available exclusively for our Patreon members at both the Paperback and Hardback levels.*

We recently got all kinds of thanks from readers who put in their requests for previous bonus episode title The Secrets We Kept *a solid month before release, and also a month before Reese Witherspoon chose it as her monthly book club selection. So readers, don't wait to put those holds in.*

This is just one of the perks you get in our Patreon community.

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The Likeness is set in motion when a young detective is pulled off her current beat to assist with a murder investigation—not because her team needs another set of hands, but because they need HER. When she arrives at the scene, one look at the victim reveals why: as Cassie looks down at the murdered stranger, it's as though she's staring into her own dead face. The new case is dubbed Operation Mirror, for good reason: the resemblance between the two women is uncanny—and even stranger, the victim had been using the alias Lexie Madison, the same name that Cassie herself had used in a previous case, one that left her physically and emotionally scarred.

It's too late to help the dead Lexie Madison in front of her; the only thing the Dublin Murder Squad can do now is figure out what happened to her, and why. To solve any murder, the team always has to get to know the victim—what her life is like, what *she* is like. Cassie's boss convinces her that the only way to get to know *this* victim is to become her. He begs Cassie to go undercover and impersonate the victim, returning to her strange circle of friends at university and explaining she survived the attempted murder. By discovering what Lexie Madison was like—what her *life* was like—Cassie hopes to uncover her killer.

Lexie lived with four other students in a strangely intimate, isolated setting, and Cassie is tasked with doing the unthinkable: entering this tight-knit group just as if she is Lexie. The risks are absurd, and many—she nearly blows her cover at an early meal because she nearly eats onions, something the "real" Lexie would never have done. At first, Cassie finds her fellow students eccentric and their way of life bizarre, but as she settles in, she begins to like them almost in spite of herself, and that's when her boundaries—and loyalties—begin to blur. "*Some people are undercovers all the way to the bone; the job has taken them whole,*" Cassie's colleague tells her. This job—or, more specifically, the darkly charming people she meets for it, in Whitethorn House—take *Cassie* whole.

Last week on One Great Book we discussed how Kazuo Ishiguro used science fiction to probe human nature; well, mystery is French's way of doing so. And the reader sees, perhaps before Cassie does, that Cassie's in grave danger. Because in this snug circle of friends, something

has gone horribly wrong—so wrong, that it triggered a murder. And the reader fears, long before Cassie does, that she could become the next victim.

French credits her experience on the stage for her powerful style: she studied acting at Dublin's Trinity College, and was a successful actor before quitting to finish her debut novel, *In the Woods*. As an actor, her job was to get inside her character's head, so she could make the audience feel they knew her intimately. As a writer, she wants to make *you*, the reader, feel like you know Cassie better than you know yourself. French writes her books in the first person, which means you know exactly what Cassie is thinking and feeling, because she tells you herself. This is a key reason French's books are so fantastic on audio: the character tells you her own story, in her own voice—and tells it in a fantastic Irish accent.

The plot may seem far-fetched, but French's insights into how memories of past wrongs color our present are all too believable. In short, if you're looking for a taut psychological thriller that unapologetically focuses on friendship and keeps you guessing till the end, *The Likeness* may be the next great book you're looking for.

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Readers, visit modernmrsdarcy.com/onegreatbook to learn more about *The Likeness* and all of the great books in this volume. And be sure you are subscribed in your favorite podcast player because I've got more great books coming your way in Volume III.

I'd love to hear what you think about *The Likeness* on Twitter or Instagram. You can find me there @AnneBogel that's Anne with an E, B as in books, O-G-E-L. You can also find me on Instagram @WhatShouldIReadNext.

That's the title of my long form podcast, where each week a reader tells me three books they love, one book they don't, and what they're reading now, and I recommend three titles they should read next.

ONE *great* BOOK

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Thanks to Kellen Pechacek for his sound design on today's episode.

Readers, that's it for this episode, thanks so much for listening.

And as Rainer Maria Rilke said, "ah, how good it is to be among people who are reading."

Happy reading, everyone.