

An Introduction to *Revenge of the Spellmans* by Lisa Lutz

The times, they are a changing—and Isabel (Izzy) Spellman is trying desperately to hit the pause button. Recently, Izzy’s sleuthing instincts led her straight into a temporary restraining order* and an excruciating 12-session stint of court-ordered therapy. Izzy quickly masters the “long pause” and other subterfuges employed by the reluctantly analyzed but realizes that she needs a break from Spellman Investigations. Milo, the owner of The Philosophers’ Club, her favorite watering hole, offers temporary sanctuary in the form of a bartending gig. All too soon, however, the forces of the Spellman clan—along with a bogus marriage license, a handsome Irish usurper, and the siren song of balmy Florida—converge and Izzy is forced to confront the possibility of growing up.

She knew Ernie Black was trouble when he walked into the bar and didn’t order anything alcoholic. But Izzy isn’t one to deny a favor to a friend—especially when that friend is her boss. So when it turns out that Milo and Ernie are old buddies, Izzy lifts her ban on detective work to find out if Ernie’s wife, Linda, is cheating on him. What looks like a routine case turns intriguing when she discovers that she’s not the only one on Linda’s tail.

Out of the blue, Milo fires her to make room for his cousin, Connor, who’s arriving in town from Ireland, but Izzy’s need to know the truth supercedes any resentment she might feel and she continues the investigation. Unfortunately, the loss of \$200 a night in cash tips means that Izzy can no longer afford even her marginally habitable 350-square foot apartment in San Francisco’s seedy Tenderloin district. The unsavory ruse she enacts to put a roof over her head leaves her sleep-deprived and exposed to the demands of a very eccentric blackmailer.

By Izzy’s standards, merely juggling blackmail, unemployment, and homelessness is a cakewalk. Even when she stumbles across a gun in her chronically respectable brother David’s apartment, inadvertently becomes a chauffeur to her octogenarian lawyer, *and* receives an ultimatum from her parents, it isn’t until Henry Stone—the cop she’s not-so-secretly in love with—starts dating an annoyingly likeable public defender that Izzy begins to crack.

As she wanders the streets in pursuit of leads, a place to nap, and her ancient and battered Buick—which she’s *certain* she parked on Eddy between Hyde and Leavenworth—Izzy realizes that everything she’s counted on is beginning to change. Her precocious little sister, Rae, is actually studying for her tests, David is exhibiting evidence of his Spellman DNA, and an undercover stint in the office of her father’s most hated nemesis threatens to drive a permanent wedge between Izzy and her parents. After her unsubtle stonewalling in therapy lands her an additional twelve sessions with a new shrink, Izzy finds herself wondering how low she needs to fall before change is in order.

Revenge of the Spellmans is the hilarious follow-up to Lisa Lutz’s Edgar Award–nominated *Curse of the Spellmans* and the latest installment following the endearingly zany antics of everyone’s favorite dysfunctional PI.

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. If you were Linda Black, would you rather have a husband who doesn’t cook dinner and leaves his socks lying around or one who reads *Cosmopolitan* in an attempt to better understand you?
2. How is Izzy’s challenge of her mother’s taste for gimlets—“sometimes we need to accept change” (p. 20)—an example of foreshadowing?
3. Does Mort really think the pastrami in Florida would be any less authentic than the pastrami in San Francisco?
4. Is Rae’s statement that “things usually work out exactly the way I want them to” (p. 161) evidence of:
 - A. Adolescent self-delusion
 - B. Painfully low expectations
 - C. A dangerously manipulative personality whose development should be closely monitored by her sister
5. “So Gabe was one of *those* people who can voice his or her emotions without embarrassment. Why can’t I make more friends like me?” (p. 161) Does Izzy’s honest assessment of her own emotional limitations improve her odds of finding romance?

6. Would Henry and Maggie's relationship have survived if it hadn't been for Rae's interference?
7. If Izzy is like the lounging African lion, which zoo inhabitants evoke the other members of the Spellman family?
8. With Rae's entrepreneurial instincts and financial acumen, why does she want to enter the family business?
9. In what way are Henry and Izzy's neuroses—and yes, compulsive cleaning and healthy eating can qualify as neurotic behavior—complementary?
10. Is there a future for Connor and his combination of charm and thinly cloaked violence in Isabel's files—beyond being ex-boyfriend #12?
11. How many sessions of therapy would Izzy have to attend before she might expect a breakthrough?

* See Document 2, *Curse of the Spellmans*, now in paperback.