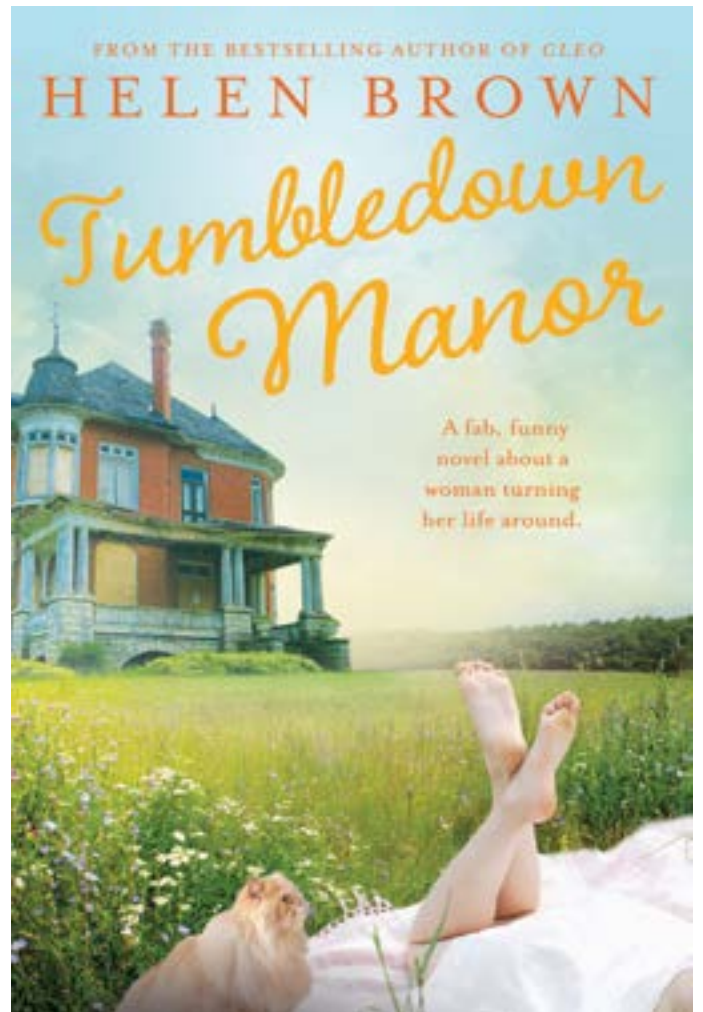


ALLEN&UNWIN



# READING GROUP NOTES

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## About the book

Life's going down the gurgler for romance writer Lisa Trumperton. The deadline for her next novel is looming, her daughter won't eat but has a new tattoo each week, and now her Wall Street trader husband has run off with a woman at work.

Lisa makes a quick escape, home to Australia, where at least her girl-magnet son seems to be making hay. Determined to grow older disgracefully, she turns her back on a trim and tidy townhouse that is close to shops, aged-care providers and her bossy older sister, instead buying a grand old house in the country that once belonged to her great-grandfather. But like its new owner, Trumperton Manor has seen better days. Crumbling, filthy and possibly haunted, the old house defies Lisa's attempts to restore it. Add flood, fire and family secrets, plus a stray cat with attitude and an overly familiar handyman, and the cracks begin to show . . .

Richly observed and laugh-out-loud funny, *Tumbledown Manor* is for anyone who believes it's never too late for a makeover.

## About the author

Helen Brown grew up in New Zealand where she became an award-winning newspaper and magazine columnist as well as a popular scriptwriter. Helen's memoirs *Cleo* and *After Cleo* became international bestsellers and are available in a vast array of countries and languages. A *New York Times* bestseller, *Cleo* is also currently being made into a film by the producers of *The Whale Rider*.

Like the main character of *Tumbledown Manor*, Helen has ancestral ties with rural Victoria from back in the gold rush days. She lives in Melbourne with her husband Philip and temperamental cat, Jonah. She has three adult children and two granddaughters.

## Helen Brown on writing *Tumbledown Manor*

On a weekend drive into country Victoria, we stopped outside the old manor house my grandmother lived in. It looked beautiful bathed in afternoon sun. I was frazzled after a long publicity tour. The house seemed so solid and permanent, I wanted to crawl inside and wrap its walls around me. "Just as well it's not on the market," I said to Philip. "I'd buy it on the spot." And suddenly a book was born.

I spent close to two years researching and writing *Tumbledown Manor*. After staying in Castlemaine a few times, visiting the Historical Society and watching countless television programs about people renovating old houses, the characters took over and wrote the thing for me. The best part was going to a bush dance as part of my research. Because Lisa, the main character, is writing a trilogy about the Bronte sisters, I had a wonderful time delving in to the sisters' tragic and extraordinary lives.

## Reviews of *Cleo*

"Heart warming and life affirming—it's easy to see why it's been on the [Australian and New Zealand] bestsellers list since it was published ..." - *NZ Herald*, NZ

"A buoyant tale, heartfelt and open." - *Booklist*, US

"A heart-warming, tear-stained ride told with great charm and humor." - *North & South*, US

"Helen Brown's *Cleo* is not just a tender story about a cat and a family facing the world again after a family bereavement. It's also an epic, genuinely moving, funny and ultimately uplifting. Don't be surprised to find yourself smiling through tears after reading it." - Witi Ihimaera, author of *The Whale Rider*

## For discussion

- ☞ In *Tumbledown Manor* Lisa discovers what it means to be part of a modern family by delving into the past. How important do you think it is to understand your family history?
- ☞ Did you enjoy the portrayal of Lisa's sister, son and daughter?
- ☞ How important is the idea of embracing imperfection in *Tumbledown Manor*?
- ☞ After nearly 20 years in New York Lisa decides to return to her childhood home, Australia, to start a new life. How difficult do you think it would be to return to your childhood home after so many years living abroad?
- ☞ How did Helen Brown use the story of the Bronte sisters to help tell Lisa Trumperton's story?
- ☞ Part of what readers and reviewers enjoy about Helen Brown's writing is its humour. Do you like commercial women's fiction to be funny at times?
- ☞ Helen Brown said of writing *Tumbledown Manor*, "After nearly two decades living in Australia, this novel is my love song to this land and some of its extraordinary creatures." How do you think the book reflects Helen's love of Australia?

## Suggested further reading

*Cleo* by Helen Brown

*The Husband's Secret* by Liane Moriarty

*Chocolate Cake for Breakfast* by Danielle Hawkins

*The Rosie Project* by Graeme Simsion

*Happy Eva After* by Chris Harrison