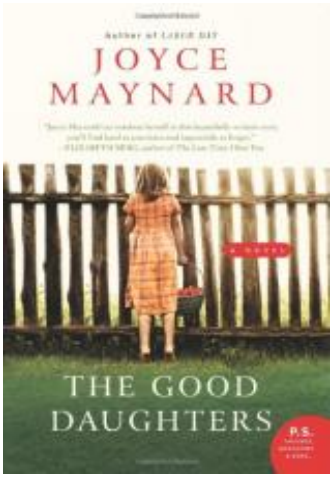
The Good Daughters

by Joyce Maynard



About the Book

The bestselling author of the *New York Times* bestselling novel **Labor Day** returns with an "exquisite" (*Publishers Weekly*) novel about friendship, family secrets, and the strange twists of fate that shape our lives.

They were born on the same day, in the same small New Hampshire hospital, into families that could hardly have been less alike. Told in the alternating voices of Ruth and Dana, **The Good Daughters** follows these "birthday sisters" as they make their way from the 1950s to the present. Moving from rural New Hampshire to a remote island in British Columbia to the ?70s Boston art-school scene, **The Good Daughters** is a "rich and realistic" (Library Journal) story about the ties of home and family, the devastating force of love, the healing power of forgiveness, and the desire to know who we are.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel opens with a terrible storm. How does this beginning portend the events of the ensuing story?

2. Discuss the "birthday sisters" Dana and Ruth. What is each like? What kind of households are they raised in? Each represents an opposing side of nature: one is scientific and practical, the other an artist and dreamer. How do their opposite personalities affect who they are and how they make their way in the world?

3. What are your impressions of Edwin Plank, Connie Plank, and Valerie Dickerson? If this story were set today, would the outcome be the same? Why?

4. Both girls share a special relationship with Edwin Plank. In what ways are they similar in the eyes of this kind man one girl calls father and the other calls friend? What life lessons did they learn from him?

5. Think about Valerie Dickerson and Connie Plank. How did their personalities affect their views on family and

childrearing? Analyze their relationships with their daughters. What did each girl share with these very different women?

6. Why didn?t the adults correct the mistake that changed everyone?s lives? Why didn?t they tell the girls? How might events have been different if the girls had known what had happened? How did the girls? unawareness of the truth affect how they saw each other through childhood and beyond? Were the girls cheated in any way?

7. What made Dana?s brother, Ray, so attractive to Ruth? Was not telling Ruth the truth sooner cruel?

8. What role did the Planks? farm play in the story? How are Dana and Ruth tied to the land when they are children? Does this change once they become adults?

9. When Ruth is living in Boston, Edwin comes to visit and they talk about her art and the nude models she draws. He says, "Back in my day, they made such a big deal about all of that, it made you a little crazy. If people could have talked about it and not acted like the whole thing was so sinful, maybe we wouldn?t have gotten into so much trouble." What is Edwin referring to? Do you think he?s correct?

10. After her breakup with Ray, Ruth forgave her father but not her mother. Why? What made her eventually forgive Connie?

11. Why didn?t Ruth call Dana immediately when she discovered the truth about the past? Why didn?t Dana tell Ruth after she?d figured it out? How did the truth set them free to be themselves?

12. What is the significance of the title The Good Daughters? How does this gardening term perfectly capture the story and its characters?

Author Bio

Joyce Maynard is the *New York Times* bestselling author of 14 novels and five books of nonfiction, as well as the syndicated column "Domestic Affairs." Her memoir, AT HOME IN THE WORLD, has been translated into 18 languages. Her novels TO DIE FOR and LABOR DAY were both adapted for film. She is a fellow of MacDowell and Yaddo artists' residencies.

When not running her hotel/retreat center, Casa Paloma, in Guatemala --- where she mentors women in the telling of their stories --- she makes her home in Northern California and in the state of New Hampshire.

Critical Praise

"The author?s deft and delicate touch as she plumbs the depths of her characters? psyches is what will keep readers pinned to the page. It?s like a conversation with friends about whose lives you crave every detail, simply because they are so dear to you. . . Maynard?s simple language gorgeously interprets the book?s themes... In Maynard?s gifted hands, every sentence and step seems organic, as if she were just keenly observing these women and taking richly detailed notes

on their lives."

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