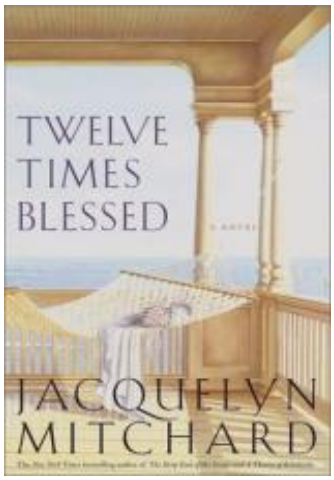
Twelve Times Blessed

by Jacquelyn Mitchard



About the Book

It is True Dickinson's birthday and her best friends have gathered on this snowy night to celebrate. True has never felt more alone. Though her small business is thriving and her young son is happy, the death of her husband eight years ago has left an empty space in her life that friends and family cannot fill. Are youth and beauty slipping away while True is busily taking care of everyone else? An accident the night of her birthday will answer that question and give True the opportunity to let love back into her life -- that is, if she can overcome her own fears and if these two spirits can find a way to tame each other's wild hearts.

A story of transformation and an unforgettable tale of the perils and pleasures of modern love, **Twelve Times Blessed** is a powerful, moving novel of the heart from one of our most gifted and best-loved storytellers.

Discussion Guide

In her fiercely honest, often funny, and exquisitely insightful novel, **Twelve Times Blessed**, Jacquelyn Mitchard follows the course of a woman's life through one defining year. During 12 astonishing months, businesswoman True Dickinson meets a much younger man, marries him within weeks, and then faces the consequences.

When the novel opens during a howling snowstorm, True is celebrating her 43rd birthday with friends at a chic Cape Cod restaurant. It is also Valentine's Day, and the restaurant is filled with cooing couples. Widowed in her 30s and left with a son to raise, True now finds herself--despite the millions made from her Internet baby gift business, Twelve Times Blessed--especially vulnerable, sensitive to the ticking of her biological clock, and ripe for a foolish infatuation. Or true love.

During the evening True meets Hank Bannister. A charming Southerner, Hank not only cooks for the restaurant; he owns it. Hank challenges her to a game of darts, flirts with her, lights a sexual fire between them, and later that night

literally saves her life. This dashing young man appears to be a real hero. Or is he? Although dazzled by the stars in her eyes, True feels a dark undercurrent of mistrust: after all, Hank knows a great deal more about her than their chance meeting suggests.

Yet, perhaps love can conquer all. Dragging undisclosed emotional baggage along with them, True and Hank enter into a volatile, passionate union--sanctified by marriage. The effect of this new relationship on her son Guy, on her mother Katherine, and on her own self-esteem is far from predictable. And when the arrival of Hank's Creole family adds another element to their stormy relationship, True trumps this bump on the rocky road of love by intentionally becoming pregnant.

What happens next reveals the essence of a woman's heart with breathtaking clarity. The decisions that lay before True--to stay in or abandon the relationship, face her own past, deal with her self-destructive behaviors, and weigh the fates of her son, unborn child, and business--unfold with escalating drama. Season by season, a woman's life rolls by against the glorious backdrop of Cape Cod. Perhaps Jackie Mitchard's most romantic book, Twelve Times Blessed is a portrait of a woman that is filled with all the light and shadings of life's sorrows, joys, and dreams.

1. What are True's major character traits? What does her name suggest about her? What parallels, if any, are there with Emily Dickinson?

2. What are Hank's strengths and weaknesses? What attracts him to True? Did he encourage her insecurity? Does he betray her trust? Do men and women view sexual infidelity differently? How does True react to Hank's? Is it realistic?

3. Do you think the main conflict between Hank and True is their age difference? Is True's perception of the problem real, or exaggerated? How do you feel about older women and younger men?

4. Do you agree with the saying "Marry in haste, repent in leisure"? Or, if two people fall in love, virtually at first sight, do you believe that waiting is just a waste of time? Do True and Hank have more problems because of their quick wedding?

5. Another area of potential conflict for this relationship could be Hank's racial heritage. How do you feel about Hank's not directly revealing it to True? Do you think, in America, it is more or less significant than the age difference?

6. On the day of Hank's and True's wedding, the author writes, "A wedding, though a union, also is always a collision of conflicting interests, a competition of the most basic sort." Do you agree?

7. The concept of family, and the importance of family, hold a central place in this novel. Discuss Guy as a child and True as a mother--good and bad. What conflicts and benefits does Hank add? What makes a family different from a group of people who happen to live together--and which specific characters therefore are True's family?

8. How important are friends in a woman's life? What do Isabelle, Rudy, and Franny give to True? Do you think men have the same kinds of friendships as women?

9. This novel has an interesting structure, with each chapter representing a month. Why do you think the chapters open with sales copy from True's business? Are the months themselves, and what happens in each, symbolic, significant, or

ironic?

10. Fate does indeed have a place in this book. What do you think about the fortune-telling episode? What do you think brings two people together: random chance or something else? Is there a divine plan for each of us

Author Bio

Jacquelyn Mitchard is the award-winning, *New York Times* bestselling author of 12 novels for adults, seven novels for teenagers, and five children?s books. These include THE DEEP END OF THE OCEAN, the inaugural selection of the Oprah Winfrey Book Club. She is also a professor of creative writing whose short stories, articles, essays and book reviews have been widely published. A native of Chicago, she now lives on Cape Cod with her family.

Critical Praise

"[Mitchard] perfectly understands women?s insecurities and the minutiae of daily spats. She wrings tension out of every sharp word and awkward hug."

?*People*

"Jacquelyn Mitchard brings her pitch-perfect rendering of human relationships to her new novel."

?*Seattle Times*

"Mitchard is a keen observer of the ebbs and flows of daily life."

?*Chicago Sun-Times*

"Seductively voyeuristic."

?*Rocky Mountain News*

"The author of **The Deep End of the Ocean** delivers once again ? in [a] story about a middle-aged woman?s complicated second marriage ?Mitchard infuses the courtship and domestic life with gentle humor. [Her] characters ?resonate with distinctive voices as Mitchard explores the intimate details involved in making a family work."

?*Publishers Weekly*

"A perfect choice for the beach."

?*Capital Times* (Madison, WI)

"Mitchard has established herself as a master of literary chiaroscuro."

?*Entertainment Weekly*

"Entertaining and absorbing."

?*Chattanooga Times Free Press*

"Mitchard?s writing is vivid and absorbing."

?*Capital Times* (Madison, WI)

"Mitchard writes seductively, and sometimes with breathtaking honesty, about insecurity and self-absorption, love and lust, family and friendship."

?*Boston Herald*

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