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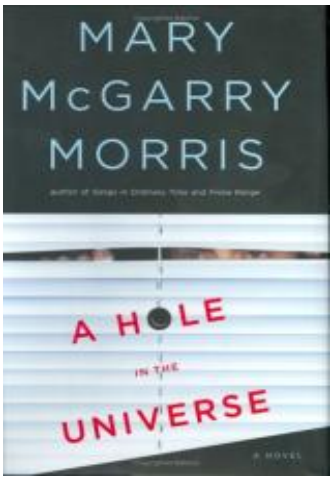
A Hole in the Universe

by Mary McGarry Morris



About the Book

*From the acclaimed author of **Songs in Ordinary Time** comes a moving new novel of forgiveness and redemption*

When Oprah Winfrey chose Mary McGarry Morris's **Songs in Ordinary Time** for her book club, she brought more than a million new readers under the spell of a novelist praised by the *Boston Sunday Globe* as "brilliantly acute...remarkable" and by *USA Today* as "extraordinary."

In her stunning new novel, Morris introduces us to Gordon Loomis, who, after twenty-five years in jail for a senseless high school murder, cannot come to terms with the enormity of his crime and its violation of all that is good and right. A giant of a man, he has learned to preserve a polite low profile and meager expectations for his life. Pressed by his family to start over, he stubbornly refuses to leave his old home and neighborhood?now devastated by a quarter century of decline. A Hole in the Universe follows Gordon and the three women who care for him as they force him to confront real life.

Graced with Morris's signature command of dialogue, her talent for creating vivid, unforgettable characters, and her masterful use of suspense, **A Hole in the Universe** is an engrossing story from "one of the most skillful authors at work in America today" (Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*).

Discussion Guide

1. What is the significance of Gordon remaining mute about the events that put him in prison? Why does he refuse to ease anyone's mind when he is questioned on the subject?

2. Discuss how you initially reacted to each of the characters and how your perception changed as their flaws and gifts

were further revealed.

3. Gordon thinks of Delores: "Her charity was earthy and promiscuous. She had done it not for the girl's sake or his, but for her own. In helping others, she was pleasuring herself" (p. 178). How accurate do you think Gordon's statement is?

4. For Gordon, "It was vital that the few people in his life stay the same, to be who he needed them to be. He felt betrayed" (p. 148). How much of Gordon's powerful reaction to his brother's relationship with Jilly is based on the above statement and how much do you think it is simply an ethical response?

5. Why is Gordon so hard on all the people in his life? What in his history causes him to have little flexibility in his understanding of people's behavior?

6. There are various points in the novel in which each character's trajectory could have taken a different turn. Discuss different moments in the novel in which slight changes could have led to an entirely different result.

7. Could Dennis and Lisa's marriage have survived without Gordon's intervention? Are lies ever acceptable in marriage?

8. When Gordon pondered Delores's affair, he thought, "Acceptance was the greater struggle. Forgiveness was words, an easy chant to numb the sin, until with time the loss no longer really mattered or deserved its raw place in the heart" (p. 275). Why is it so difficult for Gordon to accept others' flaws? What is he saying about forgiveness? Why does he need to maintain that "raw place" in his heart? Are there some actions that are simply not forgivable?

9. Where do you see Gordon, Delores, and Jada five years later?

10. In real life, how would you react to Gordon? Do you think it's possible that you could understand and relate to someone like him, beyond the safety of a book cover?

Author Bio

Mary McGarry Morris is the author of **Vanished**, which was a finalist for the National Book Award and the PEN/Faulkner Award; **A Dangerous Woman**, which was chosen by *Time* as of of the five best novels of 1991; **Songs in Ordinary Time**, an Oprah's Book Club Selection and national bestseller, and the critically acclaimed **Fiona Range** and **A Hole in the Universe**. She lives in Andover, Massachussetts.

Critical Praise

"Mary McGarry Morris is adept at creating characters we want to follow, even if their paths do take them to crime and jail. [**A Hole in the Universe**] is a compelling and poignant read about a man who doesn't believe he can start his life over, and the people around him who are determined to help him take the first steps."

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