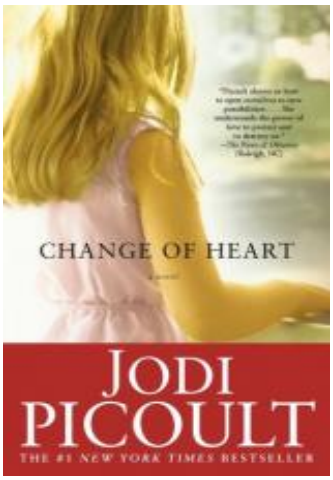
Change of Heart: A Novel

by Jodi Picoult



About the Book

The acclaimed #1 *New York Times* bestselling author presents a spellbinding tale of a mother's tragic loss and one man's last chance at gaining salvation.

Can we save ourselves, or do we rely on others to do it? Is what we believe always the truth?

One moment June Nealon was happily looking forward to years full of laughter and adventure with her family, and the next, she was staring into a future that was as empty as her heart. Now her life is a waiting game. Waiting for time to heal her wounds, waiting for justice. In short, waiting for a miracle to happen.

For Shay Bourne, life holds no more surprises. The world has given him nothing, and he has nothing to offer the world. In a heartbeat, though, something happens that changes everything for him. Now, he has one last chance for salvation, and it lies with June's eleven-year-old daughter, Claire. But between Shay and Claire stretches an ocean of bitter regrets, past crimes, and the rage of a mother who has lost her child.

Would you give up your vengeance against someone you hate if it meant saving someone you love? Would you want your dreams to come true if it meant granting your enemy's dying wish?

Once again, Jodi Picoult mesmerizes and enthralls readers with this story of redemption, justice, and love.

Discussion Guide

1. The author uses several famous quotations from some of the greatest thinkers in history, including Lewis Carroll, Voltaire, Woody Allen, Mother Teresa, Mark Twain, the Dalai Lama, Bono, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Albert Einstein. What effect do these philosophical tidbits have on the telling of this story? Which one resonated most with you?

2. Discuss the theme of belief in this novel. What does Shay believe, and who believes in him? Apply this same question to Maggie, Michael, and June. Did this story call any of their beliefs into question? Which ones?

3. When Shay is moved to the I-tier, some very strange things start happening -- water turns to wine, Calloway's pet robin is brought back to life, a tiny piece of gum becomes enough for all to share. Some call these miracles while others call them hijinks. What do you make of these incidents? Were you convinced that Shay had divine powers, and if so, at what point did you make that conclusion?

4. Michael tells Maggie that "there's a big difference between mercy and salvation" (142). What is that difference? Which characters are pursuing mercy and which are pursuing salvation? Which, do you think, is granted in the end for each of the main characters?

5. Having lost a daughter and two husbands, June's life is fraught with grief. How do you see that grief shaping her character and informing the choices that she makes? Do you think she makes choices in order to reconcile the past or in hopes of a better future?

6. How do the three religions referenced in this book (Judaism, Christianity, Gnosticism) imagine the presence or reappearance of the divine? Compare Michael's vision on p. 71 with Rabbi Bloom's explanation of the Jewish Midrash on p. 96 and Shay's depiction of heaven on p.106.

7. Consider the passage on p.165 where Maggie thinks "the penitentiary [Shay] was referring to was his own body." In what ways are some of the other characters in this book (Claire, Maggie, Lucius) imprisoned by their bodies?

8. Discuss June's questions on p. 184: "Would you give up your vengeance against someone you hate if it meant saving someone you love? Would you want your dreams to come true if it meant granting your enemy's dying wish?" How do the characters answer this question?

9. June thinks that if Claire accepted a heart transplant from Shay Bourne and had to absorb the emotional pain of her father's and sister's murders, it would be "better to have no heart at all" (238). This statement eerily echoes Shay's own statement to June that her first daughter, Elizabeth, "was better off dead." How do you feel about the adults in this novel making such grave choices over the life of a child? Do you feel like they are being protective or presumptuous?

10. Why do you think Shay never puts up a real fight for his innocence? Do you believe he is resigned to his fate or is an active participant in choosing it? Has he made the ultimate sacrifice or is he just trying to make the most out of circumstances beyond his control?

11. Does **Change of Heart** have a hero? If so, who is it?

12. In **Change of Heart**, religion seems at times to bring characters together and at others to drive a wedge between them. Ultimately, do you think religion unites people or divides them?

Author Bio

Jodi Picoult is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of over 30 novels, including HOLLOW BONES, BY ANY OTHER NAME, MAD HONEY (co-authored with Jennifer Finney Boylan), WISH YOU WERE HERE, THE BOOK OF TWO WAYS, A SPARK OF LIGHT, SMALL GREAT THINGS, LEAVING TIME and MY SISTER'S KEEPER, and, with daughter Samantha van Leer, two young adult novels, BETWEEN THE LINES and OFF THE PAGE. She lives in New Hampshire with her husband.

Critical Praise

"Picoult is a rare writer who delivers book after book, a winning combination of the literary and the commercial."

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