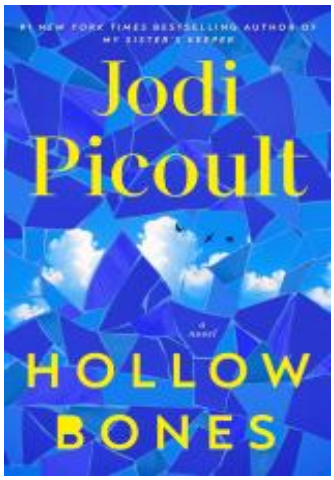
Hollow Bones

by Jodi Picoult



About the Book

From the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of BY ANY OTHER NAME comes a riveting novel about the risks we take to protect the ones we love in a world where crisis is always just around the corner.

On September 11, 2001, when Molly Fitzgerald was only two months old, her mother went to an appointment at the World Trade Center and never came home. Her father and the stepmother who raised her couldn?t have loved her more, but she still grew up with a healthy dread of disasters.

Now an adult, Molly runs the Rhode Island Department for Emergency Preparedness, mapping out ways to save lives during storms, epidemics and airplane crashes. She and her husband, Jesse --- a police polygraph expert with his own history of crisis --- have found a love that is a solace in a dangerous world. But then the unexpected upends their new marriage, leading them both to question everything they thought they knew.

Moving between past and present, HOLLOW BONES is an epic story of the lies we tell ourselves as we write the narratives of our lives, the plans we design to protect ourselves at the worst moments, and the ties that bind mothers and daughters.

Discussion Guide

1. Molly spends her life anticipating worst-case scenarios. Where is the line between preparedness and fear? Do you think Molly knows when she crosses it?

2. How does losing her biological mother on 9/11 when she was an infant shape Molly differently than losing someone she can remember?

3. The novel asks what risks we take to protect people we love. When does protection become control? Which characters struggle most with that distinction?

4. Can a lie be an act of love? Choose one lie or withheld truth from the novel and argue both sides.

5. Picoult moves between past and present and different understandings of family history. How did learning information at different points affect whom you trusted?

6. Discuss the mothers and daughters in the novel. What makes someone a mother here --- biology, sacrifice, caregiving, choice, truth or something else?

7. Jesse is a police polygraph expert, while Molly?s world revolves around predicting danger. Why do you think Picoult paired someone professionally concerned with truth with someone professionally concerned with risk?

8. What does the novel suggest about our desire to assign blame after tragedy? Does knowing why something happened actually make grief easier?

9. How effectively did the historical backdrop of 9/11 work for you? Did it feel like history, personal memory, inherited trauma --- or some combination?

10. Which character did you judge most harshly at first? Did additional information change your judgment?

11. Picoult has said she wanted the novel to examine how people try to keep loved ones safe, including by lying to themselves. Which character is most dishonest with themselves?

12. What can parents reasonably promise their children? Is ?I?ll keep you safe? a loving promise, an impossible one, or both?

13. If you could ask Molly one question after the final page, what would it be?

14. Jesse Fitzgerald returns from My Sister?s Keeper, something Picoult has described as a gift for longtime readers. Does knowing Jesse?s earlier story change how you interpreted him here? Does Hollow Bones change how you see the Fitzgerald family now?

15. What did you learn about postpartum psychosis from this book? Were you familiar with the disorder before this? In what ways does the health care system fail women --- and what can be done to change that?

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.

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