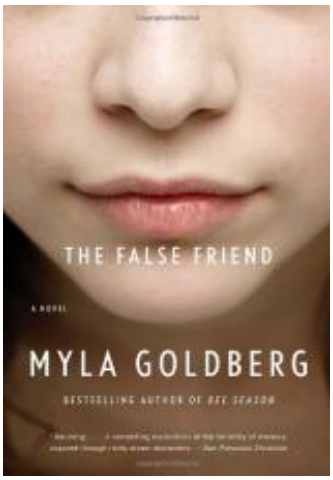
ReadingGroupGuides
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The False Friend

by Myla Goldberg



About the Book

From the bestselling author of Bee Season comes an astonishingly complex psychological drama with a simple setup: two 11-year-old girls, best friends and fierce rivals, go into the woods. Only one comes out ?

Leaders of a mercurial clique of girls, Celia and Djuna reigned mercilessly over their three followers. One after¬noon, they decided to walk home along a forbidden road. Djuna disappeared, and for 20 years Celia blocked out how it happened.

The lie Celia told to conceal her misdeed became the accepted truth: everyone assumed Djuna had been abducted, though neither she nor her abductor was ever found. Celia?s unconscious avoidance of this has meant that while she and her longtime boyfriend, Huck, are professionally successful, they?ve been unable to move forward, their relationship falling into a rut that threatens to bury them both.

Celia returns to her hometown to confess the truth, but her family and childhood friends don?t believe her. Huck wants to be supportive, but his love can?t blind him to all that contra-dicts Celia?s version of the past.

Celia?s desperate search to understand what happened to Djuna has powerful consequences. A deeply resonant and emotionally charged story, The False Friend explores the adults that children become --- leading us to question the truths that we accept or reject, as well as the lies to which we succumb.

Discussion Guide

1. The False Friend is set into motion when Celia remembers her friend Djuna after having managed to block out those memories for twenty years. What is it about where Celia is in her life or her relationships that may have brought this memory to the surface? Does this sort of sudden recollection make sense to you, or was it difficult for you to accept the

book?s opening premise?

2. Why are Celia?s parents so reluctant to talk to Celia about Djuna? Does this seem representative of their larger relationship with their daughter? Representative of their relationship with each other?

3. How common is the sort of friendship Celia and Djuna had as girls? In what ways did their friendship and their clique seem strange or familiar to you?

4. In what ways does Celia?s relationship with her mother differ from her relationship to her father? Is one relationship healthier than another, or are they just differently functional/dysfunctional?

5. To Celia, Jensenville is a place that she can only bear to visit briefly and seldom. To Celia?s parents and to people like the town librarian, Jensenville is a fine place to live. What do you think of Jensenville? What makes some people want to flee their hometown and others want to stay?

6. Do you agree with how Noreen and Warren dealt with Celia as a girl in the aftermath of Djuna?s disappearance? Do you think they could or should be blamed for Celia?s subsequent repressed memories?

7. Though Jeremy?s drug addiction and recovery is only addressed indirectly in the novel, in what ways is it an important aspect of the larger story of this family?

8. Huck liked to tease Celia that ?they could have been spared years of heartache had they met earlier, but Celia disagreed. Her prior love life had been too binary, the replication or repudiation of her parents consuming its earliest daisy petals.? In what ways does Celia?s relationship with Huck resemble the relationships within her family? In what ways is it different?

9. When Celia spontaneously arrives at Leanne?s house to apologize, she is told that her appearance there is only ?more harm done.? Was Celia right to attempt to apologize to Leanne in person? Both Jewish tradition and the 12-step program (just to name two) assert that true forgiveness can only be achieved when we apologize to the person we have wronged. Do both parties always benefit equally?

10. What does the future hold for Huck and Celia? How do you think Celia?s trip to Jensenville will affect their relationship?

11. When Celia visits Djuna?s mother as an adult, it is very different from the experiences she remembers as a girl. Who do you think has changed more, Celia or Djuna?s mother?

12. No one agrees with Celia?s version of what happened to Djuna on the wooded road twenty years ago. Who is right? Can that question be answered?

Author Bio

Myla Goldberg is the bestselling author of FEAST YOUR EYES, THE FALSE FRIEND, WICKETT'S REMEDY and BEE SEASON, which was a *New York Times* Notable Book, winner of the Borders New Voices Prize, and a finalist for

the Hemingway Foundation/PEN award, the NYPL Young Lions award, and the Barnes & Noble Discover award. It was adapted to film and widely translated. In addition to her novels, she has written an essay collection, a children?s book and short stories that have appeared in *Harper?s*. She teaches in the fiction programs at Sarah Lawrence and NYU, and has been known to sing and play accordion and banjo in the Brooklyn art-punk band The Walking Hellos. She was also the subject of a song by The Decemberists, ?Song for Myla Goldberg.? She lives in Brooklyn with her husband Jason Little and their two daughters.

Critical Praise

"**The False Friend** is a riveting read, both compelling and richly satisfying."

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