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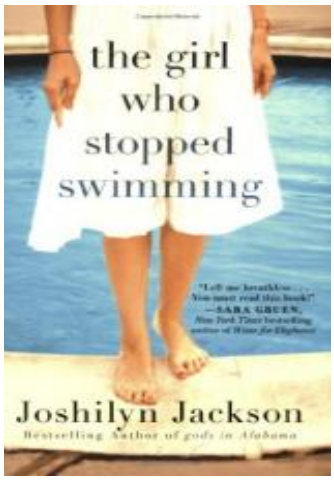
The Girl Who Stopped Swimming

by Joshilyn Jackson



About the Book

Lauren Gray Hawthorne needs to make things pretty, whether she's helping her mother keep family skeletons in the closet or sewing her acclaimed art quilts. Her estranged sister, Thalia, is her opposite, an impoverished actress who prides herself on exposing the lurid truths lurking behind middle class niceties.

While Laurel's life seems neatly on track --- a passionate marriage, a treasured daughter, a lovely suburban home --- everything she holds dear is threatened the night she is visited by the ghost of her 13-year-old neighbor Molly. The ghost leads Laurel to the real Molly, floating lifelessly in the Hawthorne's backyard pool. Molly's death is an unseemly mystery that no one in her whitewashed neighborhood is up to solving. Laurel enlists Thalia's help, even though she knows it comes with a high price tag.

Together, they set out on a life-altering journey that triggers startling revelations about their family's haunted past, the true state of Laurel's marriage, and the girl who stopped swimming.

Discussion Guide

1. Art, and what constitutes true art, is one of the earliest questions raised in **The Girl Who Stopped Swimming**. Thalia clearly dismisses Laurel's quilts as handicraft, not art. What, in your opinion, is "true art?" Is there such a thing?

2. Laurel's mother brings canned goods and toys to DeLop, but she has severed all emotional connections. Does this disconnect compromise her good works? Do you think a person's motives and feelings make a difference to how valuable a "charitable act" is? Why or Why not?

3. On p. 65, Thalia explains "Mother is Cowslip." Do you know anyone who is prone to "cowslipping?" Can you think of situations where you yourself have cowslipped?

4. The tension between what is on the surface and what lies beneath is dominant in this book. Can you think of some examples of this dichotomy in the text? What statement do you think the author is trying to make by highlighting these dichotomies?

5. The title clearly refers to the discovery of Molly Dufresne in the first chapter of the book. But is there another interpretation you could offer?

6. Thalia consistently needles, pushes, or blasts Laurel out of her comfort zone, usually for what she considers to be Laurel's own good. Do you have a "Thalia" in your life?

7. One particular bone of contention for Laurel and Thalia is Shelby --- Thalia clearly believes Laurel is doing her great harm by overprotecting her and keeping her "safe" at home. How do you feel about Laurel's relationship with her daughter --- is it as close as Laurel believes, or as false as Thalia insists? Did your view change throughout the book as events unfolded?

8. Laurel and Thalia do not understand each other' marriages; both would say their marriage is better. Thalia's marriage is certainly untraditional, but it seems to work for her. Do you think Thalia's relationship can be considered a good marriage? Does Laurel have a good marriage at the beginning of the book? In what ways? Has there been significant change in that relationship by the end of the book?

9. Laurel makes decisions using intuition and emotion, David through logic and reason. What does Thalia use to make decisions? Is she closer to David or Laurel, or does she have a system of her own?

10. Laurel is her mother's quietly acknowledged favorite, and Thalia seems to belong to Daddy. Is this a "normal" or healthy family dynamic? How does this divided favoritism shape the sisters? Do you think this causes "sibling rivalry?" Have you seen this dynamic at work in your own family, and do you think it affected the way you interact with your parents or siblings? With your own children?

11. Jackson has said in interviews, "At its heart, this is a book about poverty." Do you agree? If not, what did you think the book was about? Do you think she means only literal poverty? What other kinds of poverty did you notice in the book?

12. Thalia provides a logical explanation for all of Laurel's ghosts, assuming her visions have more to do with psychology and the subconscious than the supernatural. Do you think there are real ghosts in this book? Do you believe in ghosts, or have there been times in your life when you have been convinced of their presence?

Author Bio

Joshilyn Jackson is the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of numerous novels, including GODS IN

ALABAMA and NEVER HAVE I EVER. Her books have been translated into more than a dozen languages. A former actor, Jackson is also an award-winning audiobook narrator. A recent expat from the American South, she and her family have settled in upstate New York.

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