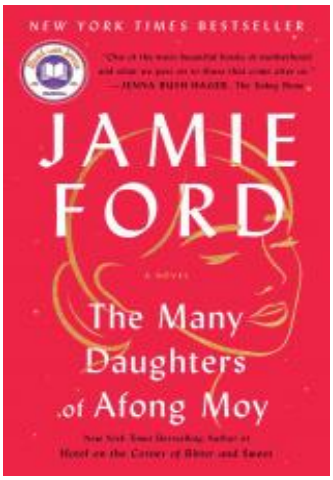
The Many Daughters of Afong Moy

by Jamie Ford



About the Book

The *New York Times* bestselling author of the ?mesmerizing and evocative? (Sara Gruen, author of WATER FOR ELEPHANTS) HOTEL ON THE CORNER OF BITTER AND SWEET returns with a powerful exploration of the love that binds one family across the generations.

Dorothy Moy breaks her own heart for a living.

As Washington?s former poet laureate, that?s how she describes channeling her dissociative episodes and mental health struggles into her art. But when her five-year-old daughter exhibits similar behavior and begins remembering things from the lives of their ancestors, Dorothy believes the past has truly come to haunt her. Fearing that her child is predestined to endure the same debilitating depression that has marked her own life, Dorothy seeks radical help.

Through an experimental treatment designed to mitigate inherited trauma, Dorothy intimately connects with past generations of women in her family: Faye Moy, a nurse in China serving with the Flying Tigers; Zoe Moy, a student in England at a famous school with no rules; Lai King Moy, a girl quarantined in San Francisco during a plague epidemic; Greta Moy, a tech executive with a unique dating app; and Afong Moy, the first Chinese woman to set foot in America.

As painful recollections affect her present life, Dorothy discovers that trauma isn?t the only thing she?s inherited. A stranger is searching for her in each time period. A stranger who has loved her through all of her genetic memories. Dorothy endeavors to break the cycle of pain and abandonment, to finally find peace for her daughter, and gain the love that has long been waiting, knowing she may pay the ultimate price.

Discussion Guide

1. This story is told in alternating timelines across many characters. Who did you relate to the most? Was there one story

you wished there was more of?

2. In the opening chapter, Faye Moy reads from an Edgar Allan Poe poem, ?But we loved with a love that was more than love...? How do you think the characters show their capacity for love? Most of the characters seem to be driven by love. How do you think that affects their decisions? How does it affect the final outcome of the book?

3. Dorothy Moy recognizes some characteristics that she shares with her young daughter. How do you think that realization makes her feel? This book is all about how we can share trauma through a family line. What are some shared traits, positive and negative, that connect you to your family?

4. The relationship between Louis and Dorothy is very volatile. Why do you think that she stays with him?

5. The theme of fate versus choice runs throughout this novel. Pick out some of the moments where a different choice made by a character might have led to a different outcome. What stopped the character from making a better choice? Do you think it was external or internal forces that informed the decision?

6. At one point, Dorothy wonders if art can only be created through pain and trauma. What do you think? Can there be great art created from joy?

7. What was your reaction to Summerhill? Did it seem like it was an ideal school? Were all the normal hierarchies of school still present? What was your expectation for how their political experiment in fascism would play out?

8. A lot of the women in this book have very little agency over their lives and bodies. Discuss how that changed for each generation in the story. How would you say that women are treated today in the real world? What has changed since the time of Afong Moy in the 1800s? What changes do you see in the future?

9. Greta Moy designs a dating app called Syren that is female-led and meant to be empowering to women. Unfortunately, it is ultimately taken down by the actions of a man. What did you think about the decisions made by Greta in meeting with Carter? How did he manipulate the situation?

10. This book takes a peek at the year 2086 with high-speed trains and driverless cars. What are some advancements you hope to see in the next 20 years? What do you hope future generations might get to see?

11. Dorothy is able to drastically change the lives of her family members and herself through an experimental treatment. Would you take part in an experiment? What might deter you? What would make it enticing? What, if anything, would you change in the lives of your ancestors?

12. Discuss your reaction to the ending. Was it a satisfying ending?

Author Bio

Jamie Ford is the great-grandson of Nevada mining pioneer Min Chung, who emigrated from Hoiping, China to San

Francisco in 1865, where he adopted the western name Ford, thus confusing countless generations. His debut novel, HOTEL ON THE CORNER OF BITTER AND SWEET, spent two years on the *New York Times* bestseller list and went on to win the 2010 Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature. His work has been translated into 35 languages. Having grown up in Seattle, he now lives in Montana with his wife and a one-eyed pug.

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