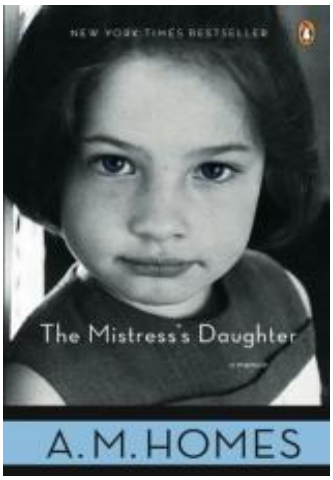
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The Mistress's Daughter

by A.M. Homes



About the Book

In her critically acclaimed novels and short stories, A.M. Homes has proved herself as one of this generation?s most fearless authors. Now, in her latest work, **The Mistress?s Daughter**, Homes moves from fiction to fact, shifting the focus to her own life and the families?biological and adoptive?who have shaped it. Applying the withering honesty and wicked wit for which she is known and celebrated, Homes tackles issues of identity and personal history from a fresh perspective, using her two sets of parents to illustrate the age-old debate of nature versus nurture.

A.M. Homes was put up for adoption before she was born. Thirty years later, she was contacted by her birth mother, and Homes?s childhood fantasies about who that woman might be were revived?only to be dashed by meeting her in person. Rather than the beautiful, capable goddess Homes had dreamed of, her mother proves to be a complicated, unsettling woman who demands too much, too soon; who fails to respect Homes?s personal boundaries; and who requires mothering rather than providing it. Homes?s biological father, meanwhile, treats his relationship with his daughter much like the illicit affair that created her, promising much but delivering little. Homes alternately pulls toward and away from her newfound parents, wanting something from this ?new? family yet unsure exactly what and uncertain as to how it would fit with the family she calls her own. In this way, the author explores the confounding nature of heredity?as much as she feels alienated from her birth parents, she in equal measure recognizes herself in their tics, mannerisms, and physical characteristics. Ultimately, Homes moves beyond both her biological and adoptive parents, widening her net of family by looking back into her genealogical history and looking to the future in the form of her baby daughter. It is in this extended family picture that she finally finds her peace.

Central to **The Mistress?s Daughter** are themes of personal character, love, and forgiveness that extend beyond the events of adoption. Homes?s achievement is that she has taken her unique experience and made it universal. While fans of her fiction may be especially interested in catching a glimpse of the inner workings of the author?s psyche, those readers who are new to Homes?s work will be impressed by her bravery, her sharp humor, and her elegant prose. Her exploration of the point at which identity and ancestry both meet and diverge will ring true with anyone who has felt a

disconnect between themselves and their family?which, plainly put, includes all of us.

Discussion Guide

1. As part of the process of discovering herself, Homes pursues genealogical research, uncovering her family tree and even having her DNA mapped. To what degree have you ever been interested in discovering your family history? Why does ancestry matter to us?

2. What do you believe is the source of identity?nature or nurture? Use your own experiences growing up to make your argument.

3. Adoption is a popular topic in the news and a current celebrity trend. What are your views? Would you consider adopting a child?

4. What was your reaction to Homes?s birth mother? Her father? Her adoptive parents? Where did your sympathies lie in reading the book?

5. Do you think Homes would have been better off not knowing her birth parents? Explain your answer.

6. How do you define ?family?? How did you develop that definition?

7. Had you read any other memoirs before this? If so, which ones and what did you enjoy about them? If not, how did the experience of reading a memoir differ from reading a novel?

8. If you could ask Homes one question, what would it be?

9. People write memoirs for a number of personal reasons but the books usually center on one theme or event. If you were to write a memoir, which theme or event would you focus on? What title would you give your book?

Author Bio

A.M. Homes is the author of 13 books, among them the bestselling memoir THE MISTRESS' DAUGHTER; the novels THIS BOOK WILL SAVE YOUR LIFE, THE END OF ALICE and JACK; and the short story collections DAYS OF AWE, THE SAFETY OF OBJECTS and THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW. She also writes for film and television and teaches in the Creative Writing Program at Princeton University.

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