



Keepsake

By Kristina Riggie
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Introduction

From the critically acclaimed author of *Real Life & Liars* and *Things We Didn't Say* comes a timely and provocative novel that asks: What happens when the things we own become more important than the people we love?

Trish isn't perfect. She's divorced and raising two kids, so of course her house isn't pristine. But she's got all the important things right and she's convinced herself that she has it all under control. That is, until the day her youngest son gets hurt and Child Protective Services comes calling. It's at that moment when Trish is forced to consider the one thing she's always hoped wasn't true: that she's living out her mother's life as a compulsive hoarder.

The last person Trish ever wanted to turn to for help is her sister, Mary, meticulous, perfect Mary, whose house is always spotless . . . and who moved away from their mother to live somewhere else, just like Trish's oldest child has. But now, working together to get Trish's disaster of a home into livable shape, two very different sisters are about to uncover more than just piles of junk, as years of secrets, resentments, obsessions, and pain are finally brought into the light.

Questions for Discussion

1. Before reading *Keepsake*, what did you know about hoarding, and the mental and emotional issues behind it? Do you know someone who hoards?
2. Have you watched documentary TV about people who hoard? Do you find these shows to be educational, and do you believe they genuinely help the subjects of the programs? What about the viewers at home? Do you think Trish would have recognized herself if she'd watched a show about hoarding?
3. Talk about Trish and Mary. Do you relate to either of the sisters, or both? If so, how?
4. What is your relationship with your own "stuff"? Are you like Trish, in that you might keep things you never use or buy unnecessary things in order to make yourself feel better? Or are you like Mary, in that clutter jangles your nerves and dirt upsets you?
5. Why do you think the sisters responded so differently to their upbringing by a hoarder parent? Why do you think Mary left to live with their father, while Trish stayed with their mother through the end of her adolescence?
6. In what ways is hoarding similar to a substance addiction?
7. Do you think Frances had a genuine choice in whether to keep her baby, or did the culture she lived in force her hand?
8. How different would their lives have been if Frances had kept her baby? Would Frances still have hoarded? Would Mary and Trish even have existed, or would keeping the baby have altered Frances's life so much that she never would have married the man she did?
9. Both Trish and her mother had husbands leave them because of their hoarding. Do you understand why they left? Could they have done anything to prevent what eventually happened to their wives?
10. In what ways is Mary's obsession with neatness connected to her discomfort with emotional closeness?
11. Mary's relationship with Seth started out as friendship. Have you ever had a friend for whom you've grown to have romantic feelings? Do you think that romantic relationships are best begun through friendship, or do you believe in love at first sight?
12. Discuss Seth and Mary's relationship. Why did Seth not initially think of Mary in a romantic way? Do you believe Mary can break down her emotional walls long enough to connect with Seth?
13. What do you think the future holds for Ron and Trish?
14. Will Trish ever let go of the crib? Do you believe it's harmful that she kept it? Have you hung on to something for reasons that you can't fully explain?
15. After reading *Keepsake*, do you have a deeper understanding about what makes someone hoard?

About the Author

A freelance journalist, published short-story writer, and fiction coeditor at the e-zine Literary Mama, Kristina Riggle lives and writes in Grand Rapids, Michigan, with her husband, two kids, and dog.