

The Almost Sisters

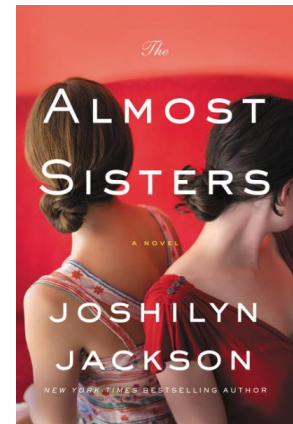
William Morrow

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Introduction

Superheroes have always been Leia Birch Briggs' weakness. One tequila-soaked night at a comics convention, the usually level-headed graphic novelist is swept off her barstool by a handsome and anonymous Batman.



It turns out the caped crusader has left her with more than just a nice, fuzzy memory. She's having a baby boy—an unexpected but not unhappy development in the thirty-eight year-old's life. But before Leia can break the news of her impending single-motherhood (including the fact that her baby is biracial) to her conventional, Southern family, her step-sister Rachel's marriage implodes. Worse, she learns her beloved ninety-year-old grandmother, Birchie, is losing her mind, and she's been hiding her dementia with the help of Wattie, her best friend since girlhood.

Questions for Discussion

1. Throughout the story Leia deals with motherhood in many iterations--when she gets pregnant, when she reverses roles with Birchie, when she sees Rachel floundering and must help Lavender. How does Leia grow as a mother throughout the story? Leia mentions speaking in "unbrookable mother," what do you think she means by that?
2. Leia makes the decision to hide her pregnancy early on, and keeps her secret throughout much of the story. Do you think Leia made the right decision? Were you surprised by characters' reactions when her pregnancy was revealed?
3. Leia sees her comic book characters as reflections of her inner self—Violet as a reflection of her own innocence, and Violence as her doppelganger. Do you also feel like you have multiple versions of yourself?
4. We see Jake as Leia's ex-best friend, as Rachel's husband, and as Lavender's father. How does your impression of him change throughout the story? Do you feel more sympathy for Rachel or Jake during their conflict?
5. After discovering the trunk of bones, Birchie says, "I told you the first night you were here. I told you at dinner." Did you have any idea who Birchie had been referring to? Were you surprised by what really happened?

6. Despite her worsening dementia, Birchie remains a strong character throughout the book. How would you describe her lifelong friendship with Wattie? Did your impressions change throughout the novel? Why do you think Birchie chose to keep their true relationship a secret even as times changed?
7. For much of the story, Selcouth Martin is referred to only as "Batman." Were you surprised by how different he was from Leia's memory of their one-night stand? How did your impression of Selcouth change throughout the novel?
8. There are multiple relationships in the novel that fit the title *The Almost Sisters* description. How did the title take on new meaning to you as the story developed?
9. At the end of the novel, Selcouth is there for the birth of his son. What was your impression of the nature of Leia and Selcouth's relationship at this point? Do you want them to be together?
10. Leia is a comic book artist who has found herself up against a creative roadblock. Has this happened to you and how have you worked through it?
11. *The Almost Sisters* deals with difficult topics like race, privilege and family. Everyone has biases--in life and in books--but some people handle them better than others. Which of these characters dealt with these the best? The worst? Do you see similar situations or challenges in your own life?
12. Leia talks about there being two Souths that exist simultaneously. Do you agree?