



THE MYSTERY OF HOLLOW PLACES

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ABOUT THE BOOK

All Imogene Scott knows of her mother is the bedtime story her father told her when she was a child. It's the story of how her parents met: he, a forensic pathologist; she, a mysterious woman who came to identify a body. A woman who left Imogene and her father when Imogene was a baby, a woman who was always possessed of a powerful loneliness, a woman who many referred to as "troubled waters."

Now Imogene is seventeen, and her father, a famous author of medical mysteries, has struck out in the middle of the night and hasn't come back. Neither Imogene's stepmother nor the police know where he could've gone, but Imogene is convinced he's looking for her mother. And she decides it's up to her to put to use the skills she's gleaned from a lifetime of reading her father's books to track down a woman she's only known in stories in order to find him and, perhaps, the answer to the question she's carried with her for her entire life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the beginning of the book, we're told that "precious stones could grow in hollow places" (p. 2). What are some of the hollow places throughout the book? What precious stones grow out of those hollow places?
2. Why do you think Imogene's father left her his half of the geode? Why does Imogene keep this important clue to herself?
3. Throughout the book, Imogene repeats what her father told her—that she has "big shoulders." What do you think her father meant by this? What does it mean to Imogene?
4. What were your first impressions of Imogene's best friend, Jessa? How did your impression of her change throughout the book? How did Imogene's view of her best friend change?
5. Reread the passage where Imogene visits the Boston Museum of Fine Art to see Eugene Delacroix's drawing, *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes* (p. 142–143). Go online and look up this artwork for yourself. What was your impression of this drawing before and after you saw it? Why do you think Imogene's parents had an affinity for this particular piece? How does it inform the overall tone of the story?
6. Why do you think Imogene is so dead set against sharing any of her discoveries with her stepmother, Lindy?
7. Why doesn't Imogene want anyone to know her father is missing?
8. Why is it so important to Imogene that she be the one to find her mother and, by extension, her father?
9. Imogene tries to be tough because "tough is the opposite of troubled waters" (p. 176). Why is it so important to Imogene that she be the opposite of troubled waters? Why can't she let herself be "sad—or god forbid, lonely" (p. 176)?
10. Imogene thinks "If there's one thing Dad's bad times have taught me, it's this: I never, ever want to have anything I can't survive without" (p. 221). Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
11. Imogene has spent her life worrying she'll fall victim to the same "curse" as her mother and her grandmother, "doomed to turn into a woman who could be lonely wherever she went" (p. 248). How does referring to her mother's and grandmother's mental illness as a curse prevent Imogene from dealing with her own emotions in a healthy way?
12. Imogene has heard many stories from her father and others about how her mother was "troubled waters" and needed help. She knows that her father has bad days too, but why do you think her father's mental illness isn't discussed in the same way her mother's is?
13. What do Sidonie's sketches of her imagined daughter tell you about Sidonie? Why do you think she kept that sketchbook but never reached out to Imogene?
14. What are some of the elements that make up a good mystery? How does Rebecca Podos use those elements in *The Mystery of Hollow Places*?

