

The Perfect Mother

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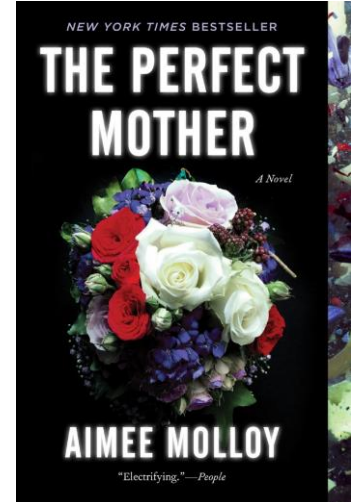
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Introduction

A night out. A few hours of fun. That's all it was meant to be...

They call themselves the May Mothers—a group of new moms whose babies were born in the same month. Twice a week, they get together in Brooklyn's Prospect Park for some much-needed adult time.

When the women go out for drinks at the hip neighborhood bar, they are looking for a fun break from their daily routine. But on this hot Fourth of July night, something goes terrifyingly wrong: one of the babies is taken from his crib. Winnie, a single mom, was reluctant to leave six-week-old Midas with a babysitter, but her fellow May Mothers insisted everything would be fine. Now he is missing. What follows is a heart-pounding race to find Midas, during which secrets are exposed, marriages are tested, and friendships are destroyed.



Questions for Discussion

1. What are the benefits of a support group like the May Mothers for expectant and new mothers? In what ways might such a group also be challenging?
2. What is each new mother—Winnie, Francie, Colette, and Nell—like? What does each bring to the group?
3. How is Token an appropriate member of the group or not? How is his experience being a new parent similar or different?
4. In addition to the group, what support does each woman have in her life?
5. Winnie vehemently states, “We weren’t mommies. We were mothers.” What does she mean?
6. What powerful and influential experience did each of the mothers have in her past? How does it influence her experience as a friend and a mother?
7. What is suggested by the mythic name Midas? What are the connotations of other names: Will, Poppy, Beatrice, Amelia?

8. A common experience for all women in the group when pregnant was “strangers’ hands on our bellies.” Why is such an act compelling to people? How is it that being pregnant allows such access to a woman’s body? Why is this appropriate or not?
9. Despite claiming to be “the country of family values,” the United States is one of the only countries that doesn’t mandate paid leave for new parents. What explains this profound contradiction?
10. Speaking to Colette, Winnie asks, “Why does everybody like to tell new mothers what we’re about to gain? Why does nobody want to talk about what we have to lose?” What do women have to sacrifice when they have a child? Why isn’t it talked about more? How does this compare with what a man has to sacrifice or not when he becomes a father?
11. Colette’s mother, Rosemary Carpenter, who started the feminist organization Women for Equality, argues that, “the only thing worse for a woman than making herself dependent on a man...is to have a child dependent on her.” What might she mean? How might women best negotiate the complex political and economic challenges of having a child?
12. Tabloid journalist Patricia Faith self-righteously criticizes the mothers for going out for a drink. What’s a reasonable, healthy way for mothers to balance the demands of motherhood with their own need of rest and relaxation?
13. Despite her strong intention to not be “one of those mothers” who obsess over every possible toxin or danger, who parent righteously in public as if it’s a “piece of performance art,” Scarlett admits that three minutes after she knew she was pregnant, she “was someone else entirely.” What does she mean?
14. What’s a productive, realistic way to navigate the overwhelming amount of media and information about raising children?
15. What does each of the May Mothers bring to the frantic investigation and search for Midas?
16. In what ways has parenting become competitive or a reflection of social status? What explains such behavior? What role does economic class play in this? What are the essential qualities of a good parent?
17. What various difficulties and betrayals has Scarlett experienced in her life? What support might have helped her cope with the loss of her child?
18. Do you think Colette, Francie, Nell, and Winnie will still be friends in five years? Why or why not?