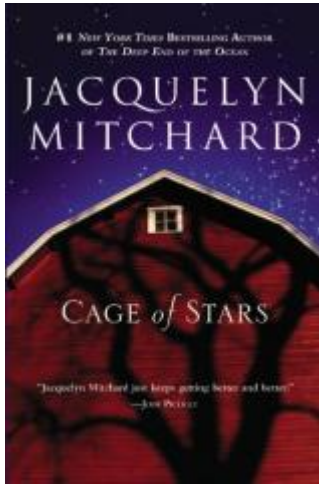


## Cage of Stars

by Jacquelyn Mitchard

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### About the Book

The author of **The Deep End of the Ocean**—Oprah's first Book Club selection—delivers a compelling, emotionally charged tale of tragedy, revenge, and redemption.

12-year-old Veronica Swan's idyllic life in a close-knit Mormon community is shattered when her two younger sisters are brutally murdered. Although her parents find the strength to forgive the deranged killer, Scott Early, Veronica cannot do the same. Years later, she sets out alone to avenge her sisters' deaths, dropping her identity and severing ties in the process. As she closes in on Early, Veronica will discover the true meaning of sin and compassion, before she makes a decision that will change her and her family's lives forever.

### Discussion Guide

1. Why do you think this book is titled **Cage of Stars**? It's a wonderful visual image, but what might it mean?
2. What real-life case does the situation in this book evoke for you? Do you believe that mental illness is a legitimate defense when a person commits a terrible crime? Is justice served if the person is released from an institution?
3. Who is to blame for this crime? Could it have been prevented? Can a random act of violence ever be prevented? Do any of the survivors feel guilty? Do they bear any responsibility in the deaths?
4. At one point, after reading a letter from Miko, Ronnie says "I was the only one still . . . stuck." Do you think this being "stuck" is related to Ronnie's choice of vengeance over forgiveness? How else does her quest for "justice" affect her life?
5. Ronnie does not carry out her plan for revenge, but if she had, how would you rewrite the end of this story?
6. Talk about Ronnie's relationship with her parents. Do you think she is closer to her father than her mother? Why?
7. Ronnie says, at the beginning of chapter fourteen, that "I think every religion must have been started by a person who loved someone who died." What is your response to that? True or false?
8. Looking at Ronnie's life and that of her parents...do you believe that someone can love and hate at the same time? Do you think a person can go beyond grief and tragedy, even when the loss is as great as the murder of two innocent children? If yes, what behaviors can help that happen—carrying out an act of

vengeance or offering forgiveness?

**9.** How much does the Swan family being Mormon influence this story? Would this story be radically different if the family had been Jewish, Muslim, Roman Catholic, or Friends (Quakers)? Would a family without any strong religious affiliation have responded to tragedy in the same way as the Swans?

**10.** The names of the characters in this book are unusual. Do you think any of them have symbolic meaning? Which ones?

**11.** Ronnie has an exceptionally close friendship with Clare. Talk about its importance in Ronnie's emotional life.

**12.** What do you think ultimately stops Ronnie from carrying out the kidnapping of Juliet or from letting Scott Early die?

**13.** Ronnie's landlady, Mrs. Desmond, assesses Ronnie's character at their first meeting. On what does she base her judgment? Is she right? What traits or behaviors are the truest reflection of character?

**14.** Why does Ronnie fall in love with Miko and vice versa? Is true love a choice or an act of fate?

**15.** The story has a happy ending, and a symbolic one. Discuss what happens in the final chapter, when it happens, and what message it conveys.

#### Author Bio

*New York Times* bestselling author Jacquelyn Mitchard has written many novels for adults, including *TWO IF BY SEA*. She has also written young adult novels; children's books; a memoir, *MOTHER LESS CHILD*; and a collection of essays, *THE REST OF US: Dispatches from the Mother Ship*. Her first novel, *THE DEEP END OF THE OCEAN*, was the inaugural selection of the Oprah Winfrey Book Club, later adapted for a feature film starring and produced by Michelle Pfeiffer. Mitchard is the editor in chief and co-creator of Merit Press and a professor of fiction and creative nonfiction at Vermont College of Fine Arts in Montpelier. She lives on Cape Cod with her husband and their nine children.

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