

The Good Daughters

by Joyce Maynard



About the Book

The bestselling author of the *New York Times* bestselling novel **Labor Day** returns with an "exquisite" (*Publishers Weekly*) novel about friendship, family secrets, and the strange twists of fate that shape our lives.

They were born on the same day, in the same small New Hampshire hospital, into families that could hardly have been less alike. Told in the alternating voices of Ruth and Dana, **The Good Daughters** follows these "birthday sisters" as they make their way from the 1950s to the present. Moving from rural New Hampshire to a remote island in British Columbia to the '70s Boston art-school scene, **The Good Daughters** is a "rich and realistic" (*Library Journal*) story about the ties of home and family, the devastating force of love, the healing power of forgiveness, and the desire to know who we are.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel opens with a terrible storm. How does this beginning portend the events of the ensuing story?
2. Discuss the "birthday sisters" Dana and Ruth. What is each like? What kind of households are they raised in? Each represents an opposing side of nature: one is scientific and practical, the other an artist and dreamer. How do their opposite personalities affect who they are and how they make their way in the world?
3. What are your impressions of Edwin Plank, Connie Plank, and Valerie Dickerson? If this story were set today, would the outcome be the same? Why?
4. Both girls share a special relationship with Edwin Plank. In what ways are they similar in the eyes of this kind man one girl calls father and the other calls friend? What life lessons did they learn from him?
5. Think about Valerie Dickerson and Connie Plank. How did their personalities affect their views on family and childrearing? Analyze their relationships with their daughters. What did each girl share with these very different women?
6. Why didn't the adults correct the mistake that changed everyone's lives? Why didn't they tell the girls? How might events have been different if the girls had known what had happened? How did the girls' unawareness of the truth affect how they saw each other through childhood and beyond? Were the girls cheated in any way?
7. What made Dana's brother, Ray, so attractive to Ruth? Was not telling Ruth the truth sooner cruel?
8. What role did the Planks' farm play in the story? How are Dana and Ruth tied to the land when they are

children? Does this change once they become adults?

9. When Ruth is living in Boston, Edwin comes to visit and they talk about her art and the nude models she draws. He says, "Back in my day, they made such a big deal about all of that, it made you a little crazy. If people could have talked about it and not acted like the whole thing was so sinful, maybe we wouldn't have gotten into so much trouble." What is Edwin referring to? Do you think he's correct?

10. After her breakup with Ray, Ruth forgave her father but not her mother. Why? What made her eventually forgive Connie?

11. Why didn't Ruth call Dana immediately when she discovered the truth about the past? Why didn't Dana tell Ruth after she'd figured it out? How did the truth set them free to be themselves?

12. What is the significance of the title *The Good Daughters*? How does this gardening term perfectly capture the story and its characters?

Author Bio

Joyce Maynard first came to national attention with the publication of her *New York Times* cover story "An Eighteen-Year-Old Looks Back on Life" in 1973, when she was a freshman at Yale. Since then, she has been a reporter and columnist for *The New York Times*, a syndicated newspaper columnist whose "Domestic Affairs" column appeared in more than fifty papers nationwide, a regular contributor to NPR. Her writing has also been published in national magazines, including *O*, *The Oprah Magazine*; *Newsweek*; *The New York Times Magazine*; *Forbes*; *Salon*; *San Francisco Magazine*, *USA Weekly*; and many more. She has appeared on "Good Morning America", "The Today Show", CNN, "Hardball with Chris Matthews", "Charlie Rose", and on "Fresh Air". Essays of hers appear in numerous collections. She has been a fellow at Yaddo, UCross, and The MacDowell Colony, where she wrote her 2009 novel, *LABOR DAY*.

The author of nine books of fiction and nonfiction, including the novel *TO DIE FOR* (in which she also plays the role of Nicole Kidman's attorney) and the bestselling memoir, *AT HOME IN THE WORLD*, Maynard makes her home in Mill Valley, California. Her novel, *THE USUAL RULES* --- a story about surviving loss --- has been a favorite of book club audiences of all ages, and was chosen by the American Library Association as one of the 10 best books for young readers for 2003.

Joyce Maynard also runs the Lake Atitlan Writing Workshop in Guatemala, founded in 2002.

Critical Praise

"The author's deft and delicate touch as she plumbs the depths of her characters' psyches is what will keep readers pinned to the page. It's like a conversation with friends about whose lives you crave every detail, simply because they are so dear to you. . . Maynard's simple language gorgeously interprets the book's themes... In Maynard's gifted hands, every sentence and step seems organic, as if she were just keenly observing these women and taking richly detailed notes on their lives."

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