



THEY
DROWN
OUR
DAUGHTERS
THE BOOK CLUB GUIDE

A NOTE FROM *Katrina Monroe*

They Drown Our Daughters began life in 2018 as a short story called Cape Disappointment, a fairy tale of sorts, in which Meredith looks to the ocean for answers about herself and motherhood. It still is that, in a way, but what was once a story about a captured mermaid is now a dark and haunted wade through the depths of what it means to be a mother.

I became a mom for the first time in 2006. I was barely nineteen and living in the Pacific Northwest, an entire country away from my family in Florida. I expected to be scared when they put my daughter in my arms for the first time. Instead, all I could think was, “Now what?” My son very quickly followed in 2007, and I remember the subsequent year being the hardest of my entire life. I was lost, my frame of reference for motherhood fraught and incomplete.

Fast forward to 2018, and I’m visiting my brother in Seattle, my first visit back to the Pacific Northwest in a decade. I had heard of Cape Disappointment—a real town near what they call the “Graveyard of the Pacific”—and wanted to see it. We didn’t quite make it that far, and instead visited a beach near the Quinault Reservation. It was all but deserted and gray, the clouds blurring into the water. Spread over the sand were dozens of dead crabs, tangled in webs of seaweed. I felt like I was standing on the edge of the world, entirely alone.

At the time of this writing, my kids are 15 and 14, on the cusp of adulthood. Sometimes I still feel like I’m still on that beach, alone, staring at the vastness of their future, and mine. I will never know if I’ve done anything right as a mom, if they’ll resent me or forgive me for the times I screwed up. They will never know the shame and joy and terror of every day I have been their parent.

This is what I hoped to explore with They Drown Our Daughters—the silent lengths a mother will go for her children, the skewed perceptions between mothers and daughters that lead to anger and confusion and, if we’re lucky, understanding and forgiveness. I wanted to show myself, and others, that as a mother standing alone at the edge of the world, you don’t have to be perfect. You just have to try.

-Katrina



Book Club Questions

1. Meredith and Judith's relationship is as complex as it is heartbreaking. How would you describe their power dynamic and the way secrets play a role in how their relationship developed? What are your own experiences as a parent or the child of a parent who might not have always been forthcoming? Is it a parent's job to shield their child from ugly truths, or is it their duty to be honest, even when the truth might be damaging?

2. Thalias are crucial within the world of *They Drown Our Daughters*. How does the author use them as a foreshadowing device? How might your reading experience change knowing what these flowers represent?

3. Many of the key scenes take place either in or within sight of the Cape Disappointment lighthouse. Why might the author have chosen a piece of architecture traditionally meant to represent light and safety to underscore dark and sometimes deadly scenes? What does that searching red light represent?

4. When her daughter is kidnapped, Meredith is keen to latch on to the idea of a curse, despite the fact that her mother's belief in the curse was part of what soured their relationship. Why might she be so willing to believe in it now, at this critical juncture? What "truth" about her own ability as a mother is she trying to deny by embracing the idea of a curse?

5. Meredith struggles with the fear that, despite all her efforts, she isn't a "good" mother. What might be feeding that fear?

6. Though Regina is revealed to be a villain, she is often portrayed as a victim. How might her victimhood have contributed to her becoming villainous? Does she believe herself to be a villain or victim? Why?

7. As a parent, Diana's decision to pretend that the danger plaguing their family doesn't exist appears to have disastrous consequences. Can it be argued that Diana was acting in the best interest of her children? Or were her intentions selfish?

8. When Meredith first returns to the cape, she compares the French words for sea (*la mer*) and mother (*la mère*), noting how close they are to being the same. How might the setting for the novel be representative of motherhood? How might it be a parallel of Meredith and Judith's fraught relationship?

Book Club Questions

9. As a child, Judith had an incredibly vivid imagination. How was that used to build her character? How does she use stories to cope with upheaval and uncertainty?

10. Judith tries to both bargain with and fight back against Marina, leading to a couple of tragic deaths. Was Judith responsible for those deaths? Why did Marina drown her uncle and friend?

11. Meredith, Judith, and Alice all use the pink shell to communicate with Marina's ghost. Is there any significance to when the shell presents itself to each character? How might you compare their experiences?

12. The legend of the mermaid was once the backbone of Cape Disappointment. How might Marina's presence in the water have inadvertently inspired the legend? What similarities are there between her spirit and a siren?

13. How does this book compare to other novels you've read that are set near the ocean? What similarities can you think of? What differences?

14. How does the book's title work in relation to its contents? What assumptions did you draw about the curse based on the title? Do Meredith's or Judith's assumptions about the curse mirror or oppose your own?

15. Is there any significance to Alice allowing the lighthouse to fall into complete disrepair? What are the possible implications of your interpretation of the ending?

16. What book or movie or story has scared you the most? How do the frightening aspects of this novel compare?

Recommendations from Katrina Monroe

Reading:

The Rathbones by Janice Clark
The Gloaming by Kirsty Logan
Rooms by Lauren Oliver
The Winter People by Jennifer McMahon
Wonderland by Zoje Stage
The Need by Helen Phillips

Listening:

"Safe and Sound" by Taylor Swift
The Ceremonials album by Florence and the Machine
"The Curse" by Agnes Obel
Gnossienes by Erik Satie's
"Who Will Sing Me Lullabies" by Kate Rusby
"Deep End" by Birdy

Watching:

Lady Bird (2017)
The Florida Project (2017)
The Deep House (2021)
The Others (2001)
The Lady in the Water (2006)