A BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

She Has My Face

A novel · A.R. Hollowell

ABOUT THE BOOK

Molly Sayer tunes pianos in Pittsburgh and can hear a glass ring a hair flat. At her boyfriend's birthday dinner, a look-alike website turns up five strangers with her face. Days later the closest, a cake decorator in Maryland, is found dead in her bathtub wearing a cardigan from Molly's closet. Molly drives south to warn the others, but the evidence keeps pointing home: directions to a stranger's house in her own handwriting, and her own wine glass at a second scene. When a police corporal asks for her fingerprints, she refuses, and the reason why is the question the whole book is built on.

THEMES TO TALK ABOUT

- Who owns a name
- Guilt and secret penance
- Mothers and lost daughters
- What a face can prove and what it cannot
- Kindness that hides harm

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

35 questions in 7 parts. Choose the ones that spark your group, or work through them in order.

First Impressions

01 The book opens with the first unsigned letter mailed to Irene Garvey in May 2012, before we meet anyone. Reading it again after the last page, whose voice did you hear in it?

02 At Luke's birthday dinner, the woman we know as Molly, who has never liked her own photograph, lets the table talk her into running her face through Selfsame. When the fifth face came up and she looked at it a beat too long, what did you think she was seeing?

03 For all of Part One, the italic pages called The Other One read like a killer rehearsing someone else's life in a mirror. How did it feel to learn they belonged to the narrator herself?

04 The narrator never says a false thing, yet she leaves out the one thing that matters. Going back to the early chapters, which true remark misled you most, such as the one about turning up in Philadelphia?

The Woman in Molly's Name

05 At dawn on the day Molly's mother was coming, Raylene Tidwell took Molly's birth certificate and Social Security card from her backpack and left before breakfast. She was seventeen, running from a father who hit her and an open order for her arrest, and she believed Molly had run off to a boy in Buffalo. Can you forgive her for that morning?

06 For fourteen years she mailed Irene letters and money so Irene would not worry. Then she learns from the real Molly that those letters are what made her mother stop looking. How did that change the way you saw her kindness?

07 Every Thursday for years she taught the girls at North Light piano as a secret penance. Is penance that the person you wronged never sees worth anything?

08 When Corporal Sokol slides the ink pad toward her, she pushes it back. Once you knew about the winter coat she walked out wearing in Hickory at sixteen, did you understand her refusal? Would you have done the same?

09 At the viewing window in Buffalo she looks at her own face on a dead woman and identifies the body as Jess. Why do you think she gave that answer?

10 Every January she tuned Irene's old Baldwin upright and left the A flat, the way Irene asked. At the last tuning she fixes it. What did fixing that one note mean to you?

The Real Molly

11 At the lake road, the woman the narrator has mourned as drowned opens the door. Did you suspect Jess before that moment, and if so, what gave her away?

12 Held for two years in a cellar room, Molly kept her mother's kitchen song alive with two fingers, three beats and a hitch on the third, and Wade learned the hitch from her. How did you feel watching that rhythm pass from Molly to Wade to Nita to Kenzie?

13 Free, nameless and living rough in Buffalo, Molly took Jess Shirey's name off a library screen because the girl's birthday was the next morning. How does her stolen name mirror the narrator's, and is one theft easier to forgive than the other?

14 Molly's goal was to get her own name back, but Wade turned her plan into his hunt, and after Holly died she knew and stayed. How much of the blame for Andi, Nicole, Holly and Robin do you lay on her?

15 Molly fires the shotgun in Irene's barn, and in the end she is charged in New York on counts added from her own statement. Was justice done for her?

Mothers, Fathers and the Ones Who Looked

16 Irene knew from the first January that the tuner was not her daughter: the laugh, the handwriting on the receipt, the head that never turned when she said Jeanie. Why do you think she kept inviting her back, with pie, for ten years?

17 In the parlor, Irene calls the tuner Jeanie while her fingers hold her real daughter's sleeve. Did she get it wrong on purpose, and if so, who was she protecting?

18 Darrell Tidwell hit his daughter, kept her vanished mother's hymnal for years, and tells the cameras she is his girl. On the courthouse steps he hands her the hymnal and walks away. Was that love, control, or letting go?

19 As a rookie in 2012, Nick Sokol closed Molly's case after one phone call, and in 2014 he sent the real Molly to a crisis referral and never called her mother. How does his story mirror the narrator's?

20 Pam Ruble took the volunteer named Molly Sayer for the girl in the shelter legend who walked out of the ghost room and turned up safe. What did North Light's trust in a comforting story cost?

Kind Men

21 Gary scrapes her windshield and asks everyone if they are from Buffalo, and across the lot Mr. Wade lifts a paper coffee cup to her. When did you first suspect Wade, and which other man did you suspect instead?

22 For much of the book the narrator fears the hummed waltz belongs to Luke, and then learns he was hired to befriend her and get her face into Selfsame. Can something that began as a job become real? Did Luke earn his place at the end?

23 Wade passed the FBI check because he had never been arrested, and he drove girls for North Light every Thursday for eight years. What does the book say about how danger hides inside kindness and routine?

24 Wade signed the retainer emails to Luke with the name D. Tidwell. Why do you think he chose to frame her father, and did it fool you?

Choices With No Right Answer

25 Should she have given her fingerprints the first time Sokol asked? What would that have changed, and for whom?

26 When she finally tells Luke everything, he opens his back door and says nothing. Should she have told him sooner, knowing what she knew by then about who hired him?

27 In the cell she refuses to give Sokol the real Molly's home name, believing it would put Irene's life at risk. Would you have given him the name if it might have helped Kenzie?

28 One breach away from a cell, she drives north into the storm after Kenzie anyway. Was that courage, recklessness, or the only choice she could live with?

29 Sitting against the inside of the girls' door at North Light while Wade pushes, she answers him with her birth name. Why did it matter that she claimed it then, to him?

The Ending and Beyond

30 In the dark, faces could not prove who anyone was, but sound could: the words under the laugh, the storm box, the tap test through the door. How did the narrator's ear become her proof?

31 The June 2027 letter carries a return address for the first time, and it admits she is safe but not happy. What changed between the first letter and the last?

32 The final chapter belongs to the real Molly, not the narrator. Why do you think the author gave her the last word?

33 The book ends with a new face showing up near Molly, and the seller is still selling faces. Did that last page feel like a warning, a haunting, or both?

34 What does the title She Has My Face mean to you now? Which woman has whose face, and who had it first?

35 Have you ever put your own photo into a face app or a website that searches faces? After this book, would you?

IDEAS FOR YOUR MEETING

- Hold a show-of-hands vote at the start of the meeting and again at the end: did Irene get it wrong on purpose? See whether the discussion moves anyone.
- Play a simple waltz and have one member tap three beats with a small hitch on the third, then see who in the group can hear the difference.
- Ask whether anyone has used a look-alike site or face search app, and whether they would now, knowing who might be buying the faces.
- Rewrite one scene from another seat: the January tuning as Irene sees it, or the night of April 16, 2012, from the window of the shelter room.

- Bring a small spread from the book: jelly doughnuts, a pie for Irene's table, or a cake with a sugar bee piped on top for Nicole Pardee.
