A BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Donor

The Final Say, Book Two · A.R. Hollowell

ABOUT THE BOOK

Leah Ortega is six days from giving her mother, Rosario, most of her liver. On her first case as the hospital's donor advocate, Teresa Nowicki watches Leah trace the cut line across her own belly, laugh at the risk, sign, and ask whether a yes she gives because she is afraid to say no is still her consent. At home, Rosario's partner, Arturo, owns the building and lives under Leah's floor, and he has just changed her lock. Teresa's job is to stand on the donor's side, but she cannot veto a grown woman's yes, and Wednesday at 7:30 does not move.

THEMES TO TALK ABOUT

- Consent Under Family Pressure
- When Love Becomes Coercion
- Debt and Obligation
- Family Secrets
- The Limits of an Advocate's Power

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

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

First Impressions

01 In the first chapter Leah traces the incision with the cap of a pen, laughs at the one-in-two-hundred risk, signs, and lays the form face down. What did those small gestures tell you about her before she asked her question?

02 Leah asks Teresa to keep her question about fear and consent out of the notes, and Teresa closes her notebook. Was that the right first move for an advocate, and what did it promise Leah?

03 Rosario tells Teresa, warmly, that tears with the advocate do not mean no. How did you hear that the first time, and how did you hear it by the end?

04 Leah's office is planning a surprise lunch for her on Tuesday. When it finally arrives, with a collection jar and her mother's voicemail on the front-desk speaker, what had that kindness become?

05 At the family dinner Rosario grips Leah's wrist under the table through Arturo's whole toast, the same hand that blessed her an hour before. Which moment in the first week told you this family was dangerous?

Rosario

06 Rosario shows her burn scars proudly and keeps her old hospital band in her wallet. How did the story of the fire shape your sympathy for her in the first half?

07 Rosario told everyone, the nurses and Leah included, that she was still on hold, when she had been active for six weeks and had turned down two livers. Was this love for her daughter, fear of a dead stranger's organ, or something else?

08 Rafael finds two sealed bottles of the medicine Rosario stopped taking on purpose, so the team could not wait. How did that discovery change the way you saw her illness and her bleed?

09 With Leah's hand holding hers on the cut line, Rosario finally tells the fire true: she was cooking, Leah was asleep on the floor, and for twenty-seven years she let her daughter carry the blame. How does that change the debt Leah thought she owed?

10 On the last morning Rosario, wheeled toward her own surgery, lays her hand on Leah's belly, makes the cross on her forehead, and opens her hand for the burn band. Did that moment feel like a blessing, an apology, or a release, and could you judge her?

Arturo

11 Arturo changes Leah's lock, keeps the spare, and sits at her kitchen table in the dark, checking the pipes. When did you decide what kind of man he was, and did that decision hold?

12 He paid off Leah's $38,000 debt from the shop's money without asking her, and Graciela later lets slip that it was Rosario's idea. Who bought Leah's yes, and does it matter who asked?

13 In the funeral home parking lot Arturo holds up the statement for Rosario's plan and tells Leah there are two bills and she must pick. Then the truck's locks click shut with her inside. What made that scene so frightening without a single blow?

14 Arturo kept quiet about Rosario's refusals because he believed the program would take her off the list, and he saw her medicine cups full in the sink and lined them up anyway. Was his silence love, fear, or the shop?

15 Arturo had the Civic crushed before dawn to protect Rafael, sent his yard man to lift Teresa's car on a hook to show her, not hurt her, and finally asked Teresa for one thing. How did you feel about him by the time a nurse stopped him at the red line?

Rafael, Paloma and Graciela

16 Early on Rafael tells, as a joke, how his mother made him pull the wrecker over on the interstate to pray. When you learned what that stop really was, did you go back to the joke?

17 In the truck outside the funeral home, Leah named a price for her yes: her brother's semester. Was that a surrender or the one free choice she made all week?

18 Paloma named her own price, a car to get to class, and then called the fraud hotline in Teresa's hearing. What did her choice say about the rest of the family, and about Leah?

19 Rafael wired a resistor behind the Civic's dash so the airbag light would stop blinking, meaning to fix it after the surgery, and told Paloma her uncle had paid for it. How do you judge him, knowing the money had gone to Leah's debt?

20 Rafael lets Teresa believe Arturo moved her car into the row by the rollback, and he points her at Arturo the morning after the crash. Why do you think he did it, and did it change how you read his tears in the yard?

21 Graciela blames Leah for Paloma ever being tested, yet she was the one on the phone with Paloma when the car left the road, and the one who told Arturo about the hotline. What does her grief hide, even from herself?

The Hospital

22 Albright had already written Teresa's clearance note, dated before Teresa ever met Leah, and later deleted it at midnight. What does that say about who the program was really serving?

23 Haverty coached Leah's two-beat pause on a practice recording, and the pause Teresa thought the family had drilled turned out to be the program's. How much can any interview prove about consent?

24 Maren believes families are a donor's best support, turns Leah's chair to face her mother, and quietly arranges the breach report against Teresa. Was she a villain, or a kind person doing her job too well?

25 Teresa loses her post to an email Albright requested after Teresa told the team about Leah's leg. Is the advocate's role, as the book shows it, strong enough to protect anyone?

Teresa's Choices

26 When Leah tells her about the paid-off debt, Teresa lets Colette's twenty-four hours run and keeps the payment to herself. Was she protecting Leah's choice or taking it from her?

27 Teresa walks into Rosario's room in the open and asks why she is on hold, and it costs her a breach report and Leah's trust for a day. Would you have crossed that line?

28 Teresa gives Leah a deadline: tell the team by seven, or she will. Then she carries it out, telling them about the clot but not the money. Was the ultimatum right, and was it still Leah's choice once Teresa made it?

29 With her car just set down off the hook, Teresa promises Leah she will not report Rafael or Arturo, and later she does not call the federal investigator back. Should she have finished what Paloma started, if it ruined Rafael?

30 Asked by Graciela whether the airbag worked, Teresa says she does not know, when she does. Was that lie a mercy, a betrayal, or both?

The Ending and Beyond

31 Leah tells the team her no has nothing to do with the clot, and says it with no pause at all. Why did it matter that she refused the medical way out?

32 At the clipboard on Wednesday, with the consent and the withdrawal side by side and two bands in her other hand, Leah signs the withdrawal. Did you know what she would sign, and how did learning her mother had said yes to a liver the night before change that moment?

33 Teresa tears up her own signed, unwitnessed form without reading it, though she knows the name begins with A, and Adam, whose own form names her, never learns she named him. What do you make of her choice?

34 Teresa slips the unsent grievance, which names Arturo, into Leah's bag. Should Leah send it, and who should have the final say over what happens to this family now?

IDEAS FOR YOUR MEETING

- Before the meeting, have each member write down whether they would give an organ to a parent, and what would make them say no. Share only what you are comfortable sharing.

- Read a plain-words consent aloud, the way Teresa does in the first chapter, including the one-in-two-hundred risk. Talk about what would make your own yes free.
- Hold a vote: was Rosario's love the coercion? Vote again at the end of the meeting and see who changed their mind.
- Debate Teresa's ultimatum. Split into Leah's side, the family's side, and the program's side, and argue what should happen at seven o'clock on Tuesday.
- Cast it. Who would play Teresa, Leah, Rosario, Arturo, Rafael, and Paloma, and why?
