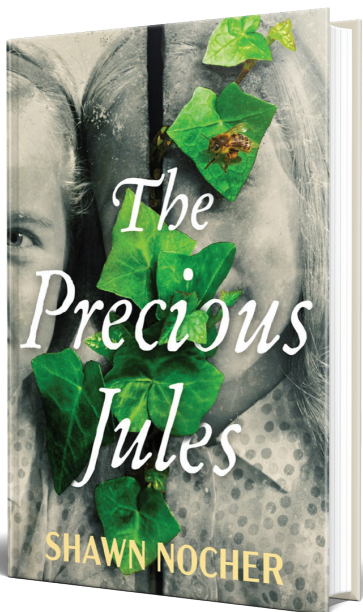


THE PRECIOUS JULES

By Shawn Nocher



THE PRECIOUS JULES, written by author Shawn Nocher (Blackstone Publishing; Hardcover) is a deeply felt family narrative that examines the fine line between selfishness and what passes for love. Available Now.

After nearly 200 years of housing retardants, as they were once known, the Rosewood Institute is closing the doors on its dark history, and the complicated task of reassigning residents has begun. An adult Ella Jules, having arrived decades earlier at the tender age of seven, must rely on the state to decide her future. Ella's aging parents have requested she be returned to her childhood home, much to the distress of Ella's siblings, but more so to Lynetta, her beloved caretaker who has been by her side for decades. The five adult Jules children haunted by the earliest memories of their sister, each dealing with the trauma of her banishment in their own flawed way, are converging on the family home, secrets in tow, arriving from the far corners of the country to talk some sense

The Precious Jules examines the thin line between selfishness and what passes for love. This family story asks what is best for one child in light of what is perceived as the greater good, and just what is the collective legacy of deep family secrets, shame, and helplessness. The Precious Jules is a deeply felt family narrative that will make you fall in love with these flawed and imperfect characters standing on the threshold of an awakening they never expected.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

WHO IS TELLING THE STORY?

- 1) The Precious Jules is told from the point of view of ten different characters including all family members as well as Lynetta and Clarissa. Why do you think the author chose to tell the story in this way?
- 2) We don't hear from Ella until nearly the end of the novel at the dinner party in her honor. Did this chapter change your understanding of Ella?
- 3) Likewise, we don't hear from Stone until after the dinner party when he and Finny are cleaning up debris from the explosion. Did this chapter change your understanding of Stone in any way?

SECRETS

- 1) Hillary eventually shares with Lynetta that Ella nearly drowned, but she fails to reveal her full role in that incident. Why do you think that is and do you think Lynetta suspects the truth?
- 2) Lynetta later shares with Hillary the incident with Brody and the bees, but likewise fails to share that Ella was a victim of rape. Why do you think that is and should she have shared the full story? Do you think Hillary suspects that she is only getting part of the story?

3) Did Stone believe Jax when Jax told him what he witnessed?

4) Belle has some secrets of her own. Hillary believes Belle to be most like her, but how does Belle's secret make her different from her mother? And how are they alike?

5) Jax and Clarissa have an unlikely friendship. Discuss their friendship in light of the secret they share.

6) All the Jules children have secrets to some degree: Finney doesn't tell his family he is coming to Baltimore to see the aunts, George doesn't tell his family about his wife's illness, and Tess doesn't want anyone to know she lost her job. Discuss the various "small secrets" the Jules siblings keep. Do you believe this is normal or is it tied in some way to Ella's banishment?

CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS

1) Even after the dinner, Hillary shocks Stone and her children by refusing to give up on the idea of bringing Ella home. She refuses to hear what her family has to say and insists it be her own decision. This is a change for Hillary. Discuss the ways in which she feels she has been controlled by her church and the needs of her family.

2) How did the near drowning of Ella change the relationship between Jax and his mother?

3) Hillary is devastated when she leaves Bets's home. What is at the core of her pain? How does it change her relationship with Stone and her relationship to the secret itself?

THINGS TO PONDER

Do you know of an institution similar to Beechwood? Do you think Beechwood is typical of such institutions in that era?

Is Hillary a sympathetic character? Can she be forgiven for what has happened with Ella? Likewise, can Lynetta be forgiven for what happened with Brody?

How did you feel about the ending? Is it in Ella's best interest to remain with Lynetta?

AUTHOR BIO



Shawn Nocher's compelling short stories have appeared in numerous literary magazines, including SmokeLong Quarterly, Pithead Chapel, Eunoia Review, and MoonPark Review, and she has been longlisted or won honorable mentions from both SmokeLong Quarterly and Glimmer Train.

She earned her master of arts in writing at Johns Hopkins University, has given wings to two children, and lives with her husband and an assortment of sassy rescue animals in Baltimore, Maryland, where she writes in a room of her own. This is her first novel.

CONNECT WITH SHAWN!

ShawnNocher.com | [Twitter](https://twitter.com) | [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com)