

# READER'S GUIDE

## *Sins of the Daughter* by Carolyn Huizinga Mills

### INTRODUCING *Sins of the Daughter*

Danah Calsely was only nine when her mother abandoned her. Years later, as a promising Sociology PhD candidate, Danah appears largely unaffected by this traumatic loss — until she finds a letter that she's convinced is from her missing mother. The truth about Jane Lily and her disappearance is wrapped in a long history of silence, and Danah's grandmother, Edith, has no interest in rehashing the past.

Danah becomes obsessed with the letter and the secrets she believes Edith is keeping from her. Edith is convinced she's only protecting her granddaughter, but she has her own reasons for staying silent. As for Jane Lily herself, she has a certain knack for disappearing.

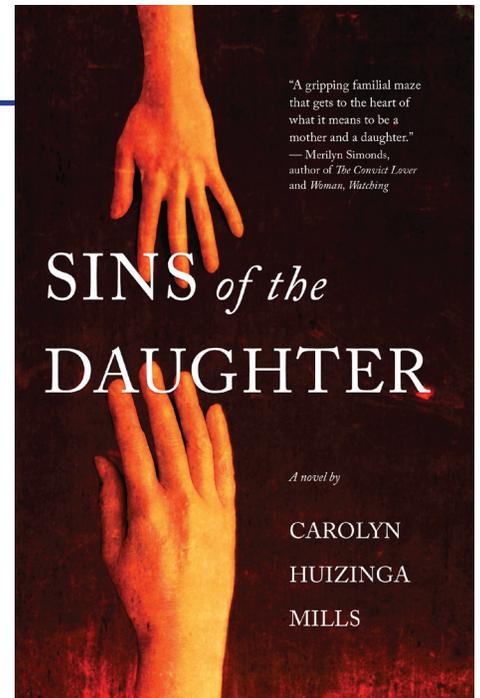
A story of heartbreak and hope, guilt and redemption, *Sins of the Daughter* explores the fragility of the bond between mothers and daughters and the domino effect that the choices of one generation have on the next.

### IMPORTANT THEMES

***Intergenerational Trauma*** – Edith and her mother. Jane Lily and Edith. Danah and Jane Lily. For each generation of mothers and daughters, there is an undeniable hurt that has torn their relationship apart, but also an unbreakable connection between kin. Each character's relationship with their mother, in turn, affects their relationship with their own daughter.

***Escape and Individuality*** – Edith felt stifled by motherhood after her husband's death, Jane Lily craves escape from home as both a child and an adult, and Danah chafes against Edith staying with her. Each woman wishes to assert her own individual desires and make her own choices, only to clash with her family unit when she acts upon it.

***Gender Roles*** – Edith, Jane Lily, and Danah each have different approaches to motherhood, to being a wife and/or girlfriend, and to their careers. The men in their lives, and society at large, has certain expectations about their behaviour, their choices, their emotions, and the duties that they should fulfill.



## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. On Page 167, Jane Lily says that Edith “had ruined my childhood; I was determined not to do the same to my daughter.” How do Edith, Jane Lily, and Danah’s relationships with their mothers affect their relationships with their daughters? Do they repeat the same mistakes?
2. Edith, Jane Lily, and Danah grew up in different time periods, each with a different view on gender roles and expectations for womanhood. How do these differences affect each character and their relationship with each other? In what ways do they fulfill, challenge, or chafe against the gender roles of their time?
3. On page 97, Jane Lily says this about Edith: “She was my mother: love was inevitable, if also, in our case, invisible.” How, if ever, do these women express their love for their mothers and/or daughters? How, if ever, were the acts of love received?
4. On page 173, Edith asks, “What’s the point in looking back if we can’t undo what’s been done?” This is a book about mistakes, thus it is also a book about forgiveness. How do these characters struggle with seeking forgiveness? How do they struggle with giving it?
5. Compare Jane Lily’s relationships with Morian and Andrew. What do each of these relationships say about what Jane Lily desired, or did not desire, for herself at different points in her life?
6. Initially, Danah insists that she is unaffected by her mother leaving because she had a loving relationship with her father. Yet, she obsesses about Lily’s past and Edith’s secrets. Why was she so adamant to be uncaring about Jane Lily’s leaving? Why can’t she help but care so desperately?
7. On page 207, Jane Lily states that she “understands with blinding certainty that in order to be herself, or this new version of herself, she will need to cut herself off from her mother.” Does this statement ring true for any of the characters? How does it apply to mother-daughter relationships in general?
8. On page 284, Danah says, “I am confronted with the disheartening certainty that I will never find the answers I’m looking for.” There are large, seemingly insurmountable, gaps of misunderstanding between Edith and Jane Lily, Jane Lily and Danah, and Edith and Danah. Consider the final chapters. What would true understanding and reconciliation between these characters look like? What do you think it would take for them to achieve it? Do you believe they could?



### ABOUT CAROLYN

Carolyn *Huizinga* Mills began her career by writing short stories and in 2017, her story “Finders” placed second in the Alice Munro Short Story Competition. Carolyn’s first picture book, *The Little Boy Who Lived Down the Drain*, was chosen as a 2018 Blue Spruce Honour Book. *The Good Son*, her first novel, was published in 2021; Carolyn’s second novel, *Sins of the Daughter*, was published in 2022; and *Grandpa’s Stars*, her second picture book, was published in 2023. A grade seven teacher, Carolyn loves to share her passion for reading and writing with her students. She grew up in Calgary, Alberta, and now lives in southwestern Ontario with her husband and two children. In addition to reading and writing, Carolyn loves playing soccer, camping, travelling, and eating dark chocolate.