



SIMON & SCHUSTER  
AUSTRALIA

A CBS COMPANY

# LITTLE DISASTERS

## BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

### Introduction

In this new novel from the internationally bestselling author of the “cool, sharp, and beautifully written” (Lisa Jewell, *New York Times* bestselling author) *Anatomy of a Scandal*, a doctor is faced with an ethical dilemma when her friend’s child lands in the emergency room.

Liz Trenchard is an experienced pediatrician with a duty to protect all children admitted to her busy emergency room. So when her friend Jess turns up at the ER one night with her baby girl and a story that doesn’t quite add up, Liz is forced to question everything she thought she knew about her friend and about herself. There are so many secrets and so many lies. The truth can’t come soon enough.

With Sarah Vaughan’s signature “clever and compelling” (Claire Douglas, author of *Last Seen Alive*) prose, this is a tightly wound and evocative page-turner that will haunt you long after you finish the last page.

## Topics & Questions for Discussion

1. Consider the two epigraphs, "Morning Song" by Sylvia Plath and the excerpt from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Why do you think the author chose to introduce her novel with these two selections? How do they set the tone of *Little Disasters*?
2. Sarah Vaughan explores the bonds of friendship throughout the novel. Compare and contrast Liz's relationships with Jess, Mel, and Charlotte. What does Liz like about these three women? What does she find challenging or difficult to relate to in each of them?
3. One theme running throughout the novel is how people react to things outside their control. Which characters struggle with handling uncertainty? How do they manage their fears surrounding control?
4. At the beginning of the novel, Liz describes her advisor, Neil, and how, as a male doctor, his life is quite different from hers. Liz thinks to herself, "I want a wife" (page 33) and wishes she had a partner who could fulfill many of the duties historically handled by women. How are gender roles explored in the novel, especially with regard to parenting?
5. Liz and her mother are very different characters; do you think there are any ways in which they are similar?
6. There are many characters suspected of harming Betsey. Were you surprised at the two final twists at the end of the novel and how Betsey actually was injured? Did you have any idea who the real culprit was?
7. How would you describe Ed's and Jess's marriage? How does it change throughout the course of the novel? Do you think they will have a happy partnership in the future?
8. Do you sympathize with Jess's instinct to cover up what actually happened on the day Betsey was hurt? Did you ever feel frustrated with Jess's choices? How would you have

handled this difficult situation?

9. How is mental health explored in *Little Disasters*? Who is struggling with mental health, and how do they cope with their issues? How do their struggles affect their family, friends, and selves?

10. Liz and Jess must both learn to trust themselves; do you think they have learned how to by the end of the novel?

11. The mothers in this novel are all judged for their parenting choices in one way or another. What dilemmas does Sarah Vaughan raise about modern motherhood? Do you think these issues are new or timeless? How have more recent societal changes heightened them?

12. Almost every character is hiding a secret of one type or another; whose secret most intrigued you? What was the character's motivation in hiding the truth?

## Enhance Your Book Club

1. For your next book-group selection, choose another novel centered around a medical/ethical dilemma, like Jodi Picoult's *My Sister's Keeper* or Lisa Genova's *Still Alice*. What themes are common to each novel? How do they differ?

2. *Little Disasters* explores the bond between mother and child. Write a letter to one of the mother figures in your life and share a special memory you have of the two of you.

3. Visit Sarah Vaughan's website, <http://www.sarahvaughanauthor.com/>, for more information about the book.