



Isabel's Daughter

By Judith R. Hendricks
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Introduction

After a childhood spent in an institution and a life as a teenage runaway, Avery James has trained herself not to wonder about the mother who gave her up. But her safe, predictable life changes one night at a party in the home of a wealthy Santa Fe art dealer when she stumbles upon the portrait of a woman who is the mirror image of herself.

Avery has found her mother, Isabel Colinas, an artist who died eight years earlier in a tragic accident. Slowly but inevitably, she is compelled to discover all she can about the woman. Searching for Isabel - in her work, in the stories of friends, rivals, and lovers, and in what's left of Querencia, the old miner's cabin that was her haven -- Avery is drawn into complex relationships with the people who knew her mother. And the unexpected reappearance of Will Cameron, the boy Avery loved in high school, further complicates matters. As she draws together the threads of her mother's artistic

heritage, her grandmother's skills as a curandera, or healer, and her own talent for cooking, Avery learns that, while discovering Isabel provides a certain resolution in her life, it's discovering herself that brings lasting happiness.

Questions for Discussion

1. Avery's journey to finding herself mirrors her mother's in many ways. Discuss some of the parallels in Isabel's and Avery's lives.
2. Early in the story (page 4), Avery recounts how a Doberman once chased her. The owner hollered, "Stand still miss! He won't bite you!" Avery thought, "I didn't trust him or his dog, so I ran like a jackrabbit." How does this set up how Avery reacts to most people and situations in her life?
3. Avery stumbles upon the identity of her mother while catering Paul DeGraf's party. He asks Avery to call him so he can tell her about her mother. After years of wondering who her mother was and why she abandoned her, why is Avery reluctant to take him up on his offer?
4. Why do you think Avery has no interest in discovering who her father is?
5. Cassie takes Avery in off the street and becomes the family Avery never had. How does Cassie help shape Avery's self discovery? What life lessons does Avery learn from Cassie?
6. Rita is the closest thing to family, yet Avery turns hostile when Rita announces she's moving in with Rick. Why is Avery so cruel to Rita, and to all the people who try to be nice to her throughout her life?
7. How would you describe Avery's relationship with Paul DeGraf? What about Paul's relationship with Avery? What conflicts must they both overcome?
8. How did Avery's friendship with Jimmie John change her life?
9. Will Cameron offers Avery unconditional, pure love, but Avery seems determined to ruin it. She first distrusts his initial advances, then rips up his Valentine's card, then leaves him when he goes away for the summer after high school. Why is she so reluctant to allow herself to fall in love with him?
10. There's a lot of heat in the story: the hot weather, the spicy foods, and the fire that nearly destroys Avery's home. What is the significance of all the heat?
11. Avery finds Isabel's plane ticket and passport and knows her mother was planning a secret escape. This makes her somehow more sympathetic to both her mother and Paul. Why?
12. What role does the wild dog play during the fire?

About the Author

Judith Ryan Hendricks -- a former copywriter, publicist, computer instructor, travel agent, waitress, and baker -- is the author of the novel *Bread Alone*. She lives in Santa Fe, NM.