



# **Bones & All**

## **Camille DeAngelis**

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## **READING GROUP GUIDE**

About the book:

A haunting coming-of-age story about a young outcast as she sets out on a journey to find her long-lost father, who can tell her why she does the bad thing she does.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. *Bones & All* is the story of a sympathetic monster. In what ways do Maren's voice, memories, and perspective allow you to see the world through her eyes?
2. When Maren eats her babysitter, Janelle makes a decision that effectively locks mother and daughter into a pattern of flight, pretending to be normal, "bad thing," and repeat. She later chooses to leave Maren forever. Do Janelle's actions show strength, cowardice, or both? Do you think she truly loved her daughter? How else might Janelle have dealt with her tragic circumstances?
3. Throughout her childhood Maren struggles to avoid situations where she might be tempted to do "the bad thing," and yet her encounters have a sad air of inevitability. The lesson here seems to be: we can't help what we are. What is the novel's underlying message about determinism and free will? Is it ever possible to truly re-create oneself, as Maren tries to do in Madison—or are we, like our narrator, permanently boxed in by our darkest aspects?
4. Maren searches for her father hoping he'll somehow be able to free her from her identity, but instead her reunion with Frank has the opposite effect—and when she discovers the truth about Sully, her place in this lineage of monsters is even more firmly cemented. To what extent do family dynamics and genetic inheritance shape our fate?
5. "If they knew what we were," Lee says, "they'd think even hell would be too good a sentence for us." How does the novel draw on Christian theology, classical mythology, and fairy tales to explore the nature of good and evil?

6. From references to the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," and other small details, we know that *Bones & All* takes place in 1998. Why do you think the author chose to pinpoint the story in the late 1990s?
7. Many of the "normal" characters in the novel—Barry Cook, Kerri-Ann, Barbara Yearly, Samantha, Lauren, Lee's babysitter and his mother's string of abusive boyfriends—come off hardly more virtuous than the eaters themselves. Why might the story put forward such a pessimistic view of humanity?
8. When Maren dreams of Mrs. Harmon, the kind old lady reassures her that she and Sully aren't the same. Do you agree? Why or why not?
9. "Someday you'll have to answer for this," Janelle tells Maren near the beginning of the book. "Someday someone will believe you." Can a narrative still offer a moral touchstone if the villain is never caught?
10. Given the conditions in which Maren attracts and consumes young men, the reader can infer that she will never be able to consummate a physical relationship. Nevertheless, the story follows a young girl's growth into sexual maturity. What does the novel's treatment of Maren's attachments imply about the nature of physical attraction and romantic love?
11. The author has stated in her biography that she is an ethical vegetarian. Why do you think a vegan would write a novel about people who eat other people?
12. *Bones & All* reverses the typical scenario of male perpetrator and female victim, yet Maren is very much moving through a "man's world" in public and private. In what sense might the novel's ending offer a commentary on female empowerment?

## Author Bio



**Camille DeAngelis** is the author of the novels *Mary Modern* and *Petty Magic* and a first-edition guidebook, *Moon Ireland*. A graduate of NYU and the National University of Ireland, Galway, Camille currently lives in Boston. She is a vegan.