



Book Club Book of the Month December 2022 ***Tiny Uncertain Miracles* by Michelle Johnston** **(HarperCollins)**

Summary

Marick is a late-to-God chaplain whose pastoral services bleed into the overlap between god and science. He provides peace for those whose personal realities are fraught with pain, routinely standing with others in their grief whilst privately dealing with his own profound loss.

At work, Marick meets Dolly, a hospital volunteer who wants her life to mean something, and Hugo, an eccentric academic in a publish-or-perish world who claims to be turning e-coli into gold. Tentative friendships grow tangible roots as Marick finds solace in these mundane interactions. His personal demons are increasingly triggered by his reluctant enmeshment in Hugo's work and personal life. Tensions escalate as Marick's dual-timeline narratives align, gradually revealing the tragedy at the heart of his emotional isolation.

A cerebral exploration of grief and belief written in personal universality, *Tiny Uncertain Miracles* highlights the irony of hope, and explores the human need to attribute existential meaning to arbitrary phenomena.

About the author

Dr Michelle Johnston is both an emergency physician and an author. On good days it is difficult to tell the difference. She is a Staff Specialist at the Royal Perth Hospital Emergency Department, a busy inner-city trauma centre where she works as both clinician and teacher. Her first novel, *Dustfall*, was published by UWA Publishing in February 2018 and shortlisted for the MUD Literary Prize for a debut novel in 2019. She speaks and holds workshops, for both doctors and normal people, about marrying critical care and creativity, and she is occupied searching for the beauty and awe in an often-brutal reality.

Questions for discussion

1. This book contains references to gold within various contexts of culture, religion and history. Which of these references do you feel resonate most strongly with the thematic core of *Tiny Uncertain Miracles*?
2. What feelings do Johnston's labyrinthine hospital descriptions evoke, and how crucial are these undertones in creating atmospheric resonance?
3. Which act of kindness provides the greatest potential for good; the donation of a kidney (p. 67) or the fishes-and-loaves alternative (p. 290)? Why does this matter to Dolly?
4. Is Hugo's gold a biblical miracle, an alchemical hoax, or a scientific triumph? Is truth synonymous with belief? Does it matter?
5. The Emergency Physician (p. 259) says, "We don't need wellness and yoga and chat. We need society fixed." Discuss.
6. How does the dual timeline contribute to the effective escalation of narrative tension?
7. Marick reveals a perspective-shattering truth towards the end of the book. Did you see the shift coming? If so, what gave it away? If not, how did the revelation impact your perception of characters and events?
8. Is this conversation between Marick and Hugo (p. 292) testament to the healing power of being heard, a comment on the importance of honesty, or something else entirely?
9. "Marick could feel the inklings of affrontery inside him, a growing awareness that treachery had come for them all..." (p. 274-275). Why did the potential of a past affair impact Marick's overall faith in Hugo? Is there a moral distinction between omission and outright dishonesty?
10. "True to his word, Marick had never tried to contact Diane again..." (p. 221). How do you feel about Marick's reaction to Diane's decision? Whose perspective are you most likely to sympathise with in this context, and why?
11. How does the semi-chronological structure of the book reflect the implicit meaning at the core of its final paragraph?

If you liked this book you may also like ...

Dustfall by Michelle Johnston (UWA Publishing)

Devotion by Hannah Kent (Picador)

Skimming Stones by Maria Papas (Fremantle Press)

The Little Boat on Trusting Lane by Mel Hall (Fremantle Press)

The Airways by Jennifer Mills (Picador)

The Pull of the Stars by Emma Donoghue (Picador)

The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho (HarperCollins)