

# A CLEAN MESS

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Tiffany Jenkins puts a human face on addiction and recovery by bringing her truest self to the page. Talk about the storytelling techniques she uses to create a personal connection with you, the reader. How would you characterize the author's voice? Did you feel like you really "knew" her by the end of the book?
2. If "I opened the cage," Tiffany writes, "the monster inside me would ravage my life in no time." How did Tiffany learn to quiet the beast of addiction? What temptations did she face—at the halfway house, with her "clean" husband, and during early motherhood—and how did she find a way to resist them?
3. Tiffany went directly from jail to rehab. She writes: "I had been blessed with a second chance and I sure as hell won't take it for granted." Talk about the choices Tiffany made to correct the course of her life—and become the success that she is today.
4. "For as long as I can remember," Tiffany writes, "I was stuck on a train to nowhere." After she got clean, Tiffany found herself on a train to "somewhere I'd never been, and I was the friggin' conductor." In what ways did Tiffany need to relearn how to be an adult in the world? How did she manage to overcome her anxiety, in particular, and forge ahead? You may wish to talk about her support system, and the impact her loved ones and mental-health professionals had on her path toward recovery as well.
5. Jenkins is open and honest about her struggles with mental health. She is also deeply funny. Discuss the ways in which the author employs humor to either deepen or deflect the truth about her mental-health journey in *A Clean Mess*.
6. Once Tiffany entered therapy she began to understand how her lifelong anxiety was at the root cause of her addiction. What does *A Clean Mess* have to say about how we all manage—or mismanage—our everyday or even existential discomforts? How, if at all, did Tiffany's journey toward self-care resonate with you?

7. Since learning the truth about Colin's trip to Vegas, Tiffany said she "hadn't been in a place where [she] could trust [her] own thoughts and feelings." She adds: "I no longer knew what was real and what was made up in my head." Why do you think Tiffany chose not to share the explicit details of (to borrow the cliché) "What Happened in Vegas" with the reader? Is this a case in which her silence speaks louder than words? And what do you think happened?
8. Consider the emotional impact of divorce on Jenkins's life story. What does resilience and forgiveness look like for her? You may wish to discuss what it looks like to you as well.
9. What is your biggest takeaway from *A Clean Mess*? You may wish to talk about the thematic significance—literal and symbolic—of the title, for starters.
10. If there's one question you could ask the author—about her life (then and today), her writing process, or what she hopes readers will take away from *A Clean Mess*—what would it be?

