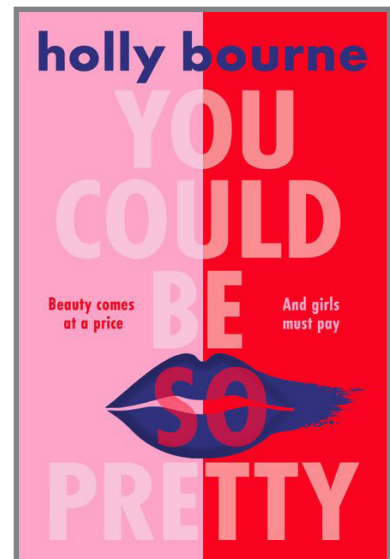


# You Could Be So Pretty

AUTHOR  
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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Upper Secondary  
(Violence, Sexual Content, Language)

## SYNOPSIS

BEAUTY COMES AT A PRICE. AND GIRLS MUST PAY.

In Belle and Joni's world there are two options for girls:

One, follow the rules of the Doctrine like Belle: apply your Mask, work hard to be crowned at the Ceremony, be a Pretty. Or two, fight the rules like Joni: leave your face bare, work hard to escape to the Education, be an Objectionable.

But maybe there is a third option . . . Change the rules. Reclaim your power. If you can . . .

What would you choose?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Holly Bourne is the author of *Am I Normal Yet?*, *How Hard Can Love Be?*, *The Manifesto on How to be Interesting* and *Soulmates*. She graduated with a first class degree in Journalism Studies and spent two years working as a local news reporter on the *Surrey Mirror*, garnering a nomination for Print Journalist of the Year in 2010. She worked as a journalist for TheSite.org, an advice and information website for 16–25 year olds. She lives in Lewes, UK.

## STUDY NOTES

- What are your thoughts on the book's title? What does it make you think of and how does it make you feel?
- Think about the terminology and labels used by the Doctrine—Pretty, Invisible, Try Hard, Objectionable, etc. Why do you think labels carry so much power, both within the book and in the real world, and how is this language used to reinforce the aims of the Doctrine?
- Belle tells Joni that 'the Ranking is real life too.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?
- Discuss the power that both the Ranking and Validation Counts have over the choices of the characters throughout the book. Could they ever serve a different purpose?
- Think about Joni's friend, Jack. Although he disagrees with the Doctrine, Joni tells us that he's always 'telling me how great I was for confronting the Doctrine, but not actually confronting it himself.' Discuss whether you think Jack is a good friend/ally to both Joni and the anti-Doctrine cause, and why or why not?
  - What factors might prevent someone from standing up for what they believe in?
- Although Joni's mother doesn't Mask, Joni remarks that 'she uses so much budget on buying Mask products' for the Centre for Discarded Women. Discuss why you think Joni's mother does this in spite of her strong anti-Doctrine stance?
- Compare both Belle and Joni's mothers' reactions to their Ceremony looks, starting on pp 314 and 322 respectively.

What do you notice about their reactions, and the ways in which they try to influence their daughters' choices?

- Think back to Belle's journey to the ceremony in the carriage with her friends (p 328), particularly to her interactions with Ben. Did this passage change your opinion of Ben, and if so, why or why not? What does this tell us about the Doctrine's impact on boys and young men?
- Take a look at the way Joni describes the children at the Centre playing on p 219. What does this show us about the way boys and girls are raised under the Doctrine? What parallels can you draw between this, and the differing ways boys and girls are raised in society today?
- The little girls Joni babysits give her lots of reasons why they're worried that they won't win their Ceremony eg. 'I have too much melanin to ever win' / 'My body is too filled with Sin to ever win' / 'Everyone talks about Sin at school'. How did reading this make you feel? Are you surprised by this?
- Although Belle and Joni have been working towards getting into the Education, ultimately this wish goes unfulfilled, and we leave the characters uncertain of where the future will take them. How did you feel when you realised that they hadn't got the Scholarship and why do you think the author chose to conclude the book in this way?
- In the end, Belle comes to the conclusion that 'The Ceremony didn't change anything.' Based on the text and your own thoughts about what might happen next, to what extent were Belle and Joni successful in challenging the rules of the Doctrine?
- The author has included an epilogue. In it, she tells the reader that 'This isn't a dystopia. This isn't a fiction. This is now. Normal. Our world today.' Why do you think the author has included this epilogue, and how far do you agree with this statement?