


"Gorgeously written and fully immersive. I could feel the salt air and the crackle of lies and secrets."

—KATE MORETTI, *New York Times* bestselling author  
of *The Vanishing Year* and *Blackbird Season*

# THE FIFTH OF JULY



A NOVEL

Author of  
**ONE  
MORE  
DAY**



KELLY SIMMONS



# Reading Group Guide

1. The anniversary of trauma is a central theme in *The Fifth of July*. Have you ever experienced this kind of pain or stress as the anniversary of a death or violent event approaches?
2. The divisions between summer people and year-rounders are starkly evident in this story. Are there other places in the country or world where you have noticed these differences?
3. The metaphor of fixing people's houses versus fixing people's lives pervades the novel. Have you ever noticed parallels in your community between what people do to their houses and what they do to themselves?
4. Several of the characters in the book remain fixated on, or stymied by, events and relationships from when they were teenagers. Why is it so hard to move past the memories of these tender years?
5. Though set on the relatively crime-free island of Nantucket, the novel showcases a wide variety of minor and major crimes, from vandalism to theft to rape and murder. Is this realistic? And do beautiful places do a better job of hiding ugly behavior?

6. The book highlights sharp disagreements with religious overtones, bordering on criminality, yet none of the characters seems particularly religious. What does this say about the growth and inheritance of prejudice?
7. The Warners are a family uncomfortable with talking about things, whether good or bad. What events in the book could have been aided or avoided by an open discussion?
8. The island lifestyle of unlocked doors, moonlit beach walks, and talking to friendly strangers brings up different issues of trust and vulnerability for different ages. Have you ever felt threatened in an environment like this? If so, why?
9. Tripp Warner's illness is perceived and handled differently by each character in the book. Whose approach did you think was correct, and why?
10. The portrayal of the detective is colored by his own history on the island. Do you believe being a native makes it easier or more difficult to police a population?



Kelly loves meeting with book clubs—she's visited hundreds of groups. Email her to book a free in-person or Skype visit: [kellysimmonswrites@gmail.com](mailto:kellysimmonswrites@gmail.com)

## A Conversation with the Author

**There are five first-person points of view in the book. How did you arrive at that approach, and how did you differentiate the character voices?**

Well, originally there were more! My editor, quite wisely, asked me to narrow and focus them, choosing the most important voices. The variety of genders, ages, dialects, and backgrounds helped me ground them, and I tried to make their actions and dialogue distinct without being stereotypical or obvious or employing any kind of high-wire stylized writerly crap. Writer's stunts usually feel like bad radio commercials you want to mute!

**The Nantucket setting seems integral to the plot. How much research did you do on this area of the country? Did you ever consider setting it somewhere else? If so, why?**

I'm sure there are other places where similar tensions simmer beneath the surface, but I have been carefully observing Nantucket for many years, having spent all or part of each summer on the island for more than twenty years. I cannot imagine setting it anywhere else. That being said, despite my familiarity, I had to do a lot of research about all kinds of things: vegetation, weather, history—there were so many things I did not know!



**As this novel goes to press, there are eerie parallels between the hate crimes in the book to hate crimes in the United States. How do you feel about that?**

Sick. Sad. And astonished that something I conjured years ago, and that frankly seemed almost unbelievable at one time, has become all too real.

**This is your second book that focuses on religious differences. Any particular reason you are interested in that topic?**

I think because I'm not religious that I find religious zeal and passion particularly fascinating. And religious prejudice pretty much unfathomable.

**It could be argued that every single character in this novel, from age twelve to seventy, behaves badly. Why did you choose to do this, and what type of bad behavior do you relate to most?**

Okay, that question made me laugh—and made me realize how much trouble I could get into here! One of the things I really sought to showcase in this book is how seemingly small betrayals can have devastating consequences, and how larger criminal acts can almost make sense, when you put them in context. As for the second half of the question, I relate, on the whole, to Tripp joyfully throwing caution to the wind. I love it when people don't care what other people think!

**Police notes and police reports are sprinkled throughout the book. What made you choose this approach?**

I thought it was a simple but fun way to keep the police presence in the book without turning it into a crime novel, because it is, at its core, a family novel.

**The stresses of raising children while managing elderly parents collide to great effect in this novel. Do you have some direct life experience with this?**

My husband and I have weathered a pretty full spectrum of experiences with our parents—surprising illnesses, sudden death, lingering and heartbreaking declines—all while raising three daughters. I have nothing but compassion for families going through this.

**What are you working on next? More religious zeal and bad behavior?**

Bad behavior always! I'm currently tinkering with a novel about a fugitive mom trying to reconnect with her long-lost sister. See? Bad mom. Fugitive.

Have more questions? Learn more at [kellysimmonsbooks.com](http://kellysimmonsbooks.com)