

“Propulsive and impossible to put down.”

—JULIE CLARK, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Last Flight*

NOT MY BOY

A child wearing a bright red puffer jacket and a grey knit hat with a pom-pom stands with their back to the camera on a playground. The child is positioned in the center, with two empty swings visible on either side. The ground is covered in brown mulch. In the bottom right corner, there is a close-up of a fire burning in a metal container, with flames and smoke rising. The background is a blurred, overcast sky.

KELLY SIMMONS

AUTHOR OF *ONE MORE DAY* AND *WHERE SHE WENT*

A NOVEL

READING GROUP GUIDE

(Note: The author wants all of you to know that she did not base “the world’s bitchiest book club” in her new novel on ANY of the hundreds of reading groups she has visited!)

1. Have any of you ever dreamed of a “family compound,” with relatives nearby, like Hannah and Hillary? Did your dreams change over time, and why?
2. While both Hillary and Hannah love their mother, Eva is sometimes kept removed because of the sisters’ closeness. Have you observed this pattern in other families? And at what cost to the others?
3. The novel contains a number of observations about parenting boys versus parenting girls. For parents—did you notice any differences in the way you or your friends approached this? Do you think Hannah’s attitudes toward Miles’s proclivities and her ex-husband’s interests were justified or are a product of her own prejudices?
4. Miles’s relationship with his cousin, Morgan, is one of the reasons the sisters wanted to live near each other. As readers, did you worry about the closeness between them and what might happen as a result? Did you agree with Hannah’s decision to downplay Miles’s issues in order to keep that friendship intact?

5. If Miles were your son or grandson, what disciplinary choices or parenting decisions would you have made differently? Should he and Hannah have stayed in their former school district and toughed it out? Should Hannah have disciplined her son more harshly? Or protected him more fiercely?
6. What were your feelings about Eva's real estate quest? Do you think it was wrong not to confront Hillary—and inform Hannah—about the illegal financial transaction? Should Eva have threatened her?
7. Even in the midst of an unsolved crime, the neighbors don't consider cancelling the fall festival. How did you feel about this decision?
8. The relationship between Ben and Hannah is one of the most fraught in the book. Do you think Hannah did the right thing by going to the police with her concerns? And do you think, after the final chapter, that she and Ben will be able to be close friends again?

A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

Many of your novels are set in the Main Line area of Philadelphia, which you have said you find endlessly fascinating. Do you think *Not My Boy* could have been set in another place?

The desire of close-knit sisters to raise their children together is pretty universal, so I think there are many towns in America where this could work. But the other elements—one sister's house much bigger than her sister's next door, neighbors who seem friendly but aren't, the history of the estate, the hilly topography with a creek running through it—all made it seem right to be set in Pennsylvania. I guess I could have found a neighborhood in Pittsburgh, but I was too lazy, haha! (Although I love Pittsburgh and lived there for a few years.) There were lots of neighborhoods nearby that I used as a roadmap.

You have three daughters. Was it a challenge to base a novel around a young boy?

Yes, in a way, because there was not as much personal history to draw from. But Hannah was a woman with no brothers, raised by a single mother. Her experience was a girl-centric household, and she was not innately in tune with the world of boys. So I related to that aspect of her and channeled it in writing.

***Not My Boy* is your sixth novel. In what ways do you think your work is different from when you started out?**

Stylistically, sentence for sentence, I think all my work is pretty much of a piece. But I think I've grown better at crafting well-rounded male characters, better at tempering anger, better at offering hope within the darkness. I'm all about the hope.

You've written novels in first person, in third person, and with multiple points of view. Do you prefer one over the other?

I feel most comfortable writing in first person. I just love the intimacy and creating a singular voice. But it's so limiting, especially when writing about crimes and secrets (which I always do!). So I've grown to enjoy and embrace all the flexibility of third person, too.

What's up next for you?

I'm plotting out a book about three sisters who commit a crime in high school and hide it from their mother, who stumbles onto clues ten years later. My daughters are not particularly happy about this!