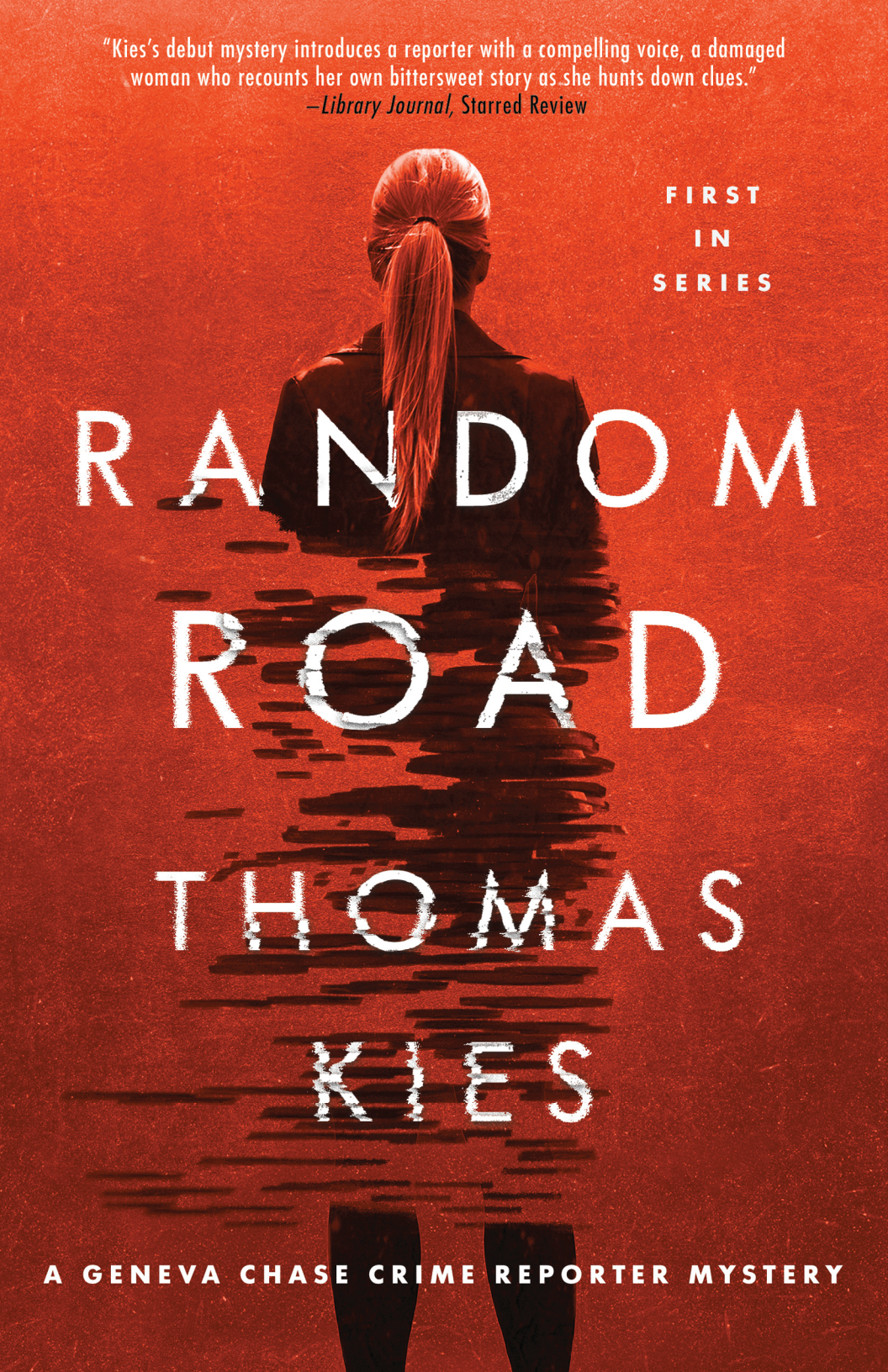


"Kies's debut mystery introduces a reporter with a compelling voice, a damaged woman who recounts her own bittersweet story as she hunts down clues."

—*Library Journal*, Starred Review

FIRST  
IN  
SERIES



RANDOM  
ROAD  
THOMAS  
KIES

A GENEVA CHASE CRIME REPORTER MYSTERY

## READING GROUP GUIDE

1. When Geneva first receives the anonymous call in *Random Road*, she decides not to tell the police. What would you have done? How does her decision shape what happens next?
2. Mike loses Geneva's esteem when he warns her that Kevin is an alcoholic, though he quickly backpedals. How do you think the stigma against addiction affects the path to recovery?
3. Geneva considers her affair with Frank to be about equivalent to Ted's swinging. Do you think she's right? What are the biggest similarities and differences?
4. Even when she's not talking on the record, Geneva gets evasive answers from most people who might know something about the murders. Who did you find the most suspicious? Was there anyone you didn't question who turned out to be important?

5. As much as Geneva hates the consequences of her drinking, she doesn't try very hard to stay on the wagon. What do you think drives her addiction most? Do you think Kevin shares that motivation? Jim Brenner?
6. It's clear that Geneva and Ruth don't get along. What would you consider their primary source of tension? Do you think it changes the way either of them interact with Caroline?
7. Do you agree with Ruth that Kevin's pride and costly health insurance prevented him from seeking help for his pain? Can you think of any other reasons he might want to avoid hospitals?
8. Though she falters in many other aspects of her life, Geneva staunchly maintains her journalistic integrity. Did you think it was realistic for Mike to ask her to downplay the role of the teachers to help his son get into a good school?
9. What do you think of Geneva's final thoughts on death? Do tragedies happen for a reason, or do we just assign them meaning when everything is over?

## A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

**How does your own experience as a journalist shape Geneva's challenges and decisions?**

Working for newspapers and magazines has introduced me to an incredible range of very interesting people, including some very scary characters. It also allowed me to hear some incredible stories and visit places that most people never see. Many of the places in *Random Road* are based on real-life locations, including the sex club.

**The double standards between Sheffield's wealthy and average stand out throughout the book. What brought your attention to those kinds of social issues?**

While working in Fairfield County, Connecticut, where the book takes place, I saw the disparity between the "haves" and the "have nots" again and again. The region is a bedroom community of New York City, and parts of it are incredibly wealthy. However, the state's most impoverished city, Bridgeport, is also in Fairfield County. It's disturbing when some wealthy individuals pretend not to see the people who are serving them in restaurants or restocking the shelves in the grocery store or catering their parties.

**Isadora Orleans is a wonderful surprise in this story. Was there anyone in particular who inspired her? Do you have any experience with art like hers?**

Years ago, I met a gentleman who was a blind artist. His works were these incredible explosions of color. Isadora, whom I adore, works in wood, and yes, I have seen this kind of art. It's both visual and tactile. Isadora is a little bit magical, I think.

**Geneva seems to think that a lot of the decisions made in Sheffield are swayed by closed-door politics. Do you think that's the case in every town?**

Yes, in every town I've ever been in. It wouldn't be politics if some decisions weren't made behind closed doors.

**When you write a book like this, do you start from a broad list of suspects, including people like Jim Brenner, and then narrow them down to your true villain, or do you know the killer all along and add in misdirections to keep readers on their toes?**

In this book, when I started, I didn't have a clue who the villain was or the motive. This was a true adventure for me. At some point, the characters became so real, the dialogue would take place unbidden in my head, and some of the plot twists surprised even me! I love that when I'm writing, I don't always know what's going to happen next.

**You give Geneva a lot of obstacles to overcome at once—a murder, hometown politics, alcoholism, and a terminal love interest. How do you think about that as a writer? Do you ever just feel a little mean?**

A large portion of this book is based on a true story. Real life is a series of obstacles. I think we get pleasure from reading a

novel and watching protagonists overcome multiple obstacles. Am I mean? One of my editors once told me that she never thought that a guy as nice as I am could be so bloodthirsty. My wife laughs that now that she knows the real me, she sleeps with one eye open.

**You write about addiction with great sympathy. What do you want people to take away from Geneva and her struggles with alcoholism?**

I've known a lot of nice people who have suffered from addiction. Some of them overcame it. Some of them didn't. It's a disease that carries with it the baggage of shame, and it shouldn't.

**What's your favorite place to write? Do you have a routine that helps you get in the zone?**

My favorite place to write is my home office over the garage. It's kind of my man cave. In answer to your question about getting into the "zone," I really don't have a problem with that, as long as I don't let myself fall down a rabbit hole on the internet. I'm a news junkie, and I can get lost pretty easily.

**What are you reading these days?**

I'm currently reading Michael Connelly's latest book. Next up, I want to read R. G. Belsky's new Clare Carlson mystery. He also writes from the first person POV of a female journalist.