

“Kristina McMorris does what few writers can—  
transport me right into the middle of the story.”

—SARA GRUEN, author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Water for Elephants*

# sold on a monday

*a novel*



*New York Times* Bestselling Author

KRISTINA McMORRIS

# READING GROUP GUIDE

1. Which character became your favorite? Your least favorite? How did your opinions of the major characters change throughout the story?
2. In the prologue, the unidentified narrator reflects upon “the interwoven paths that had delivered each of us here. Every step a domino essential to knocking over the next.” After reading the book, do you agree with that view? Do you recall any notable incident that wasn’t integral to the final outcome?
3. At the Royal, Max Trevino makes a difficult decision regarding his sister. Do you agree with his choice? Do you believe he intended to stick with the plan he proposed? For readers of McMorris’s novel *The Edge of Lost*, did your impression of Max Trevino differ while reading this book?
4. Early in the story, Lily carries a burden of shame and guilt regarding her son, due to societal norms and her own dark secret. Would you have felt the same in her shoes? Would you, or Lily, feel differently in present times?

5. Like many parents during the Great Depression, Geraldine Dillard faces a near-impossible choice when Alfred Millstone appears at her house with an offer. In her position, would you have made the same decision?
6. People deal with grief in various, sometimes extreme ways. How do you feel about the manner in which Sylvia Millstone and Ellis's father, Jim Reed, came to grips with the loss of a child? Do you sympathize with them equally? What are your thoughts on Alfred Millstone's choices and actions?
7. Throughout the story, Lily struggles to balance motherhood and work. Do you believe her career ambitions were solely for the sake of her son's future? If not, would she ever admit this to herself or another person? Have these considerations changed in today's society?
8. On a mission to find and rescue Calvin, Lily and Ellis break several laws. Do you agree or disagree with their actions? Would you have done anything differently in their situation?
9. In positive and/or negative ways, how do you think Ruby and Calvin were affected by the whole of their experiences in the story? How would these elements likely shape who they'd become as adults, or as parents themselves?
10. Where do you envision the characters soon after the story ends? How about five years from now?

## A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

**Truth in journalism has certainly become a hot topic amid current events. Was this one of the major reasons you chose to write *Sold on a Monday*?**

It was never my main purpose for writing the book, though I did realize early on that it was going to pertain to that subject area. There's obviously a poor decision made by Ellis, being a desperate but well-meaning reporter. And from there, the chief—along with thousands of readers throughout the country—formed their own view of what was captured in Ellis's photo. Specifically, the mother turning away from the camera was seen as evidence of her shame, and Sylvia even interpreted the picture as a sign from her late daughter.

I think it's really important to remember in today's world of viral posts, images, and sound bites that we all bring our own perceptions to the table. And that inevitably these are skewed by our past experiences or even an unconscious desire to see what we want to see. More than ever, quick judgments based on those snippets, and certainly pushing the moral line in reporting, too often can have devastating consequences to others—as Ellis learned the hard way.

**When envisioning a newspaperman from the 1930s, most people likely picture a suited reporter hovering outside**

**a courtroom with a notepad or an oversize camera in hand. Early in the story, why did you choose to make Ellis a more unconventional writer assigned to the Society page?**

I admit, it wasn't the first job I had in mind for him. (Sorry, Ellis!) To make his actions involving the second photo more understandable, though, there had to be a strong reason behind his desperation to hold on to his big break—something that went beyond paying the rent or achieving a promotion. I decided that him being stuck as a so-called “sob sister” would have provided that motivation. In that era, the “women’s pages” were written almost invariably by women, supposedly in no small part because men were so averse to the job. So, it would have been a humiliating assignment for Ellis not only among the staff at the paper, but also with his father.

Interestingly enough, while researching for the book, I happened to learn about Clifford Wallace, the first male editor of the women’s page at the *Toronto Star* and hence nicknamed “Nellie” (as in, yes, Nellie Bly). Apparently, after much begging, he was relieved of the job, which was then given to Gordon Sinclair, who did nearly everything he could to be fired or reassigned. This included limiting his work hours to only three hours a day and even clipping the majority of his material from other newspapers. Before a proofer discovered the latter, Sinclair actually managed to retain his job for more than a year!

**Aside from the true accounts you’ve already mentioned, what are some of your other favorite pieces of history that are woven into the book?**

The actual newspaper articles strewn throughout the story definitely intrigued me the most. A headline about a runaway bride reuniting with her groom made me smile, above all because it appeared as a prominent headline in a major paper. The same went for the piece about the couples caught with thousands of

counterfeit banknotes stuffed in their mattresses. On the grimmer side, the slaying of Mickey Duffy, known as Prohibition's Mr. Big, is primarily fascinating for the fact that his notoriety managed to draw thousands of curious onlookers to his funeral.

As for my very favorite articles...I probably have two. One was the story about a séance held by a rumrunner's widow hoping to identify her husband's murderer, and the second was about the mythical floating nightclub known as the *Flying Dutchman*. (In my novel, I renamed it the *Lucky Seagull*.) During Prohibition, Sanford Jarrell, a reporter at the *Herald Tribune*, wrote a copyrighted lead story detailing his visit to the elusive speakeasy, complete with a map of its location and a menu of prices. The article and his follow-up pieces quickly became quite the sensation, so much so that authorities went on a determined hunt for the ship. But soon after, many of his claims began to fall apart, and when pressured with questions, Jarrell resigned with a note confessing that the whole story was a hoax. In a painful front-page admission, the paper ended up publishing an acknowledgment of the truth, admitting it had been deceived.

**When it comes to bustling newsrooms, New York City quickly comes to mind, especially for a story that involves supper clubs, gambling halls, and mobsters. Was there a reason you chose Philadelphia as another setting over a city like, say, Chicago?**

I actually used to live near Chicago and absolutely love that city. Since I'd already featured it in some of my other novels, though, I thought it would be fun to go with another setting. Years ago, I also lived near Philadelphia for a time, so I was already familiar with the area and its rich history. Plus, Pennsylvania's diversity of landscapes and livelihoods made it ideal for the story. Within a relatively short driving distance from all the activity of a big city, there are sprawling fields and farms, mining towns, and textile factories. And, of course, the



presence there of major mobsters during the '30s added even more appeal.

**What were some of the most helpful resources for your research?**

Personal experience from growing up around a newsroom was probably the most helpful. As a kid, I was fortunate enough to host a children's weekly television show for an ABC affiliate station. We would shoot in the studio every Wednesday night, squeezed in between the two evening news programs. While waiting around during editing, I would hang out with the anchors, reporters, and sportscasters. But my favorite person was the meteorologist who let me move the clouds around on the weather map. (Hey, back then, this was very high-tech.) Later, while in college and exploring different career paths, I even had a summer internship in that same newsroom.

Of course, to gather more insight for the story, I relied on a combination of journalist friends, documentaries, and a stack of wonderful nonfiction books. Those I found the most valuable include *Skyline* by Gene Fowler, *City Editor* by Stanley Walker, *Nearly Everybody Read It: Snapshots of the Philadelphia Bulletin* edited by Peter Binzen, and *The Paper: The Life and Death of the New York Herald Tribune* by Richard Kluger.