

BOOK CLUB KIT

"BEAUTIFULLY WRITTEN. AS IF
TAYLOR JENKINS REID WROTE A CRIME NOVEL."
—New York Times Bestselling Author EMILIA HART

THE SECRET LIVES OF MURDERERS' WIVES

A Novel

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BERKLEY

DEAR READER,

I'm so excited to introduce you to Beverley, Elsie and Margot—three ex-wives of convicted killers. They may be very different in character, but they all know just what it's like to share a life, and a bed, with a serial murderer....

Like many of us, I have a long-standing fascination with true crime. I'm drawn in by Ted Bundy trivia; I can spout endless opinions about the MO of the Golden State Killer. But more recently, I've wanted to delve deeper into the lives of those left in the wake of violent crime—the parents, the children, the siblings, the wives, whose lives are upended simply by being in the orbit of these dangerous men.

I am inspired by Kerri Rawson, daughter of Dennis Rader (otherwise known as BTK), who has worked with the FBI to help identify some of her father's possible victims. I have deep respect for Judith Mawson, wife of the Green River killer, who had no idea what her husband Gary was up to until the cops knocked on her door one sunny autumn morning. I'm amazed by women who have been such a huge part of these killers' lives, and who could very easily have disappeared into the long shadows of their crimes, but who choose to talk, to face it all head on, to stand tall.

I set this novel very intentionally in the late 1960s, when serial killers weren't yet called "serial killers," but when the notion of the mass or multiple murderer was just starting to seep into public consciousness, compelling people to double-lock their doors at night and eye their co-workers with suspicion.

Kind early readers have described it as *Lessons in Chemistry* with a body count; *Mad Men* with murders; a Taylor Jenkins Reid novel with added serial killers. I'm overwhelmed and (ludicrously) flattered by those comparisons, but more than anything, I see the book as testament to the sheer resilience of women. They might get by with a margarita in hand, like Margot, by tenaciously chasing the facts, like Elsie, or with a large side-helping of guilt, like Beverley. But they'll do it. Because women are incredible, and when they join forces to bring bad people to justice—just like Bev, Elsie and Margot are trying to do—they are unstoppable.

I *hugely* appreciate you taking the time to read, and I very much hope you enjoy the book.

All my best,

Elizabeth Arnott

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Beverley, Elsie and Margot have each reacted in very different ways to the discovery that their husbands were killers. Which of the women do you most relate to in that sense? What do you think you would do in the same situation?
2. Beverley has a complex relationship with her mother. How much do you think one's upbringing informs their choice of romantic partner?
3. Elsie is attempting to climb the ranks in the newsroom, but finds herself battling sexism and snobbery. Have you ever experienced prejudice at work? Did it make you more determined to succeed, as it did Elsie?
4. Beverley is unable to fully let go of her ex-husband even though he has committed terrible crimes. Do you understand why she felt connected to him?
5. The book is set against a backdrop of police misconduct and prejudice. Do you think our modern society's general opinion of the police has changed over the years?
6. Throughout the novel, Beverley worries that her son, Benjamin, might have inherited the same "rotten core" as his father. Where do you stand on the nature vs. nurture debate? Is "evil" something that is inherited or learned?
7. Margot insists on partying her way through the echoes of her husband's crimes. In your experience, how important have you found humor and escapism to be in dealing with difficult circumstances?
8. The novel features lots of music references from the 1960s, from the Rolling Stones to Dusty Springfield. Are there any songs that you would add to a *Secret Lives of Murderers' Wives* playlist?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

9. At one point, Margot comforts Beverley by telling her: "We cannot keep bad people from doing bad things." Do you believe this is true today? What do you think about the sense of responsibility Beverley felt?
10. Are there any likable male characters in the novel? Do you think the women could be accused of disliking all men?
11. Do you think the families of the murderers in *The Secret Lives of Murderers' Wives* are treated fairly by the press and the general public? Were you surprised that Elsie, Beverley, and Margot didn't completely retreat from the public eye?
12. How much do you relate to the passage "Being a murderer's wife had gifted Elsie something—a layer of armor that, until then, she'd been lacking"? Do you think we can be made stronger by the most traumatic things that happen to us? Have you had that experience?
13. Did you judge Beverley, Elsie or Margot at any point in the story? Did your opinions of them change as the book progressed? Did you have a favorite character in the novel?
14. Beverley, Elsie and Margot are all very different, but their friendship is incredibly strong. Do you think our differences can make us closer? What did you admire most about their friendship?

