

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

SALLY  
HEPWORTH

Darling  
Girls

The truth won't  
stay buried



Reading Group Notes



# Darling Girls

SALLY HEPWORTH

## Reading Group Notes

### About the book

It's not just secrets buried at Wild Meadows.

For as long as they can remember, Jessica, Norah and Alicia have been told how lucky they are. Rescued from family tragedies and raised by a loving foster mother on an idyllic farming estate, they were given an elusive second chance of a happy family life.

But their childhood wasn't the fairy tale everyone thinks it was. And when a body is discovered under the home they grew up in, the foster sisters find themselves thrust into the spotlight as key witnesses.

Or are they prime suspects?

A thrilling page-turner of sisterhood, secrets, love and murder by *New York Times* bestselling author Sally Hepworth.

### About the author

Sally Hepworth is the *New York Times* bestselling author of nine novels, including *The Good Sister* and *The Soulmate*. Drawing on the good, the bad and the downright odd of human behaviour, Sally writes incisively about family, relationships and identity. Her domestic thriller novels are laced with quirky humour, sass and a darkly charming tone. They are available worldwide in English and have been translated into twenty languages.

Sally lives in Melbourne, Australia, with her family and one adorable dog.

## Discussion questions

\* Please note, these questions contain spoilers \*

## Themes

### Family

1. *'It's a sister thing,' Jessica had said, glancing at their female therapist for solidarity. 'No one loves their husband as much as their sisters, am I right?'* (Page 27)

Jessica, Norah and Alicia identify as sisters even though they only met in their tweens/teens. In some ways it could be said they are closer than biological sisters. How do you think their combined trauma at the hands of Miss Fairchild formed their adult bonds? What does Jessica's statement about her relationship with her foster sisters tell us about her?

2. The idea of what constitutes a family is explored in several ways throughout this book. Compare the family units that Jessica, Norah and Alicia have created (or create as this book progresses) as adults. What sets them apart? In what ways are they similar?

### Mental health

3. All three sisters have long-standing mental health issues which are rooted in their childhood experiences at Wild Meadows and with some of their other foster carers. Can you identify some of these problems and how they might have come about?
4. How does the discovery of the body at Wild Meadows and the women's journey to Port Agatha help each woman to begin resolving their issues?
5. The three sisters each use coping mechanisms that solve their immediate problems but cause long-term issues for them. What are some of these?
6. On the other hand, all three women have resilience and have found successful ways to function in their adult lives. Why do you think this is? Is it in spite of – or because of – their experiences in foster care, do you think? What other factors might be at play?
7. Although it may not have been intentional on the police's part, the three foster sisters were eventually led to believe they had imagined their fellow foster sister, Amy. What part has this gaslighting played in their development as adults? How does this injustice affect the investigation of the current homicide case?

### Foster care

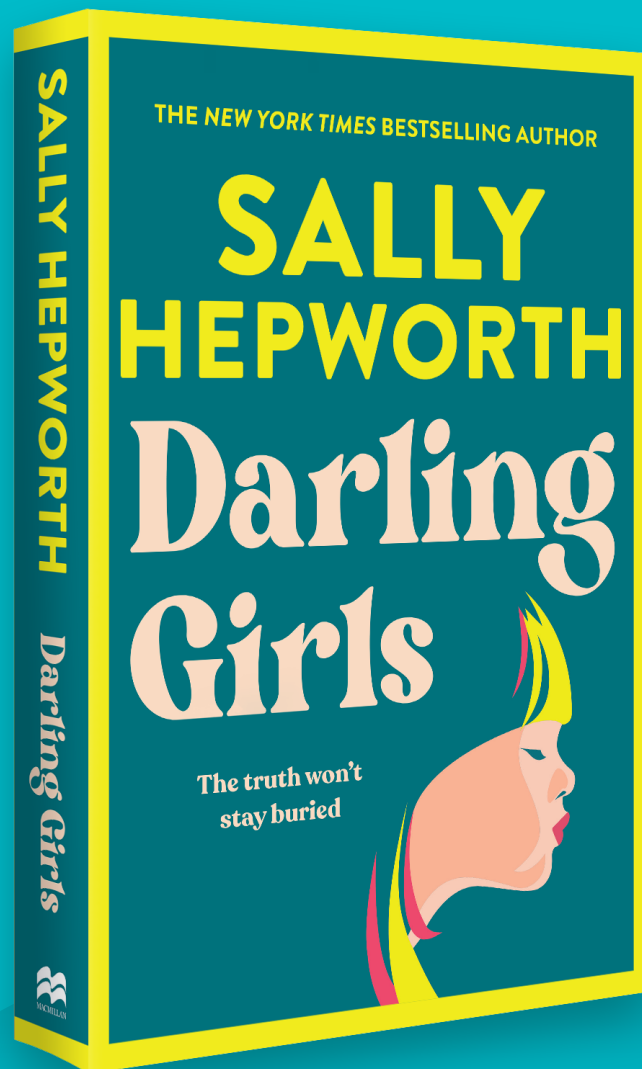
8. Foster care in general is portrayed in both positive and negative lights in this novel. What are some of the ways it fails children in need, and in what ways can it be life-changing? Discuss.
9. The concept of 'ageing out' of foster care at age eighteen is discussed in relation to Aaron. What do you think of this concept? Is it fair or ethical? What, if any, are the alternatives?

## Characters

10. Which of the sisters did you relate to most, and why? Did you like the characters?
11. Were you fooled by Miss Fairchild?

## Settings

12. The majority of *Darling Girls* takes place in Port Agatha, a fictional small town in Victoria. On the surface, Wild Meadows is a beautiful house with a swimming pool and horses in a peaceful setting. Miss Fairchild herself is described as a 'fairytale princess'. What does this have to say about appearances, and what lies under the surface of things?



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