

READING NOTES

FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE MOTHER-IN-LAW*

SALLY HEPWORTH

'An exceptional observer of
people and their relationships'

GRAEME SIMSION



THE GOOD SISTER

EVERYONE HAS A DARK SIDE



BLURB

There's only been one time that Rose couldn't stop me from doing the wrong thing and that was a mistake that will haunt me for the rest of my life.

Fern Castle works in her local library. She has dinner with her twin sister Rose three nights a week. And she avoids crowds, bright lights and loud noises as much as possible. Fern has a carefully structured life and disrupting her routine can be ...dangerous.

When Rose discovers that she cannot fall pregnant, Fern sees her chance to pay her sister back for everything Rose has done for her. Fern can have a baby for Rose. She just needs to find a father. Simple.

Fern's mission will shake the foundations of the life she has carefully built for herself and stir up dark secrets from the past, in this quirky, rich and shocking story of unexpected love.

AUTHOR BIO

Sally Hepworth has lived around the world, spending extended periods in Singapore, the United Kingdom and Canada, where she worked in event management and human resources. She is the author of *The Secrets of Midwives*, *The Things We Keep*, *The Mother's Promise*, *The Family Next Door* and *The Mother-in-Law*.

Sally now lives in Melbourne, with her husband, three children and one adorable dog.



THEMES

NEURODIVERSITY

‘I try to avoid conversations about things other than books, although I’ll occasionally indulge Gayle in a conversation about her garden or her grandchildren, because Rose says it’s polite to do this with people who we like.’ (Page 8)

‘Attempts to reschedule to another night have not gone well, historically. These cornerstones to my routine are what keep me calm and grounded.’ (Page 22)

‘I would, of course, require a man to have intercourse with, but that shouldn’t be too difficult. Apparently, they can be found at nearly every bar and club, prowling for women to have no-strings-attached intercourse with. Unfortunately, I don’t go to bars or clubs. But surely men congregate in other places too.’ (Page 34)

‘For a person with sensory processing issues, a swimming carnival is what hell would look like. The warm, wet claustrophobia of the building, the cheering and shouting, the garish team colours, the stench of chlorine.’ (Page 50)

1. Fern displays many characteristics of someone on the autism spectrum, though she has never been formally diagnosed. Do you think we need to do more as a society to allow neurodiverse people to feel integrated, for example, like the class Fern runs at the end for kids with sensory issues?
2. Like Fern, Wally has certain traits that make him different from others. Do you think Wally was neuro atypical? How was he similar or different to Fern? Do you think we, as a society, expect neuro atypical people to be the same?

“Rose is my person,” I tell him.

Wally blinks. “Your person?”

“You know. Your person. Your wife or husband. Your child. Your boyfriend. Your best friend. Someone whose name you can put down on paperwork. Someone you can share personal information with. Someone you can rely on.” (Page 59)

“I’ve had to do a mountain of paperwork. And it appears I need an emergency contact person in the country.”



He holds out the page to me, and I know what he's going to say before he says it...

“Would you consider ... being my person?” Wally asks, holding out a pen.’
(Page 146)

3. During a discussion with Wally, Fern talks about the need to have a ‘person’. Her inference is that everyone should have one. Does everyone have a ‘person’? What do you think are the consequences of not having one?
4. Up until she sees her true colours, Fern adores Rose. She relies on her, seeks her out when she needs advice, and trusts her implicitly. Do you think her inability to see Rose’s true character is to do with the way Fern sees the world? Or is it that learned blindness that we all experience with our families to some extent?

“Why can’t I just be normal?” I whisper.

“You are. It’s everyone else who are weirdos.” (Page 198)

‘I’m beginning to think Wally was right when he said I was normal and everyone else were the weirdos.’ (Page 323)

5. It is widely recognised that many neurodiverse individuals excel in areas including attention to detail, sustained concentration and recognising patterns. So, does Wally have a point?
6. How did you feel about Wally and Fern getting to keep their baby? Did you have any concerns about their ability to care for Willow?

SISTERS

“And you don’t have great boundaries with [Rose] either. You blindly believe anything that she tells you. You don’t question anything she says.” (Page 213)

‘Sisterly relationships are so strange in this way. The way I can be mad at Rose but still want to please her. Be terrified of her and also want to run to her. Hate her and love her, both at the same time. Maybe when it comes to sisters, boundaries are always a little bit blurry. Blurred boundaries, I think, are what sisters do best.’ (Page 227)



7. We see early on that Fern and Rose do not have clear boundaries with each other. Not only is Rose overzealous when it comes to Fern's life, Fern takes it upon herself to have a baby for Rose (without even telling her about it). If you have a sister, do you have clear boundaries with her? Would you have a baby for your sister if she couldn't have one?
8. Sisters are known for being close. How does it compare to a brother / sister relationship? If you have both a brother and sister, how is that relationship different? How is it similar?
9. Fern and Rose are twins, but very different. How much of that is to do with the fact that Fern is neuro atypical. Imagine for a moment that she wasn't. How do you think this would have affected their relationship?

BONUS QUESTIONS

Sally's daughters were the inspiration behind *The Good Sister*. While they don't have any deep, dark secrets (that we know of...) they do want to contribute two very important questions:

Clementine (3 years old): This book doesn't have fairies in it, would fairies make this book better or worse. Discuss.

Eloise (7 years old): Who is the good sister, me or Clementine?

THE SECRET

10. We all have a narrative from our childhood that we believe. It can be jarring when, as adults, we find out that things didn't happen the way we thought they did, or someone wasn't the way we perceived them to be. Has that ever happened to you? What was something you believed as a child that turned out to be very different from what you thought?
11. Fern spent most of her life believing that she was responsible for Billy's death. This made her fearful of herself, and increased her reliance on Rose. If Billy hadn't died, how do you think Fern's self-confidence and dependency on Rose might have been different?
12. Did you guess that Rose was falsifying the letters in her diary? If so, at which point did you guess?



13. How important was Wally in Fern's ultimate awakening to Rose's true character? Imagine Fern and Wally had only had a one-night stand, and not a relationship. Do you think Fern would have remained none-the-wiser to Rose's manipulative ways and the fact that she was not responsible for Billy's death?

'I hope she's enjoying her time with my baby. Because once this journal is in circulation, she won't have her long. I'm telling you, Fern might be the librarian ...but I'm the one who can spin a tale.' (Page 328)

14. In the end of the novel, Rose is still plotting to get the baby and have revenge on Fern. How did you feel about this ending? Would you have preferred it to end more neatly or did you like this ominous note left hanging in the air?