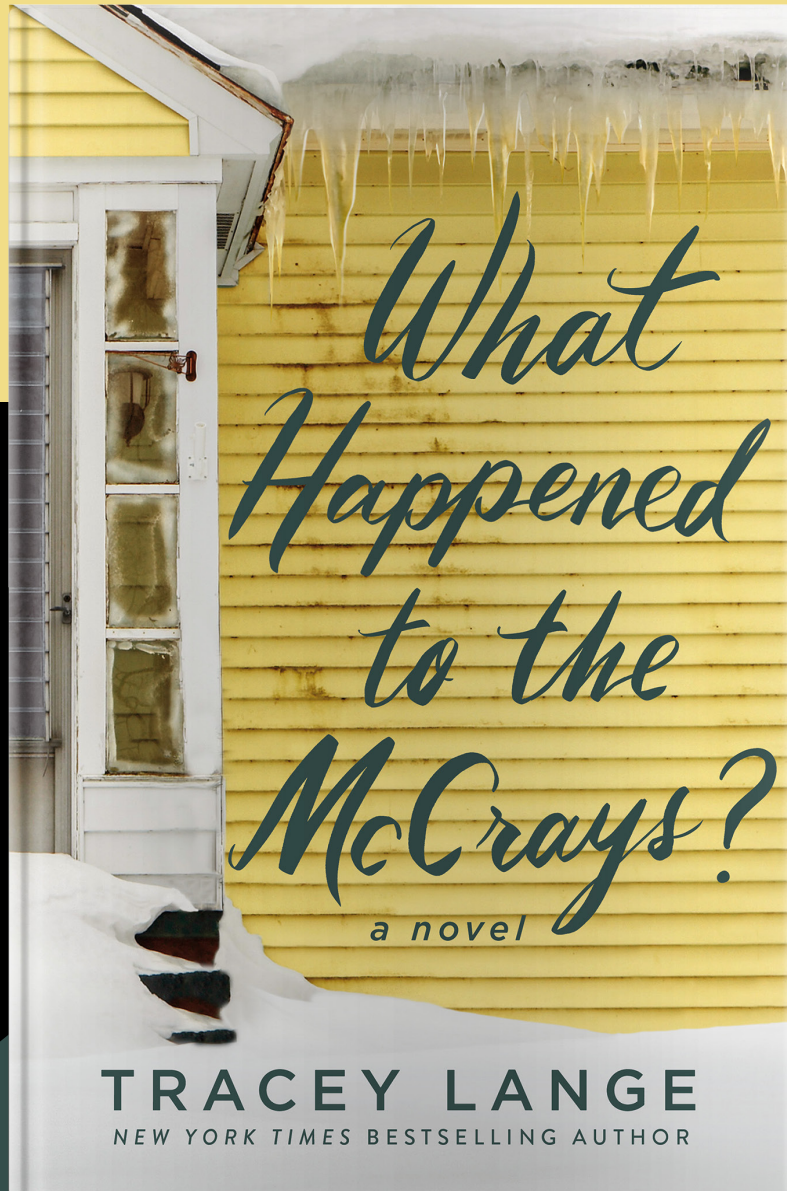


Book Club Kit



“WE WERE PLEASANTLY SURPRISED BY HOW MUCH WE COLLECTIVELY LOVED THIS BOOK! THE CONVERSATION IT CREATED WAS INSIGHTFUL AND HEARTWARMING.”

—TECUMSEH THRILLER BOOK CLUB (TECUMSEH, MI)

AN INTERVIEW

with Tracey Lange



TRACEY LANGE was born and raised in New York City. She graduated from the University of New Mexico with a degree in psychology before owning and operating a behavioral healthcare company with her husband for fifteen years. She completed the Stanford University online novel writing program, and is the author of *We Are the Brennans* and *The Connellys of County Down*. She currently lives in Bend, Oregon with her husband, two sons, and beloved German Shepherd.

Compared to your earlier novels, there is less focus on sibling relationships in this story and instead a failed marriage takes center stage. Did this main dynamic change your writing process?

In general, my process for this book was like that of my previous books. I knew I wanted to explore divorce, and I started by spending many months getting to know my characters and fleshing them out. When I began writing the first draft, there was a lot I didn't know, including how the book would end. Working with only two points of view was different for me but seemed the best way to tell this story, since the focus was on that relationship. This was also the first time I employed a dual timeline — the Now and Then chapters — which allowed me to take deep dives into the McCrays' history without long sections of backstory or flashbacks. However, like my previous books, I built the story scene by scene in a linear fashion.

Casey and Kyle both struggle with their grief in different, sometimes self-destructive ways. Why did you choose grief as such a central theme in this novel?

To a large degree, the theme of grief chose me. Initially my focus was on the effect of divorce on not only Kyle and Casey but also their extended family and small community. It wasn't until partway through my first draft that I realized what tore them apart. At that point, grief and how we deal with it became a big part of the story.

The middle school hockey team plays a large role in the book. Are you a hockey fan?

I've always had an appreciation for hockey, though my involvement was limited to having relatives who played in high school and attending a couple of Rangers games long ago. Once I decided on a small winter town as the setting, hockey was a natural choice. Additionally, the physicality and teamwork and tolerance for pain required by the sport tied in well with the larger story.

Discussion Questions

- 1** Although the story is centered on Casey and Kyle, they are part of a wide cast of characters that make up the book. Did you bond with any in particular?
- 2** If you could have advised one character during the story, who would it be and what would you have said?
- 3** The story is told in a “then and now” format, moving between the past and present of Casey and Kyle’s relationship. How did this affect your reading experience and your understanding of their history?
- 4** How do you think the novel’s close-knit small-town setting affected the characters’ decisions?
- 5** When Kyle returns to Potsdam, he finds that, contrary to his expectations, most people do not harbor resentment about him leaving. Why do you think this is, and why do you think Kyle expected anger?
- 6** The circumstances of Casey and Kyle’s divorce are slowly revealed over the course of the novel. Were you surprised when the loss of Charlie was revealed? How did it make you think about what you had already read?
- 7** Casey and Kyle dreamed of traveling together, but they also feel a close connection to their small hometown of Potsdam. What role do you think this dream of traveling plays in their lives?
- 8** The middle school students that Casey teaches and Kyle coaches play a significant role in the story, especially because they are in the same grade that Charlie was in. How do you think interacting with these students helped both characters confront their past?

Discussion Questions

- 9 Lack of communication is a major issue for Casey and Kyle as they rekindle their relationship. Did you find their struggles with vulnerability and honesty relatable?
- 10 Compare and contrast how Kyle and Casey dealt with their emotional pain. What were the differences and similarities? Could you relate to one or more?
- 11 What did Charlie's tragedy bring up for you? Did it hit close to home in any way?
- 12 What significance does Star have in the story? Why is she part of it?
- 13 Wyatt and Casey have a very close relationship. Is their sibling dynamic familiar to you? Why do you think they begin to live more independently by the end of the novel?
- 14 Have you read books by this author before? What themes from *What Happened to the McCrays*? do you recognize from her other books? Did you find the Easter eggs?

TRACEY LANGE

answers book club discussion questions

Why did you choose to set the novel in Potsdam, New York? How does the novel's close-knit small-town setting affect the characters' decisions?

Having resided in a very small northern town in Idaho for 18 years, I'm familiar with the pros and cons of living in a rural area. I wanted to surround Kyle and Casey with people who knew them well and could reflect different facets of their personalities and their relationship — family members, friends they'd grown up with, longtime co-workers. Throughout the course of the story, they each have opportunities to learn about how their decisions have impacted the people around them, and that shift in perspective is part of their healing. Once I knew what I was looking for in a setting, Potsdam fit the bill. It's a small, pretty, isolated town with lots of history and personality, and harsh winters that require people to depend on each other. The fact that there are two universities located there added a nice layer as well.

What significance does Star have in the story? Why is she part of it?

Family pets are such a reflection of the people they live with. They usually adopt the family personality and are a barometer for what's happening with their people. Since Star knows the McCrays so well, it was a good chance to offer a slightly different perspective on Kyle and Casey and what they've been through. She also afforded opportunities for some fun and humor.

Wyatt and Casey have a very close relationship. Is their sibling dynamic familiar to you?

Their special dynamic is not personally familiar to me, but I know people who are particularly close to their siblings, and it's always heartwarming to see that kind of connection. Unfortunately, sometimes that closeness is borne of surviving rough times together, as is the case with Casey and Wyatt. After losing their parents so young, they relied on each other to the utmost degree and their bond grew very strong.

If you decide to adopt *What Happened to the McCrays?* for your book club, we would love to hear about it! Please let us know by emailing us at reader@celadonbooks.com or post on social media using the hashtags #CeladonBookClub and #WhatHappenedtotheMcCrays.