



JULIA HEABERLIN

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**BOOK CLUB KIT**

# A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

**Dear Book Club readers,**

I'm honored that you have chosen *We Are All the Same in the Dark*, my dark and twisty small-town cold case thriller set in the beautiful and flawed Texas that I love.

I've long been a fan of book clubs—although I don't believe that label adequately describes what these gatherings are all about. Book clubs are intimate places where I have discovered the deepest insights into my writing (and those of other novelists). I've attended many that are nothing less than bonded sisterhoods.

At one book club I took part in to discuss my novel *Black-Eyed Susans*, I ate deviled eggs and cupcakes decorated like black-and-yellow flowers while we talked about our differing opinions on the death penalty. No one hated each other at the end. Cupcakes and books—the great equalizers.

At another, in a small-frame house out on a dark and lonely farm road I thought I'd never find, we drank wine and discussed the themes of *Lie Still*, which included date rape. One woman quietly revealed to the group an attack from her past. It is a moment I will never forget.

And I always leave a book club in Texas with a foil-wrapped package of leftover food to take to my family. For authors who work solitary jobs with only imagination for company, there is nothing that rivals these

connections with actual readers, even if it is a simple exchange on social media.

I hope you enjoy the thriller ride of *We Are All the Same in the Dark*. I worked hard on the twists and a surprise at the end. But mostly I hope that its two ferocious heroines—one missing an eye, one missing a leg—will prompt a discussion about how our culture still perpetuates stereotypes about ideal physical beauty. During my research, I interviewed a number of women and young girls who wear prosthetics. And now I never want to use the word “disabled” again unless it can apply to all of us.

Yes, it's a new virtual world. We can't turn the last page yet. But I believe we are more bonded by books than ever.

**Thank you again.**



**Julia Heaberlin**



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# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions contain spoilers for *We Are All the Same in the Dark*.

1. “I want to tell her, *We are all the same in the dark*.” Why do you think Julia Heaberlin chose this as the title for her novel? How does this sentiment relate to the characters and how they are perceived? How does it relate to the topics of vulnerability and overcoming adversity? What does its sentiment mean to you?
2. In the book, Wyatt and Odette are haunted—literally and figuratively—and burdened by the past. Is there any time or place in your own life where you felt the weight of history? Do you believe in ghosts, or have you ever had a paranormal experience? If so, what is your “theory” of ghosts (what they’re like, how they reach us, and what purpose they serve)?
3. How does small town gossip and legend work against Odette? How do the stories we tell, and the stories we tell ourselves, shape our identity and expectations? Have you ever had to challenge any personal narratives or myths?
4. Thwarted potential is a theme in the novel—from Trumanell’s death to Wyatt losing his mind to Odette and Angel losing physical parts of themselves. In our culture, we love prodigies, ingenues, wunderkinds, and rising stars. Why is potential so fascinating and prized in our culture? Is it overvalued?
5. “I always wondered: What if I’d watched the reel of my movie with her one more time? Two more times? Three more times? What else might I have seen through the crack of the door . . . .” Odette is haunted by those *what-if* scenarios: *What if* she could have said or done something differently with her friend, could her death have been prevented? She carries those alternate realities in her mind and tortures herself with what could have been. She longs to rewrite history—but it can never be done. How does this relate to her relationship with Angel? Do you have any *what-if* parallel universes in your mind? Have you ever compared yourself or your choices to a hypothetical alternative?

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

6. “The house bullies me with its history,” Odette remarks on page 84. How do the Texas setting and its landmarks take on human characteristics, and what is the effect? Do you think that places can hold onto memories, that the events of what occurred there can linger?
7. Discuss Odette and Angel’s reluctance to let the loss of an eye and a leg define them. How does it interact with their traumas and inform their ambitions over time?
8. Wyatt tells Finn that, “[He] shouldn’t mistake grief for love. Guilt for passion.” What did he mean by this? How does it manifest in other ways besides Odette’s feelings for Wyatt? Do you agree that grief can easily be misconstrued as other emotions, and if so, why?
9. How do you feel about the time gap in the middle of the novel—and Odette’s shocking fate? Are you surprised by any of the characters and what they are up to five years after Odette’s death?
10. In *We Are All the Same in the Dark*, many characters express a frustration with the half-truths of an explosive documentary, and it is revealed that Dr. Greco has authored a true crime book about Trumanell and Odette. Why do you think we are so fascinated with stories about crime and murder? What does the novel say about the pitfalls of how we choose to frame certain stories? Do you think it’s fair for a documentary to have certain biases?
11. “We are whole human beings existing the best we can without a part. . . . That’s everybody who is a survivor.” What does the novel suggest about the possibility of repair after enormous trauma? What fuels each characters’ quest for healing, and what do you think is necessary for individuals to recover?