



YOU ARE NOT ALONE

by Greer Hendricks and Sarah Pekkanen

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A Conversation with the Authors

How do you both approach the process of writing a new book? How do you prepare separately and then together collaborate to integrate your ideas? Or is there a magic formula to working together?

We are both psychologically-minded and inquisitive, and we spend hours every day brainstorming potential characters and plotlines. When we're gearing up to write, we fill our minds with storytelling: We read a lot (books, newspapers, magazines, and screenplays). We try to stay on top of the new television shows and movies, and we also love audiobooks and podcasts. We enjoy deconstructing what makes different creative projects work—the ingredients that compose compelling, unforgettable stories. We also love trying to figure out what makes people tick, and we share our observations with each other. Throughout the day, we constantly email, text, and call each other with ideas, insights, and inspirations. We often park our ideas in a shared Google document (our one for Book 4 is creatively titled Book 4). Sometimes our notes seem brilliant at the time, but when we reread them, they occasionally don't make any sense!

The process of settling on a plot and the characters who inhabit it can take us several months. When we're ready to write, we guard our work hours together zealously, carving out long stretches of time every day in which we talk over Google Hangouts while simultaneously penning every single line of our book together using a shared Google Doc. It's a unique system, and one that works beautifully for us. Readers are often surprised to learn that we never fight. We are usually in complete agreement editorially, but when we have creative differences, they energize us as we talk through the possibilities and settle on a solution that feels right to us both.



About the Authors

What is it about New York City that appeals to you both as a setting for your novels?hit the perfect balance of working together, or are you still refining how you go about it?

You Are Not Alone was originally set outside of New York City in a claustrophobic, retreat-like atmosphere. About a third of the way through our first draft we realized the story wasn't working. We felt blocked in a way we never had before. At first we couldn't figure out what the issue was. The characters? The plot? Finally we realized that the setting was too restrictive and it wasn't allowing our characters the range of motion they needed. Once we relocated the story to New York City, the story began to soar. We love the creative possibilities offered by the city—because of its diversity, our characters can have any background, occupation, income level, living situation, and collection of secrets that we dream up.

Why do the rich bonds and deep secrets between friends make for such a compelling story?

One of the themes throughout our work is ordinary women (Vanessa in *The Wife Between Us* and Jess in *An Anonymous Girl*) who are faced with extraordinary circumstances and must find the inner strength to overcome them. In *You Are Not Alone*, we wanted to continue that theme with Shay, while also exploring the issue of loneliness. These days we are more connected than ever via electronics and yet we feel more isolated. Social media can seemingly link us to others while emotionally separating us.

We have also heard from a lot of readers that they have read many books about the “perfect” husband, nanny, or job that become dangerous or even deadly, but this is the first time they have read about the “perfect” friends in that role.

What is some of the best feedback readers have shared with you since the publication of *A Wife Between Us*?

We express gratitude for each other and our partnership every day. Our motto is “better together” since we are both aware we could never write our complex, twisty-turny books alone. Some of the best feedback we have received is about our relationship. Our audience seems very inspired by our collaboration, and the power and support women create when we unite.

We also love connecting with readers during our book tours and on social media, and a number of women have talked to us about how they escaped an abusive relationship, and how *A Wife Between Us* helped them to feel validated and empowered. Those responses have brought us to tears.

What is next on the horizon for you?

We are hard at work on “Book 4” and, like our other novels, it will feature complex, compelling female characters and a corkscrew plot. Because our plots are fluid—changing as we write—we can’t give too much away. But we’re committed to giving our readers our best book possible.



Reading Group Questions

1. How does data shape Shay's world and how does she process it? Does her data journal ultimately serve a higher purpose? Did you find Shay's data entries helped set up key moments in the story? Which data nuggets did you find particularly interesting or surprising?
2. Discuss how the Moore sisters came to infiltrate the lives of Stacey, Daphne, Beth, and Amanda. How did their paths overlap and what does each woman bring to the table in terms of their talents? What are they asked to sacrifice for the favors they've been given?
3. Were you impressed by the Moore sisters' level of surveillance and intervention in others' lives? How is this influence wielded in both sinister and life-affirming ways? What ties these seemingly dissimilar women together?
4. Do you think Shay could have avoided being absorbed into the sisters' orbit? What was appealing to Shay about these glamorous women? Is loneliness Shay's greatest weakness?
5. What psychological tricks and methods (like offering gifts) do the Moore sisters use to brilliantly manipulate their targets?
6. When did you suspect Amanda was in danger? What about Shay? What early signs tipped you off?
7. How did your feeling about Detective Williams evolve throughout the book? When did you realize that she was operating behind the scenes to help Shay?
8. Describe how you felt watching Shay transform into a clone of Amanda and paradoxically grow into a more independent and confident version of herself. Were you torn about how Shay was evolving? When did the cost grow too high?

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9. What is it about New York City—a modern, bustling, and compressed city—that serves as an ideal backdrop or accomplice to this story?
10. Discuss the early lives of the Moore sisters—what did you learn later in the novel that helped color your reading of their actions or behaviors? Did you root for them at any point in the story? Who was really the master architect of their plans, and how did the sisters manage to look out for each other?
11. Discuss Sean and Jody's role in Shay's life. How did their triangle affect Shay's susceptibility to the Moore sisters' overtures? What do the people in Shay's life get wrong about her or misread?
12. When Shay visits Amanda's mother, she feels as if she's tumbled into something called the Snowball Effect: "Basically it means that people who commit small acts of dishonesty find it easier to tell more lies. As your fabrications pile up, your anxiety and shame start to disappear" (p. 116). Why does Shay think this? And does the Snowball Effect apply to the other women in this novel besides Shay?
13. "Everything is working beautifully. Even though Cassandra and Jane don't enjoy deceiving the other women, it's necessary to protect them" (p. 195). Do the other women in the group consent to setting up Shay for the crime? Why? How do they engage with the sisters' plans, even if seemingly coerced by their debt to them?
14. What cracks do the sisters begin to show that give away their scheme? The clues inadvertently dropped about a smoothie recipe, bedroom doors being left ajar, meeting the neighbor with a cat—do these tip off Shay initially? How does she continue to justify their kindnesses against the mounting evidence of something sinister at work?



15. Who is James and why does he become the target for the circle? What heinous acts has he committed? Does he deserve the punishment he gets?
16. What separates justice from revenge? Can you justify the intentions of the Moore sisters? Is their mission sympathetic? Is their approach more swift and satisfying than the legal system, as they assert?
17. Could you imagine yourself falling under the spell of the Moore sisters? What would appeal to you, or what characteristics of your personality would make you the most vulnerable to their influence?
18. Did you enjoy the cat-and-mouse chase and subway clash at the end of the novel? Were you satisfied and surprised by how all the puzzle pieces came together?
19. Did you consider Shay's last actions suspect—is there any question she committed a murder? What do you think she feels in her heart?

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