

READERS' GUIDE

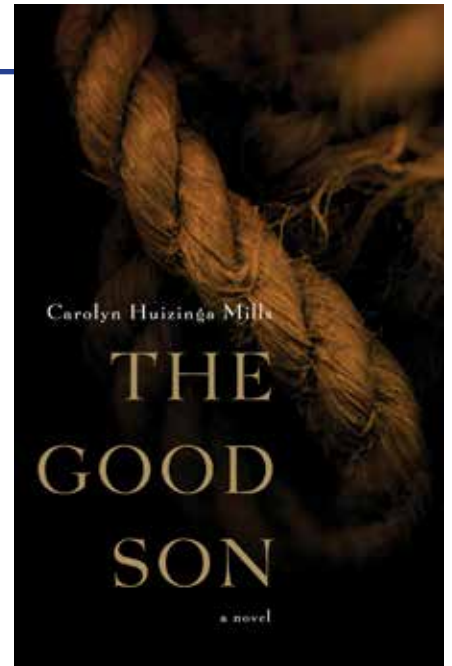
The Good Son by Carolyn Huizinga Mills

INTRODUCING *The Good Son*

Zoe Emmerson has a secret, one she's kept for years. Her quiet world is shaken when her past finally catches up with her: the investigation into the murder of a six-year-old neighbour is reopened thirty years after the fact, threatening to destroy her and everyone she's fought so hard to protect.

She was just a child when it happened, scared and confused, and she's never been entirely sure what she saw. But she kept her brother's suspected involvement in the murder from the police, and the knowledge that she withheld a crucial piece of information haunts her.

As the past collides with the present, Zoe is forced to face a most difficult truth.



IMPORTANT THEMES

Trauma – Even without Zoe's suspicions around Ricky's involvement, the murder of Amy Nessor, Zoe's six-year-old neighbour, who disappeared just outside their houses was an incredibly traumatic experience for Zoe. It deeply affected her childhood and her social development into adulthood.

Secrecy – Keeping her suspicions about Ricky's involvement in Amy's murder secret for almost 30 years forced Zoe to build a metaphorical wall around herself and stopped her from ever developing close bonds with other people.

Family – Zoe feels fiercely protective towards her mother and brother even though she has strained relationships with both of them.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. After reading Chapter One of Part One, what is your first impression of Zoe? Of Ricky? At the end of the novel, have your impressions changed?
2. Did your hometown have a coming-of-age milestone event like the Dunford Classic? If yes, what was it? If no, what kind of event would you have liked to have?
3. Why does the Classic mean so much to Zoe?
4. How has the loss of Zoe's father affected her?
5. Why didn't Zoe tell the police she thought it was Darius's car that picked up Amy Nessor? (Part One, Chapter 6)
6. How do Zoe's feelings toward Ricky colour her childhood and her relationship to her mother?
7. Zoe and Walter have had such different childhoods from one another and yet Zoe describes them both as quiet and reserved kids. Discuss how each upbringing may have led to those traits.
8. Zoe compares Champ's disappearance to Amy's. Why do you think she sees a parallel between them?
9. Zoe puts her guard up after Amir asks about her high school photography class, thinking he's implying that she should be a better photographer than she is. Why does she react this way?
10. What was it about Ricky's behaviour on the fishing trip that unleashed Zoe's rage? Do you think throwing his watch into the water gave her any satisfaction?
11. What does the darkroom symbolize for Zoe?
12. Why is Zoe having trouble reconciling the truth with her suspicions of what happened to Amy? (p 280)
13. How has Zoe's life been most affected by Amy Nessor's murder?
14. Amir offered Zoe spontaneity and ignited a spark in her, whereas Jason provides a quieter kind of stability. Who do you think Zoe will choose in the end, if either of them?



ABOUT CAROLYN

Ever since reading L.M. Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon* as a child, Carolyn Huizinga Mills has dreamed of being a writer. She began writing short stories and in 2017, her story "Finders" placed second in the Alice Munro Short Story Competition. Carolyn's first picture book, *The Little Boy Who Lived Down the Drain*, was chosen as a 2018 Blue Spruce Honour Book. *The Good Son* is her first novel. A grade seven teacher, Carolyn loves to share her passion for reading and writing with her students. She grew up in Calgary, Alberta, and now lives in southwestern Ontario with her husband and two children. In addition to reading and writing, Carolyn loves playing soccer, camping, travelling, and eating dark chocolate.