H-WPL READERS
BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

September 2015

(Please note day and time for each discussion)

Monday, September 21, 2015, at 1:00 P.M.
Casebook, by Mona Simpson.
Discussion Leader: Candace Plotsker-Herman
Spying and eavesdropping on his separating parents at the side of his best friend, young Miles wonders about a stranger's role in his parents' lives before acquiring knowledge that has consequences for the whole family. (NovelistPlus)

Tuesday, October 13, 2015, at 11:00 A.M.
We Have Always Lived in the Castle, by Shirley Jackson.
Discussion Leader: Ellen Getreu
Constance and Mary Katherine ("Merricat") Blackwood are two odd sisters who hide themselves away from the villagers in their old family mansion. We soon learn that they, along with their frail, Uncle Julian, are the only survivors of a notorious poisoning. This short novel by the author of The Lottery is a gothic masterpiece.

'Casebook,' by Mona Simpson


If "The Catcher in the Rye" were written today, the publishing insider's joke goes, it would be categorized as a young adult novel. The YA market -- along with that of its publishing twin, "New Adult" -- is burgeoning. To officially qualify as YA, a book only needs a kid narrating and some hardship to overcome: bullying, gender confusion, maybe a vampire loose in the neighborhood.
Mona Simpson's captivating sixth novel, "Casebook," does have a child as its focus, but it is most decidedly adult fiction in its approach. As in previous works, Simpson's aim is to lyrically capture the time between childhood and adulthood, as fleeting and delicate as the golden-hour light that filmmakers chase. She also mounts a challenge to the way contemporary parents coddle their children -- and how quickly parents' goals for their children degrade in the face of parental unhappiness.

The hero of "Casebook," Miles is only 9 when he begins his career as a spy. Miles may be chubby, but he can still sidle under his parents' bed to install a walkie-talkie, so he has eavesdropped on his parents' plans to separate before they announce their intentions.

They're hardly the first couple in Santa Monica, Calif., to split up. In fact, Miles's best friend, Hector, has divorced parents of his own. But that doesn't keep the precocious boys from feeling befuddled and betrayed by their new domestic arrangements. When Miles's mother, Irene, a mathematician, embarks on a long-distance romance with Eli, a charming, enigmatic divorcee, Miles and Hector ratchet up their domestic espionage.

At first limiting themselves to crude wiretaps and drawer-ransacking, the enterprising boys eventually hire a private investigator. What they discover about Eli shocks them and leaves them unsure what to do with their knowledge. Their plan for getting even with Eli involves some clever hijinks with rescued animals -- unwanted cats and dogs that, like the boys themselves, find themselves the blameless victims of changing family circumstances.

Simpson has been drawn to child narrators since her first novel, "Anywhere But Here." In that novel, too, a complicated, charismatic mother is seen through her child's eyes. In many ways, "Casebook" could serve as a contemporary retelling of "What Maisie Knew," Henry James's novel about how a divorce changes another bright child's consciousness. James was particularly interested in the way that a naive narrator becomes a vehicle for "shedding a light far beyond any reach of her comprehension."

So Miles does well at parsing out the changes in socioeconomic status that the divorce wreaks, as well as the position of his moneyed, but not that moneyed, California family: progressive private school, no TV on school nights, no junk food. But these rules begin to unravel after the divorce, with his mother's attention diverted by passion and his lawyer-father, inattentive in the best of circumstances, trying to buy him and his twin sisters off with presents. He sees through his parents' attempts to keep the kids' lives stable when the adults are barely stable themselves. "All of a sudden, it seemed our family had been lying. We'd been trying to be this great divorced family when really our lives, like the lives of any kids who were the products of failure, were coming out worse. Like being illegitimate. Or adopted."

Adopting a child's point of view is a difficult literary challenge. It's easy to get it wrong. A child can seem overly cutesy and winsome or, on the other extreme, unconvincingly worldly and articulate. One strategy to avoid these missteps is to have the narrator be older and wiser when he tells the tale. This is the route that Jane Hamilton took in "Disobedience" (2000), a novel that also concerns a teenage boy's obsession with his mother's love life and some cyberspying. But
Simpson wants to show us Miles maturing in front of our eyes, yodeling between mystification and sharp insight -- sometimes within the same scene.

She shows his rocky growth from fourth grade, when he occasionally utters a line such as "My stomach grew fur inside it," to married adult, the author of a successful autobiographical comic book who can nail the atmosphere at a fancy restaurant: "The air felt thin, prosperous, with a stable, old sacred-day light." She also lets him deliver an excellent argument for what domestic fiction can teach us when he declares, "The Cottonwoods curriculum dwelled on the massacres of the Native Americans and devoted disproportionate units to the Holocaust. We'd read Anne Frank's diary and both volumes of Maus. But until yesterday, I didn't really believe that a person I knew could be evil."

As in past works, Simpson knows her California terrain intimately and nails its denizens' pretensions with sly humor. But the real subject here is a boy's loss of innocence. As Miles says about the death of his illusions, "Our life didn't feel as pure as it had been last year at this time . . . and almost nothing felt as right as at Little League when you were nine and the ball landed hard in your mitt."

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In Mona Simpson's 'Casebook,' A Holden Caulfield For Our Time


AUDIE CORNISH: It's not uncommon in fiction written by and for adults to find a school-age narrator, from Scout Finch to Holden Caulfield to Harriet the Spy. It's a tradition continued by the novelist Mona Simpson. Here's author Julia Keller with a review of Simpson's new novel, "Casebook."

JULIE KELLER: When I was a kid I spent a lot of summer days staring up at the sky and thinking this is me thinking. And then I'd think, this is me thinking about thinking. Every young person is a philosopher because being young makes you extraordinarily self-conscious. Mona Simpson knows this. The narrator of her new novel, "Casebook," is a pudgy, underachieving teenager named Miles. His family is falling apart and all he can do is watch. Except, maybe there is something else he can do. He can become a detective. He can listen in on phone calls, snoop through emails and eavesdrop while hiding in trees. Miles isn't trying to get his mother and father back together; this isn't "The Parent Trap." He's trying to save his own life. Because when you’re young and sensitive, like Miles, your family is all you have. Simpson does a couple of things I'm not crazy about. Supposedly, Miles and a pal have written a book about their sleuthing and that's
what we're reading. But the device feels tacked on, and occasionally Miles' clandestine activities seem outlandish and implausible. Still, the novel is captivating and, at times, heartbreaking. My adolescence was nothing like the one Miles is going through, but his story felt familiar to me - the sadness and the seeking, the slinking around and the lying low. Like every good detective, Miles winds up finding out more than he bargained for and he realizes, too late, that once you know a thing, you can't not know it ever again.

“Snooping Around,” by John Williams.


THE WORD "SPYING" now brings to mind boundless digital nets trawling the ether for millions of emails at a time, but Miles Adler-Hart, the young protagonist of Mona Simpson's sixth novel, practices snooping the old-school way. He plants a walkie-talkie in his parents' bedroom. He eavesdrops on therapy sessions through a heating vent. He listens to phone conversations by carefully picking up a landline in the next room.

Miles is 9 when "Casebook" starts, in 2001, and his furtive habits soon yield knowledge about the precarious state of his family. Hiding beneath his parents' bed, he hears his father telling his mother, Irene, "that he didn't think of her that way anymore either." "What way?" Miles wonders. "And why either? I could hardly breathe." After the marriage ends, Irene begins dating a friend named Eli, who visits California from Washington, D.C., where he lives and works for the National Science Foundation. Or so he claims.

At first, Miles is glad for his mother's new companion. "I really was relieved. The nights we went to our dad's in the canyon, I thought, she had someone to talk to." But Miles's friend Hector suspects that Eli is hiding something, and he persuades his buddy that they should investigate. By the time they're teenagers, they're following clues around greater Los Angeles with the help of a private eye named Ben Orion.

As the story progresses deeper into the 21st century, there are mentions of email, and Miles uses Google to search for a street address and to look up Xanax after he finds a bottle of it in the house. But the search for information about Eli remains oddly removed from the Internet.

In the book's opening pages, Irene is roundly drawn. She describes herself as "pretty for a mathematician." She keeps an old blackboard in the kitchen, on which she scribbles high-end inspirational quotes, like this one she attributes to Einstein: "It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer." She "listened to gospel, but she didn't believe in God." She is (different from other people but "probably would rather have been more like everybody else."

So why does "Casebook," occupied with the same complex familial concerns that Simpson has vividly animated for so long, feel like a misstep?
The book suffers most from its uncertain register, with Miles too often sounding as if he's narrating events in real time as a child, rather than as someone in his 20s looking back on formative experiences. Overhearing a conversation about possible living arrangements, he writes: "It took me a minute to understand: They were talking about custody. My parents must have been fighting over us!" He lapses in and out, mostly out, of his latter-day vantage point, like Kevin Costner navigating a British accent. In this way, especially, "Casebook" is not flattered by comparison with Simpson's reputation-making 1986 debut novel, "Anywhere but Here," in which a woman recalls her troubled mother with a tersely poetic blend of childlike befuddlement and adult perspective. Miles feels more like the guide through a novel for younger readers. As Eli and his mother get more serious, he wonders: "Were they getting married? What about his kid? Would it live with us? . . .I wanted things to stand still."

There are darker glimpses of how Miles's surveillance of adults affects his development. He thinks of sex as a "lower, threatening world." Hearing his parents argue about their lack of passion "neutered me somehow." More mysteriously, coming across naked pictures of his mother "made me feel exposed. As if I would never be attractive." These are moments when Miles the adult might offer context or reveal something deeper about the person he has become, but they pass in flurries of young wonder: "People in my class at school, some of them, they were having sex already. We all knew exactly who. Simon told us. What was sex, even?"

Simpson has also adorned the book with a needless conceit that seems to betray a lack of confidence in the material. It opens with a "Note to Customer" written by the owner of a comics store, who says the book we're about to read was written by one of two friends behind a classic comic called "Two Sleuths." It becomes clear that Miles wrote "Casebook," and that Hector later added his own thoughts, which appear as footnotes. There are just 21 annotations by Hector, many of them less than a dozen words long. The fruits of this device, announced so loudly at the book's start and so ripe with possibilities for complicating Miles's memories, are conspicuously flavorless. Typical is a moment in which Miles describes Hector's favorite Roald Dahl story. We're then drawn by an asterisk to the bottom of the page, where Hector notes: "Still my favorite."

There is a sense throughout of an author operating just a degree or two removed from her comfort zone. This is not Tom Wolfe implausibly ventriloquizing the college set in "I Am Charlotte Simmons," but Simpson's decision to so fully inhabit the mind of a boy forces her into a simpler style and cordons her off from more nuanced insights, despite the fact that her themes remain humble but profound: compromises brought on by love; what we can know about other people; the unavoidable and unintended effects of parents on children.

The constant use of unexplained nicknames (Miles's mother is "the Mims"; his younger twin sisters are "Boop One" and "Boop Two") stands out because they push an intimacy with the family and its dynamics that is never fully established through more rigorous methods. For much of the novel, the stage blocking is too visible.

Eli's life is, in fact, not what he says it is - among other things, he lives in California. But the nature of his deception becomes obvious long before the final page. The second half of the book leans on descriptions of school-age high jinks, like Miles and Hector dropping unwanted pets
into Eli’s yard as revenge for his lies. Near the end, we’re shown illustrations from the pair’s "classic" comic, leaving us perplexed about why it’s a classic.

Like the Hardy Boys or Veronica Mars, Miles learns a few lessons about life by doggedly pursuing the truth. ("Everyone had secrets; I understood now that I did. With that one revelation, the world multiplied.") But for readers of Simpson's more skillful novels, who presumably learned these particular lessons long ago, it's not clear what "Casebook" has to teach.

Spying on a Grown-Up World

By Michiko Kakutani, New York Times, April 14, 2014

Family is the North Star for Mona Simpson’s characters: It defines who they are, chaperones their choices, shapes their views of the world. Her dazzling debut novel, “Anywhere But Here” (1986), gave us an indelible portrait of a girl’s emotionally fraught relationship with her impossible, narcissistic mother. “The Lost Father” (1992) followed that same heroine’s obsessive search for the father who abandoned her. And “A Regular Guy” (1996) depicted another abandoned daughter trying to come to terms with her father — in this case, a rich, eccentric entrepreneur (who bore more than a passing resemblance to Ms. Simpson’s real-life brother, Steve Jobs).

Her latest novel, “Casebook,” provides an ungainly look at a boy’s relationship with his mother as their family navigates the choppy waters of separation and divorce. Like her last novel, “My Hollywood” (2010) — about a Los Angeles nanny’s relationships with her young charge and with her own children back home in the Philippines — this novel, also set in Los Angeles, gets off to an extremely bumpy start, then builds slowly in its second half into a genuinely moving story.

In the opening chapters of “Casebook,” Ms. Simpson circles around and around, trying to find a voice and a storytelling groove. She seems unsure of just what her narrator, Miles, a geeky college-age boy looking back on his past, might sound like. Would he really say of one of his mother’s friends she “had some wisdom about ease, an understanding of moving life, the warming and the holding”? Would he write, “A mother’s happiness: Something you recognize and then forget; it didn’t seem to matter much at the time, though it spread through our bodies’”?

Also, Ms. Simpson’s depiction of what divorce might feel like to a boy like Miles seems oddly generic, lacking in the nubbly specificity of emotion found in Noah Baumbach’s sad-funny-touching 2005 movie, “The Squid and the Whale.” The relationship between Miles’s parents, Irene and Cary, is never clear to the reader: Perhaps this is because we are supposed to be seeing it through the limited perspective of their son, but we never understand the basic dynamics of their marriage or the real reasons behind their apparently amicable separation.
Irene’s immersion in a romance with a man named Eli, who supposedly lives in Washington and works for the National Science Foundation, remains as unfathomable to us as it does to Miles. The man is clearly passive-aggressive (pushy in trying to get her to commit to him, and at the same time strangely elusive), and it’s difficult to understand why the supposedly brilliant Irene, a mathematician, not only falls for him but also remains devoted to him for half a dozen years, despite his lies, phony promises and lame excuses for not visiting her (like saying his cat is ill, and illness reminds him of his mother).

The premise that supplies much of the architectural structure for this story is that Miles — with a big assist from his best friend, Hector — has been spying on his mother, listening in on her phone conversations, rummaging through her drawers and eventually contacting a private eye about digging into Eli’s past. A similar sort of detective work animated “The Lost Father,” with its heroine calling the F.B.I. and seeking relatives to track down her father. But in that case, there was an authentic sense of mystery about her dad’s identity. Here, it’s obvious, almost from the start, that Eli is a ne’er-do-well — and a pretty obnoxious one at that. As a result, much of the first half of “Casebook,” with blow-by-blow accounts of Miles’s detective work, becomes numbing. Enough already, we want to say: Why doesn’t Irene just open her eyes and see what an unrepentant cad Eli really is? And why doesn’t Miles do more to alert his beloved mother to his suspicions?

The novel begins to gather emotional traction, though, as Ms. Simpson allows us to see how Miles is affected by his growing knowledge of his mother’s vulnerability and weaknesses, knowledge that’s a kind of initiation into the mysteries and complexities of the grown-up world. This heightens his desire to protect his mother, even as it makes him realize that he can no more protect her than she can protect him and his sisters from the hazards of love and the pitfalls of circumstance.

While Miles’s mother and his father (who, oddly, makes few nonholiday appearances here) remain almost totally opaque, Ms. Simpson provides more and more access to Miles’s heart and mind, as he trundles deep into the wilderness of adolescence and develops a crush on a girl at school. Hector (whose parents have also separated) is not only Miles’s confidant and co-conspirator in spying on Eli, but also becomes his collaborator on a comic book, tentatively titled “Our Psychopath,” about an Eli-inspired villain. Turning life into fiction, the two best friends eventually turn the villain into a subsidiary character and cast themselves as boy superheroes, with “superpowers that worked everywhere but in their homes.” It’s a way for Miles to try to contain the chaos that Eli represents to him. He later writes, “The Villain’s darkness was what made our ordinary nerd lazy boys think they had a chance to be good.”

“Our Psychopath” gets retitled “Two Sleuths” and goes on to become a best-selling comic book. As for the novel “Casebook,” it is presented as a sequel of sorts to that comic book, written by Miles and annotated by Hector. The novel’s clumsy start and patchy storytelling can supposedly be attributed to Miles’s youth and greenness as a writer. The problem is, “Casebook” rarely sounds as though it had been written by a kid, and the accomplished Ms. Simpson can hardly claim inexperience as an excuse for this novel’s lapses and longueurs.
Mona Simpson


Born in 1957, Mona Simpson spent her early years in Green Bay, Wisconsin. She moved with her mother to Los Angeles as a teenager. While earning her M.F.A. degree at Columbia, Simpson became an editor at the Paris Review. She won accolades for her first novel Anywhere But Here (1986). After that initial success, Simpson has continued to produce well-regarded literary works, including My Hollywood (2010).

quotes
“I have a fantasy that at the end of my life I'll retreat to a cork-lined room and rework my books so they all fit together.”
—Mona Simpson

Synopsis

Sister of Apple Inc. co-founder Steve Jobs, American novelist Mona Simpson first came to literary fame with 1986's Anywhere But Here.

Early Life

Author Mona Simpson emerged as an up-and-coming literary light with her debut novel Anywhere But Here in 1986. The skilled fiction writer is known for exploring dysfunctional relationships, some of which may have inspired by some of her own experiences. Her Syrian father, Abdul fattah "John" Jandali, and her mother, Joanne Schieble (later Simpson), met at the University of Wisconsin. The couple had a son two years before Simpson's birth. They gave that child up for adoption, and Simpson did not meet her big brother—Apple Inc. co-founder Steve Jobs—until decades later.

Simpson's parents split up in the early 1960s, and she soon lost touch with her father. Simpson took her stepfather's last name when her mother remarried. She spent her early years in Green Bay, Wisconsin, before moving out to Los Angeles with her mother. This cross-country trek informed Simpson's first novel. "The move in Anywhere But Here is totally true. It's probably the truest thing in the book. It's what sparked it," she later told Publishers Weekly.
At the University of California, Berkeley, Simpson focused much of her talents on writing poetry. She graduated in 1979, and after writing for newspapers and holding a series of unfulfilling jobs, she headed east to Columbia University to pursue a Master's of Fine Arts degree in writing. Simpson started writing short fiction with remarkable results, quickly getting one of her stories accepted by the Iowa Review. Around this time, she joined the staff of the literary magazine Paris Review as an editor.

**Early Successes**


In 1992, Simpson published her second novel *The Lost Father*. She again returned to the character of Ann Stevenson, but this time Ann is all grown up and in search of her Egyptian father. A few years later, Simpson gave readers another engrossing exploration of complicated family dynamics in *A Regular Guy* (1996). This time, a young girl seeks out the father—a technical titan a la Bill Gates or Simpson's own brother, Steve Jobs—she never knew. In these early works, Simpson "dissects the same, bitter family plot that turns on a flaky mother, a daughter's struggle to win back an absent father and a family gripped by wanderlust and the allure of the West," one critic wrote in Publisher's Weekly. But each time, Simpson manages to find "fresh and disquieting approaches to fractured families," as another critic noted.

**Later Works**

With 2000's *Off Keck Road*, Simpson made a dramatic departure from her past fiction. She eschewed the first-person narrative for this work, choosing to write this novella—which spans about 50 years and details the lives of three women—in third person. The book, set in Simpson's hometown of Green Bay, Wisconsin, explores the idea of "home" with these midwestern characters tied to one community.

In 2010, Simpson published *My Hollywood*. The novel, which took her 10 years to write, examines the lives and relationships of a composer and the Filipina nanny she's hired to take care of her son. Simpson told UCLA Today that "I thought a lot about the question, 'Can you buy love?' We all want children raised with love. Can you get that by hiring it? It's an interesting question." This novel made the Best Books of 2010 lists for several publications, including The Atlantic Monthly and The New Yorker. Publisher's Weekly wrote, "Funny, smart, and filled with razor sharp observations about life and parenthood, Simpson's latest is well worth the wait."

As for the future, Simpson is at work on several projects. She is writing one that involves amateur detectives and another regarding "diaspora Arabs living in the United States," according
to her website. To aspiring writers, Simpson offers the following advice: "I would say to read—that's how we all learn."

**Personal Life**

Now divorced, Simpson has two children, Gabriel and Grace, from her marriage to TV writer Richard Appel. Appel worked on the popular animated series *The Simpsons* for several years and named one of the characters after his then-wife. Simpson lives in Los Angeles and works as a professor at Bard College and the University of California, Los Angeles.

Simpson was in her twenties when she reunited with her older brother Steve Jobs. The pair, despite their long separation, developed a close bond as adults. She was reportedly with Jobs when he died in 2012. At his funeral, Simpson delivered a eulogy praising her brother's passion for his work and for his family.

**Question & Answer**

1. In the opening note from Hershel Geschwind of Neverland Comics, Hershel writes that Hector and Miles will continue to go back and forth with this manuscript “until they get their story straight or until they grow up, whichever comes last, or never.” How different do you think the boys’ accounts are of what happened, and what role do Hector’s footnotes play throughout the manuscript? What exactly do you think Herschel means by “grow up”?

2. This book is in many ways a coming-of-age story, but Miles learns many of his life lessons by spying on his mother, not through his own actual experience. Why do you think the author has chosen to focus so extensively on the effects of adult lives—the secret lives of parents—on their children?

3. How the motto of Miles’s and Hector’s school—motto, “is it true, is it kind, is it necessary? Will it improve on the silence?” shape their view of the world? What impact does Eli have on this view?

4. Did Miles’s extensive involvement with his mother’s personal life have a negative impact on his ability to focus on his own experiences, or did he gain greater insight into what it means to love than he might have otherwise?

5. What do we learn about Irene and about her relationships with Carey and Eli—and about adult lives in general—that we might not find out about were the novel not told through Miles’s perspective? What do we gain? Do you think most teenagers are as
fascinated by the lives of their parents as Miles and Hector are?

6. Miles mentions that when Eli promises to put up Christmas lights, it was the “first feeling I had for Eli. We could be men who did that shit. I liked the idea of putting up lights ourselves” (page 28). What do the Christmas lights represent to Miles?

7. Why is Hector just as invested in uncovering the truth about Eli as Miles is? Or is he even more invested?

8. What is the significance of the notes on the kitchen blackboard? How do the quotes act as a reflection of what is going on in the story, whether or not Irene is aware of it at the time? For example, on page 41, what is the significance of the quote “benighted: in a state of pitiful or contemptible intellectual or moral ignorance.” Do you think Eli ever found Irene’s lack of awareness of his own deceit contemptible?

9. Several times throughout the novel Eli mentions his love for animals. The only stories he tells that Miles never doubts involve this deep love. Miles says at one point that he saw Eli holding the dead kittens, and he knew how to do it. Do you think the story about the sick cat, Coco, was true? Eli seems to be able to care for animals and not people. What does this say about who he is?

10. Does Eli ever really love Irene, Miles, and the Boops? What were his motives for stringing them along, and, do you think he ever believed the outcome would be different than it was?

11. On page 104 Miles describes romance as seeming like “friendship, but with a fleck of sparkle.” How do Miles’s feelings about romantic and platonic love change over the course of the novel? What does he learn from his parents’ relationship, from Eli and the Mims’ relationship, and from his friendship with Hector? Do you think Miles ever really questions his own sexuality?

12. On page 108, Miles says that when he “thinks of [his] life as a boy, it ended there that night, while the Mims stared out at the Pacific Ocean with its barreling waves, the world indifferent to our losses.” What causes this turning point?

13. What role does Ben Orion play? Why does he help Miles and Hector without asking for payment?

14. How does hearing directly from an older Hector through his comments in footnotes to the text alter or inform your impression of him as a character? What, if anything, does it
bring to light about his relationship with Miles? Did it surprise you that he got into drugs when he went off to school? Do you think one of them needed the other more, and if so, why?

15. Why do you think Irene puts up with all of Eli’s broken promises? What is it about him that keeps drawing her back, despite never seeing where he lives, never meeting his child or his brother, and the fact that he never follows through on any of the futures he proposes, even with things as small as the buying of silverware?

16. On page 181, at Irene’s forty-fifth birthday party, Eli makes this speech: “All of you love Reen for many reasons. . . . But I, I love her, I love her because I, I can’t help loving her. No matter what ever happens, I am and I will always be in love with Irene Adler.” What does he mean, and what is it about Irene that makes Eli love her, or at least claim to love her, so much?

17. Who is “C” in Jean’s book dedication? Why do you think she tolerates Eli’s transgressions, and how much do you think she actually knows about them? Do you think she discovered Irene on her own? Do you think that Eli would eventually have told her?

18. What leads Miles to say that “hope for happiness is happiness” (page 229)? Do you think this statement is true?

19. Why do you think Miles lies to Eli about his mother dying in the arms of a man she loved when he runs into him years later?

20. Mona Simpson is known as an author of voice. How do you think the voice of Miles stacks up? Does he feel real?

21. What do you think Irene got out of her relationship with Eli? Does she, and do we, learn anything about her through her sexual experiences with him that give insight into who she is, or into what may have gone wrong with her marriage? Do you think she ultimately found happiness?

22. **Bonus question 1**: Did you notice parallels to Sherlock Holmes? Which boy is Holmes and which is Watson? Did their identities keep shifting, as they disguise their real details, change their appearances and hair colors?

23. **Bonus question 2**: Why do you think the heroine is called Irene Adler?