



## Summary

*There's only been one time that Rose couldn't stop me from doing the wrong thing and that was a mistake that will haunt me for the rest of my life.*

Fern Castle works in her local library. She has dinner with her twin sister Rose three nights a week. And she avoids crowds, bright lights and loud noises as much as possible. Fern has a carefully structured life and disrupting her routine can be ...dangerous.

When Rose discovers that she cannot fall pregnant, Fern sees her chance to pay her sister back for everything Rose has done for her. Fern can have a baby for Rose. She just needs to find a father. Simple.

Fern's mission will shake the foundations of the life she has carefully built for herself and stir up dark secrets from the past, in this quirky, rich and shocking story of unexpected love.



## About the Author

Sally Hepworth has lived around the world, spending extended periods in Singapore, the United Kingdom and Canada, where she worked in event management and human resources. She is the author of *The Secrets of Midwives*, *The Things We Keep*, *The Mother's Promise*, *The Family Next Door* and *The Mother-in-Law*. Sally now lives in Melbourne, with her husband, three children and one adorable dog.

## Discussion Questions

1. Fern displays many characteristics of someone on the autism spectrum, though she has never been formally diagnosed. Do you think we need to do more as a society to allow neurodiverse people to feel integrated, for example, like the class Fern runs at the end for kids with sensory issues?
2. Like Fern, Wally has certain traits that make him different from others. Do you think Wally was neuro atypical? How was he similar or different to Fern? Do you think we, as a society, expect neuro atypical people to be the same?
3. During a discussion with Wally, Fern talks about the need to have a 'person'. Her inference is that everyone should have one. Does everyone have a 'person'? What do you think are the consequences of not having one?
4. Up until she sees her true colours, Fern adores Rose. She relies on her, seeks her out when she needs advice, and trusts her implicitly. Do you think her inability to see Rose's true character is to do with the way Fern sees the world? Or is it that learned blindness that we all experience with our families to some extent?
5. It is widely recognised that many neurodiverse individuals excel in areas including attention to detail, sustained concentration and recognising patterns. So, does Wally have a point?
6. How did you feel about Wally and Fern getting to keep their baby? Did you have any concerns about their ability to care for Willow?
7. We see early on that Fern and Rose do not have clear boundaries with each other. Not only is Rose overzealous when it comes to Fern's life, Fern takes it upon herself to have a baby for Rose (without even telling her about it). If you have a sister, do you have clear boundaries with her? Would you have a baby for your sister if she couldn't have one?
8. Sisters are known for being close. How does it compare to a brother / sister relationship? If you have both a brother and sister, how is that relationship different? How is it similar?

## Discussion Questions cont'd

9. Fern and Rose are twins, but very different. How much of that is to do with the fact that Fern is neuro atypical. Imagine for a moment that she wasn't. How do you think this would have affected their relationship?
10. We all have a narrative from our childhood that we believe. It can be jarring when, as adults, we find out that things didn't happen the way we thought they did, or someone wasn't the way we perceived them to be. Has that ever happened to you? What was something you believed as a child that turned out to be very different from what you thought?
11. Fern spent most of her life believing that she was responsible for Billy's death. This made her fearful of herself, and increased her reliance on Rose. If Billy hadn't died, how do you think Fern's self-confidence and dependency on Rose might have been different?
12. Did you guess that Rose was falsifying the letters in her diary? If so, at which point did you guess?
13. How important was Wally in Fern's ultimate awakening to Rose's true character? Imagine Fern and Wally had only had a one-night stand, and not a relationship. Do you think Fern would have remained none-the-wiser to Rose's manipulative ways and the fact that she was not responsible for Billy's death?
14. In the end of the novel, Rose is still plotting to get the baby and have revenge on Fern. How did you feel about this ending? Would you have preferred it to end more neatly or did you like this ominous note left hanging in the air?

## Reviews

The sisters we are about to discuss, Fern and Rose Castle, are extremely unique and not what you would expect from closely knit siblings, let alone twins. By the end of *THE GOOD SISTER*, Sally Hepworth will have you pondering which of these characters best represents the book's title.

The novel opens with an entry in the Journal of Rose Ingrid Castle. We learn right up front that Rose's husband, Owen, has left her. Not only has he accepted a job in London, far from their home in Melbourne, he has taken the first steps toward a separation in their marriage. It doesn't take long for Rose to describe the incident that changed the lives of both her and Fern. While on a family camping trip when they were 12 years old, their mom's boyfriend's son drowned. Rose indicates that Fern was responsible for Billy's death, and it was her quick thinking that kept Fern out of trouble. They all went along with the story that he got tangled up in the reeds and accidentally drowned.

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That is a tough first impression of Fern to get past. When we are introduced to Fern in the present day, we find that she is single, in her mid-20s and working at the local town library. To say that she is both a peculiar character and the ultimate unreliable narrator would be a gross understatement. She suffers from a myriad of issues, including sensory problems, ADHD/OCD, and what can be best described as "having no filter" when she talks to others. It is impossible to speak to her without being totally direct as she will call you out on anything that makes no literal sense to her.

Two events drive Hepworth's narrative. Fern learns that Rose and Owen have been unsuccessful in having a child, which could have played into their marital issues. She also meets an unusual gentleman named Rocco, although she insists on calling him "Wally" as he reminds her of the character from the Australian Waldo book series, *Where's Wally?* She is drawn to this young man who lives off the grid in his mobile trailer, similar to Frances McDormand's character in *Nomadland*.

Readers learn more about Fern and Rose via trips down memory lane in Rose's journal. They were raised by their mom and were essentially homeless most of the time. She also was an addict who eventually overdosed to the point where she suffered serious brain damage and has been confined to a facility ever since. Fern decides that it would be best for the family if she got pregnant and gave the child to Rose. Hepworth effectively turns the tables on all that has gone before as the story takes an incredibly dark and satisfying turn.

## Reviews

There are a lot of juicy occurrences here that will make you question everything that has happened and what we have read in Rose's journal entries. The finale is a wild one with plenty of unexpected plot twists along the way. What Hepworth does best is create fully realized, complex characters to whom you can easily become addicted. At one point she states, "Blurred boundaries, I think, are what sisters do best." That perfectly sums up what you can expect from Fern and Rose in a novel that will stay with you long after the last page has been turned.

Reviewed by [Ray Palen](#) on April 16, 2021