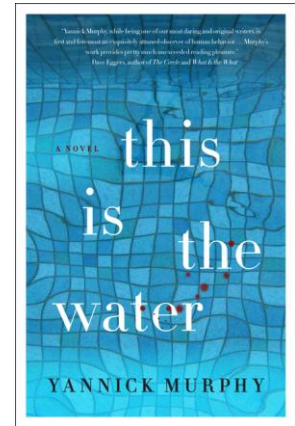# This is the Water

Harper Paperbacks

By Yannick Murphy
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Introduction

From Yannick Murphy, award-winning author of *The Call*, comes a fast-paced story of murder, adultery, parenthood, and romance, involving a girls' swim team, their morally flawed parents, and a killer who swims in their midst.

In a quiet New England community members of swim team and their dedicated parents are preparing for a home meet. The most that Annie, a swim-mom of two girls, has to worry about is whether or not she fed her daughters enough carbs the night before; why her husband, Thomas, hasn't kissed her in ages; and why she can't get over the loss of her brother who shot himself a few years ago.

But Annie's world is about to change. From the bleachers, looking down at the swimmers, a dark haired man watches a girl. No one notices him. Annie is busy getting to know Paul, who flirts with Annie despite the fact that he's married to her friend Chris, and despite Annie's greying hair and crow's feet. Chris is busy trying to discover whether or not Paul is really having an affair, and the swimmers are trying to shave milliseconds off their race times by squeezing themselves into skin-tight bathing suits and visualizing themselves winning their races.

When a girl on the team is murdered at a nearby highway rest stop—the same rest stop where Paul made a gruesome discovery years ago—the parents suddenly find themselves adrift. Paul turns to Annie for comfort. Annie finds herself falling in love. Chris becomes obsessed with unmasking the killer.

With a serial killer now too close for comfort, Annie and her fellow swim-parents must make choices about where their loyalties lie. As a series of startling events unfold, Annie discovers what it means to follow your intuition, even if love, as well as lives, could be lost.

Questions for Discussion

1. The title sets up Murphy's unique writing style for the rest of the novel. How does this strategy change our understanding of the pace and suspense of the narrative?

2. How did the point of view affect your reading of the novel? How did it affect your relationship with the characters?

3. Murphy employs much stream of consciousness throughout the narrative. How do the detailed thoughts of Annie and her surroundings inform your understanding of what type of person Annie is, and what lengths she'll go to in order to protect her family?

4. The setting of the pool is described in detail throughout the novel. How do you interpret the author's choice of including specific details about the swim team, and the dynamics of the relationships between the swim team parents? Does knowing these details help you understand the novel's larger themes?

5. At the beginning of the novel, Annie is a swim-mom in an unhappy marriage. How does the startling murder—and tragedy like Beatrice's rape and Annie's brother's suicide—unveil the true personality of each character? Are the characters likeable? Does a character have to be likeable to be enjoyable or relatable?

6. "*This is the metal doorknob on the restroom door. It remembers reflecting the murderer's face, and every time someone comes and uses the restroom, the doorknob wishes it could show that person the murderer's face again so that the man, who was never caught, would be caught.*" Murphy personifies inanimate objects in many parts of her novel. What do you think is the effect Murphy is trying to achieve? How do you think this contributes, or doesn't, to the narrative?

7. The killer is introduced at the beginning of Chapter Two. How does knowing who the killer is affect your approach to the narrative? Do you still consider it a mystery? If so, what was the true thrill of the narrative?

8. Each friendship is thrown into conflict at some point – are they resolved? How?

9. In the first half of the novel, Paul fills the void created by Annie's brother's suicide and failing marriage. As the narrative goes on, why do you think she chooses to be with Thomas?

10. Were you surprised at the ending? Did each character get what they deserve?