

"Rock'n'roll with a dash or two of murder."
—JENEVA ROSE, *New York Times* bestselling author

SHARING THE SPOTLIGHT CAN BE MURDER.

ONLY ONE SURVIVES

Internationally Bestselling Author

HANNAH
MARY
McKINNON

A NOVEL

BOOK
CLUB KIT

DEAR READER

If you'd told me a couple of years ago that I'd write a thriller about a pop-rock group, I'm not sure I'd have believed you. At that point I hadn't touched an instrument in decades. I still can't read music, and my vocals are so horrendous, my eldest son asked me to stop singing "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" when he was three. I've honored our agreement ever since.

These weren't the only potential obstacles, as the music industry was something I knew little about. There were many reasons for me to go in a more comfortable direction with my next book, except...where's the fun in that?

When the idea for *Only One Survives* sparked, it was obvious this story had to be about a fictional band. When their name, *The Bittersweet*, popped into my head, and Vienna's character took shape, there was no going back.

Music has always been a large part of my life. I clearly remember Mum and Dad twirling around the room to their latest ABBA record. The first single I got was "Pump up the Volume" by MARRS, and I saved my pocket money for weeks to buy *Kissing to be Clever* by Culture Club. I remember the very first day of MTV (a revelation!). I begged for a Walkman for Christmas, followed by a Discman, and I loved the techno/garage/underground scene in the 90s.

Maybe someday I'll tell you about dancing on the huge speakers at the New York Club in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, or a legendary foam party I attended with my friends, which is one of my fondest memories of the era.

Just like books, songs whisk me away in an instant. Nothing lifts my mood faster than one of my favorite tunes. This is why I included many different artists and songs in *Only One Survives*, and I hope that while reading the novel they evoked your own memories or helped you make new ones.

While this novel is set in present day, Covid presented a challenge as *Only One Survives* spans four years, meaning with a publication in 2024, much of it would've landed in the pandemic years, which didn't fit the plot. I therefore included music that released no later than 2019. Please check out the songs many of the named artists have released since.

To further enhance and continue your reading experience of the story, this kit includes discussion questions, Vienna's playlist, the Bittersweet song lyrics I wrote, and a more in-depth conversation with me about *Only One Survives*. Lastly, if you're part of a book club and you'd like me to stop by virtually, please ask. I promise I won't sing.

Happy reading - and happy listening!

Hannah Mary McKinnon



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WARNING:SPOILERS AHEAD

1. Why do you think Vienna and Madison were immediately drawn to each other and created such a strong initial friendship? What did you make of the evolution of their relationship?
2. What was Vienna's most life-defining event, and why? What might her life have been like if this event had never taken place?
3. Vienna and Madison came from vastly different backgrounds. Discuss the impact of their upbringing on them and their friendship. What might've happened if the cafeteria altercation in twelfth grade had never taken place?
4. Did your allegiances shift during the story? Toward whom, why, and when?
5. Describe your reaction when you began reading Part II. How did you feel about Vienna's increasing troubles in Part II compared to when you read what she went through in Part I? At what point, if ever, did you feel for her?
6. What do you think would've happened to the Bittersweet if they'd never driven to the Catskills on that fateful snowy night? Would they have achieved the success they hoped for? What else might've torn the band apart?
7. What did you make of the social media comments throughout the story? How much of an impact do you think these kinds of comments have on people in real life? How do you think being behind a screen influences what people say online compared to when they're in person?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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8. What was your favorite scene in *Only One Survives*, and why?
9. Did you have a favorite band member of the Bittersweet, and why? Were they your favorite character overall or was that someone else?
10. Read through the lyrics from the Bittersweet below. Which is your favorite song, and why? Do you think the lyrics tie into the novel in a specific way? If so, how? Do they make you look at any parts of the story differently?
11. How much and what kind of an influence has music had on your life? Do you play an instrument and/or do you sing? Who are your favorite bands and how has your taste in music evolved over time?
12. Did you discover new-to-you bands and artists while reading *Only One Survives*? Have you listened to the playlist? What other artists do you think Vienna would listen to?
13. Were you surprised and satisfied by the ending? What do you think might happen to Libby—will she break her silence? What might become of the Bittersweet's legacy now?

*Becoming the star is easier when the rest of your
band is dead...*

VIENNA'S PLAYLIST

1. "One Way Or Another" by Blondie
2. "Manic Monday" by The Bangles
3. "Fly Away" by Lenny Kravitz
4. "Connection" by Elastica
5. "Nothing Natural" by Lush
6. "Wonderwall" by Oasis
7. "Raise Your Glass" by P!nk
8. "Purple Rain" by Prince
9. "Our Lips Are Sealed" by The Go-Go's
10. "The Glamorous Life" by Sheila E.
11. "Bad Reputation" by Joan Jett and the Blackhearts
12. "Christmas All Over Again" by Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers
13. "Wherever You Will Go" by The Calling
14. "I Bet My Life" by Imagine Dragons
15. "Sunday Morning" by Maroon 5
16. "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" by The Beatles
17. "Gimme Shelter" by The Rolling Stones
18. "Under Pressure" by Queen
19. "C'est Comme ça" by Les Rita Mitsouko
20. "Missionary Man" by Eurythmics
21. "Running Up That Hill" by Kate Bush
22. "Don't Speak" by No Doubt
23. "T-Shirt" by The Beaches
24. "Money" by The Beaches
25. "The Only Way Is Up" by Otis Clay
26. "The Only Way Is Up" by Yazz & the Plastic Population
27. "Beautiful Day" by U2
28. "Supernova" by Liz Phair
29. "Stayin' Alive" by The Bee Gees
30. "Seven Nation Army" by The White Stripes
31. "Perfect" by P!nk
32. "What About Us" by P!nk
33. "Wannabe" by Spice Girls
34. "You Really Got Me" by The Kinks
35. "Heartbreaker" by Pat Benatar
36. "Iris" by Goo Goo Dolls
37. "Cherry Bomb" by The Runaways
38. "You Oughta Know" by Alanis Morissette
39. "Run" by Snow Patrol
40. "Smells Like Teen Spirit" by Nirvana
41. "Get Back" by Demi Lovato
42. "Talk To Me" by Stevie Nicks
43. "Better Be Good To Me" by Tina Turner
44. "Blank Space" by Taylor Swift
45. "Malibu" by Miley Cyrus
46. "Freedom! '90" by George Michael
47. "God Only Knows" by The Beach Boys
48. "Linger" by The Cranberries
49. "Lonely At The Top" by Bon Jovi

CLICK BELOW TO LISTEN NOW ON SPOTIFY



Music by THE BITTER SWEET

"Sweet Spot"

Verse 1

It looks like you and me
We could be running out of
time

Today should not be here
We face an uphill fight and
climb

Pre-chorus

Feel you tear yourself away
Never seemed enough for you
to stay

Not much left for me to say
Think you're gonna leave me
anyway

Chorus

Don't you see this is our sweet
spot, honey

Sweet spot for me and you
Oh, why can't you feel our
sweet spot, baby

Tell me what I should do

Verse 2

I want you by my side
But you are pulling back, I
know

Today came too quickly
It's not how this was meant to
go

Pre-chorus

Feel you tear yourself away
Never was enough for you to
stay

Not much left for you to say
Feel you're gonna leave me
any day

Chorus

Don't you see this is our sweet spot,
honey

Sweet spot for me and you
Oh, why can't you feel our sweet spot,
baby

Tell me what I should do

Bridge

Sweet spot for me and you
Sweet spot for you and me
Sweet spot's only fleeting
Sweet spot never meant to be

Verse 3

And now that you have gone
I will be standing here alone

I can't wish you to me
Feel my heart turning into stone

Chorus

Don't you see this is our sweet spot,
honey

Sweet spot for me and you
Oh, why can't you feel our sweet spot,
baby

Tell me what I should do

Outro

Sweet spot, baby, me and you
This will be our sweet spot, honey

Stay in the sweet spot, sugar
Sweet spot, baby, me and you
Sweet spot, baby, you and me

Always you and me

You and me

(fade)

"Good Tomorrow"

Verse 1

If I'd known you needed a crown
I'd have knelt in front of you
If I'd known you wanted a gown
I'd have stripped mine off for you

Verse 2

If you'd said how much your heart has bled
I'd have made mine beat for you
Had you said you wanted her instead
I'd have walked away from you

Pre-Chorus

But you said nothing
You kept it to yourself
And you said nothing
Made me doubt myself

Chorus

The bitterness I feel inside
The hurt I can't seem to push aside
The bitterness makes us divide
You're such a bitter pill

Verse 3

If I'd been told how your love had run cold
I'd have made a raging fire for you
If I'd been told how this would all unfold
I'd never have stuck it out with you

Pre-Chorus

But we said nothing
We kept it to ourselves
And we said nothing
Made us doubt ourselves

Chorus

The bitterness we feel inside
The hurt we can't seem to push aside
The bitterness makes us divide
We're such a bitter pill

Outro

We're such a bitter pill
Taste it, taste it, bitter, bitter
We're such a bitter pill
Bitter pill, bitter, bitter pill
We're such a bitter pill
Such a bitter pill

"Bitter Pill"

Verse 1

Want to wake up tomorrow
Tell the world I was good today
Shake off all my anger and sorrow
Tell the world I felt great today

Verse 2

Want to get up tomorrow
Tell the world I was fine for once
Choose to give up anger and sorrow
Tell the world I've been great all month

Chorus

Maybe I'll be good tomorrow
Don't feel like being good today
You'll want me to be fine tomorrow
But can't promise that'll be today

Bridge

Feels being good is overrated
But acting bad leaves me elated
I'm not easily persuaded
Which path will I choose

Verse 3

Might not get up tomorrow
Tell the world I'm not playing ball
Got to hide my anger and sorrow
Yeah, I know it's better for all

Verse 4

Bet I'll get up tomorrow
And put a smile across my face
Choose to hide all anger and sorrow
This might be my biggest mistake

Chorus

Maybe I'll be good tomorrow
Don't feel like being good today
You'll want me to be fine tomorrow
But can't promise that'll be today

Outro

Should be good tomorrow
Don't wanna be good tomorrow
Maybe I'll be fine tomorrow
Might not wanna be fine tomorrow
Bad tomorrow
Good tomorrow
Bad tomorrow
Bad tomorrow
(fade)

Verse 1

I think I'm still in love with you
And I'm not willing to quit
Still ready to fight for us
But will you commit

Chorus

When I'm trying to get over you
I end up being under you
Left wanting to get over you
Such an unfair game

Verse 2

Want to give it all I have
Might no longer be the best fit
Will offer you everything
But can you commit

Chorus

When I'm trying to get over you
I end up being under you
Left wanting to get over you
Don't know who's to blame

Verse 3

Now you've taken everything
Looks like it's time for us to split
No, I can't give you anything
'cos you won't commit

Verse 4

I'm no longer in love with you
Glad I found the guts to quit
No longer fighting for us
No way I'll commit

Chorus

When I'm trying to get over you
I end up being under you
Left wanting to get over you
I know you feel the same

Outro

End up being under you
Wanted to get over you
No way I'll commit
Too late for me to commit
I've decided to quit
Can't make me un-quit
We know this is it
Know this is it
(fade)

"Over You, Under You"

"Still Waters"

Verse 1

See the stillness, in the water
Nothing left to make a sound
Watch the stillness, in the water
There's no trace of what I found

Pre-chorus

Take me there, let me drink
You always brought me to the brink
You can leave me here, you can let me sink
Can't be enough time for me to think

Chorus

Still waters, running deep
There to make you drown
Still waters, can run forever
Watch they don't pull you down

Verse 2

See the stillness, in the water
There's enough to go around
Watch the stillness, in the water
In its secrets we are bound

Pre-chorus

Bring you here, make you drink
I'll always take you to the brink
I will bring you here, I will make you sink
Won't be enough time for you to blink

Chorus

Still waters, running deep
There to make you drown
Still waters, may run forever
Watch they don't pull you down

Post-Chorus

Still waters, they're still running
Still waters, they're still running
But they don't make a sound

Verse 3

See the stillness, in the water
In its treasures you'll be found
Watch the stillness, in the water
I can see you run aground

Chorus

Still waters, running deep
There to make you drown
Still waters, may run forever
Watch they don't pull you down

Outro

See the stillness, in the water
There to make you drown
See the stillness, in the water
Wants to pull you down
Wants to pull you down
(fade)

Verse 1

When she slithers up to you, whispers softly in your ear
All the things she wants you to do, says honey let's get out of here
Your heart can try to resist her, cease and desist her
But she already knows how you'll give in

Pre-chorus

She's got you right where she wants you
And it's where you want to be
She'll do whatever she wants to
And we all know that you'll agree

Chorus

You're sitting on my shoulder, I can feel you there
You're the devil on my shoulder, and although my skin is bare
I feel your heat, I feel your touch
Try to shake you off, but you won't budge
You've got your hooks in me

Verse 2

As I'm walking up to you, getting closer, getting near
The things I want to do to you, say honey let's get out of here
Your head won't try to resist me, cease and desist me
And we already know how you'll give in

Pre-chorus

I've got you right where I want you
And it's where you want to be
You'll do whatever I tell you
And we both know that you'll agree

Chorus

I'm sitting on your shoulder, you can feel me there
I'm the devil on your shoulder, and although your skin is bare
You feel my heat, you feel my touch
Try to shake me off, but I won't budge
With hooks that you can't see

Bridge

Devil's on your shoulder, can't you see her there
You've got the devil on your shoulder
But you don't really care

Chorus

You're sitting on my shoulder, I can feel you there
You're the devil on my shoulder, and although my skin is bare
I feel your heat, I feel your touch
Try to shake you off, but you won't budge
You've got your hooks in me

Outro

I feel your heat, I feel your touch
Try to shake you off, but you won't budge
You've got your hooks in me
You feel my heat, you feel my touch
Try to shake me off, but I won't budge
With hooks that you can't see
Got hooks that you can't see
Hooks that you can't see

"Devil On My Shoulder"

A Conversation with HANNAH MARY MCKINNON

This is your seventh thriller and your ninth novel. What's the story behind the story? What was your inspiration for *Only One Survives*?

The very first sliver of an idea came from an abandoned house a few miles from my home. I drove past it one frigid afternoon, and saw the words *Come Play* written in red paint on the front door, which I found deliciously creepy. The image stuck with me, and I attempted to build a story featuring an abandoned lodge and work colleagues, but it didn't sit right.

I sent a short description of my idea to my friends, authors Jennifer Hillier and Samantha M. Bailey, asking what they thought. They both liked it, and Sam suggested I make the group of people a band. The idea gave me an immediate oooh moment followed by *one of them thinks the band's worth more dead than alive*. I knew I was onto something because writing a thriller featuring a band felt fresh and cool. The story shifted quite significantly compared to my initial idea, but the abandoned house remained a constant.

My editor, Dina Davis, was a fantastic help in my pulling the plot together because I got stuck as I developed the outline. We brainstormed Vienna and the Bittersweet's trajectories, and our collaboration was brilliant. I'm immensely proud of how the novel turned out.

How did you develop Vienna's character, and without giving anything away, did you always know how the story would end for her?

Vienna was incredibly interesting to write, particularly as the book is in two distinct parts. Essentially I had to think about her past, and everything that had happened to her before the story starts. Next, I had to figure out how her character would change and grow in the first and second parts of the book, and how I'd cohesively tie them together. It was a great challenge, as was figuring out how and where to use blog posts, news articles, radio transcripts, and social media comments to expand the story and shift the reader's perception.

As for the ending, yes, Vienna is exactly where I anticipated she'd be. I never envisaged another path for her.

This isn't the first time you've written a book from a questionable character's point of view. How challenging is it to spend so much time thinking and writing about crime?

I find it intriguing to write about crime because I'm such a rule follower. Putting myself in the shoes of someone who'd do the things my characters do is an interesting exercise because I'd never act that way. I get to explore terrible thoughts and actions from the safety of my keyboard without putting myself or anybody else in danger, and I can take a break and walk away when it gets too much.

It's fun to think about how I'd outsmart the cops, although in reality I'm such a rubbish liar and I'd feel so guilty about breaking any laws, I'd never get away with anything. I always say I write to entertain, and I hope I achieved that with *Only One Survives*.

Do you have a favorite chapter or scene?

I love the FlatCat gig scene and based it a little on a pub I used to frequent in Biberist near Solothurn in Switzerland, which had live bands, great music, and a fun crowd. Picturing Vienna and Madison performing there as EmVee was fun to imagine.

Writing the interactions between Vienna and Grams was wonderful, too (except for *that* bit). Also, what happens at the cabin gave me the serious creeps, especially the last scene with Vienna and Libby, which was immensely satisfying to write.

There's so much music in this book. What was writing about that like? Do you play an instrument or sing? Have you ever been in a band?

Although I love music, I don't typically listen to any when I'm writing as I get distracted, but in between working on *Only One Survives* I played a lot of tunes, and it was fabulous. I don't know much about the music industry, but one of my childhood friends, Roger, manages artists, and his help and in-depth knowledge were incredible. The fabulous Roger Kent is inspired by him.

As for playing an instrument, I learned the recorder in school. I participated in the morning assembly group for a while until someone very kindly asked me to leave because I was, quite frankly, terrible. I couldn't read music properly, so I'd copy what the person opposite me was playing, meaning I was always a couple of notes behind. A few years later I learned to play the piano, but never very well. I can't sing—my oldest son asked me to stop when he was three. You'll never catch me at a karaoke bar, that's for sure.

Having said all that, I enjoyed writing Vienna's story immensely, researched and listened to so many drummers, I wanted to learn how to play. I signed up for Drumeo.com and while I felt ridiculously self-conscious because I hadn't touched an instrument in 40 years, I'm loving it. I hope I'll be better on the drums than I was with the recorder!

You wrote the lyrics to the Bittersweet songs that feature in the novel. How was that experience?

Amazing! I truly loved writing the lyrics and hope they'll give readers even more insight into Vienna's state of mind. It was fascinating, exciting, and at the same time a huge challenge to imagine songs for the Bittersweet, and it's an experience I hope to somehow continue.

Your first book was published in 2016. At what point in your life did you realize you wanted to be a writer?

Not until my forties when we came to Canada and my start-up HR company failed. I had a decision to make—keep working a corporate job or try something new. I plumped for the latter and I'm beyond thrilled I did. I love my second career and can't imagine doing anything else.

What's your favorite part about writing / being an author? What do you find challenging?

The camaraderie of the writing community is like nothing I've experienced elsewhere. Authors, agents, publishers, readers, reviewers—we all love books and it's amazing to be a part of it. I've made so many friends since I began writing. I feel very lucky.

In terms of the best part about writing, I adore the anticipation of plotting a new novel where everything is open, and the only limit is my imagination. I also love when I get to the editing part and think, "Yeah, there's something here," which is always such a rush. What's challenging? Pushing through the initial draft, knowing I have three hundred blank pages to fill.

You also write holiday romantic-comedies under the pseudonym Holly Cassidy. Can you share what that experience is like?

It's been so interesting to write both. In thrillers, the pressure of coming up with twists and an end that nobody will see coming is immense. When writing my first Holly Cassidy romantic-comedy, *The Christmas Wager*, that pressure fell away, which was great until I realized while the expectation was for my characters to end up together, I had to find unique obstacles to pepper their journey with. Writing romance isn't easy, either!

Other than that, I approach the genres in the same way—with a detailed outline, character interviews, and a photo gallery. I can't write until I know (or think I know) the major plot points and the ending. Without those I meander around like a person in the forest with no map, wondering where I'm headed and getting utterly lost.

What can you tell us about your next novels?

My next Holly Cassidy holiday romantic comedy publishes fall of 2024. At the time of writing it's called *The Christmas Countdown*, a grumpy-sunshine story about a recently heartbroken woman who's given up on love and the holidays, until she's tasked by her sister to complete Advent calendar challenges. A charming baker might be the spoonful of sugar she needs to reignite her belief in herself, love, and Christmas again.

I'm now working on the outline of my next thriller—a story about a missing man and his sister's desperate attempts to find him—but it's a little early to share more about the plot. Let's just say it may be my most twisted one yet.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Internationally bestselling author Hannah Mary McKinnon was born in the UK, grew up in Switzerland and moved to Canada in 2010. After a successful career in recruitment, she quit the corporate world in favor of writing, and has never looked back.

While her debut, *Time After Time*, was a rom-com, she transitioned to the dark side thereafter. Her suspense novels include *The Neighbors*, and bestsellers *Her Secret Son*, *Sister Dear*, *You Will Remember Me*, *Never Coming Home*, and *The Revenge List*. Hannah Mary recently returned to her romantic-comedy roots with *The Christmas Wager*, which published in September 2023 under the pseudonym Holly Cassidy.

Hannah Mary lives in Oakville, Ontario, with her husband and three sons and is working on her next thriller.

Connect with Hannah Mary on Facebook, Instagram, Threads, and TikTok
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For more, visit www.hannahmarymckinnon.com

