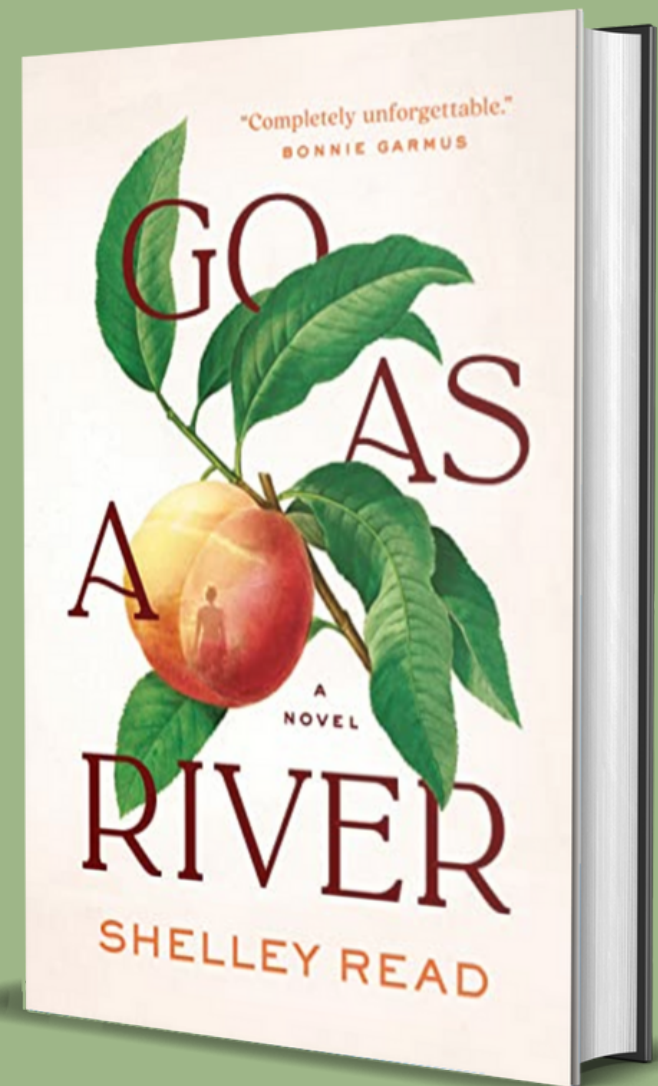


BOOK CLUB KIT



“A FORCE OF NATURE ... UPLIFTING AND
COMPLETELY UNFORGETTABLE.”
—BONNIE GARMUS, AUTHOR OF LESSONS IN CHEMISTRY

A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Hello Book Clubs!

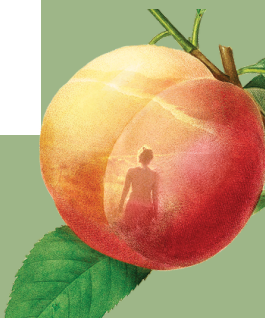
When I think of all the book club readers gathering in living rooms and book shops and, here in Colorado, even around crackling campfires, my heart soars! To me, one of the most delightful things an avid reader can do is circle up with other readers and talk about a good book. What a beautiful way to connect through your hearts and your minds ... and I am immensely honored that *Go as a River* is the book of choice for so many of these wonderful book club chats!

I really poured my heart and soul into creating the character of Victoria Nash, and I am deeply grateful that readers feel so moved by her journey of love, loss, survival, and hope. I hope that with its layered themes of grief, prejudice, home, kinship, and the power of the natural world, *Go as a River* gives your book club plenty to discuss and debate. More than anything, I hope Victoria's story touches your hearts. I hope her story deepens your belief in love, empathy, and personal resilience. And I hope each of you might be inspired by Victoria to go as a river, to find a way forward against obstacle and challenge, gathering and nurturing along the way, finding the courage to carve your own path.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for making *Go as a River* your book club pick. This novel is my love song to Colorado and to strong women everywhere. Enjoy.

With love,

Shelley Lead



SNAPSHOTS FROM COLORADO



Photography by Chris Read



A BRIEF HISTORY OF IOLA

Founded in 1896, Iola, Colorado, was a small but thriving farming and ranching community along the Gunnison River, serviced by a spur of the Denver & Rio Grande narrow-gauge railroad. When the Colorado River Storage Project was authorized by the US Bureau of Reclamation in 1956, the fate of the Gunnison River and the Iola Basin was sealed: the entire 23-mile stretch would be evacuated and the wild river dammed to create Blue Mesa Reservoir.

By 1962 when the dam construction began, 200-300 inhabitants had been displaced. The entire area—its generational ranches, homes, shops, and whatever belongings not hauled away—was flooded in 1965, erasing Iola from the map.

The town of Iola was largely forgotten, until, in 2018, a profound drought required a down-river water call on Blue Mesa Reservoir, draining the lake so low that the muddy remnants of Iola re-emerged. Iola has since become a haunting symbol of displacement and the many challenges of water resource management in the American West.



Top: An undated photo of Iola, CO, before the dam's construction.

Bottom: Tools recovered from Iola, CO, during the 2018 drought.



PEACH CRISP

By Sara Morgan, from *Crested Butte Community Cookbook: A League of Our Own, Volume II*

Ingredients

- 4 c. sliced fresh or frozen peaches
- $\frac{1}{3}$ c. sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ c. sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. cinnamon
- 1 c. all-purpose flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$ c. butter or margarine softened

Directions

Serves 6-8

- Toss peaches with $\frac{1}{3}$ cup sugar and cinnamon.
- Spoon into a lightly greased 8" square baking dish or 9" pie plate and set aside.
- Combine flour and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of sugar; cut in butter with pastry blender until mixture is crumbly. Sprinkle on top of peaches.
- Bake at 375 degrees for 35-40 minutes.. Enjoy!



AUNT JEN'S PERFECT PEACH PIE

By Jennifer Read, Colorado skier, hiker, climber, runner, baker

Ingredients

For the crust

- 2 ½ c. flour
- 1 tbsp. sugar
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 sticks unsalted butter
- 9 tbsp. ice water

For the filling

- 8 to 10 peaches
- ¼ c. Minute tapioca
- ¾ c. sugar

For the egg wash

- 1 egg yolk
- 1 tbsp. half & half or cream

Directions

- Mix flour, sugar and salt. Using a pastry blender or food processor, cut in butter until mixture is finely combined and breaks into into pea-sized pieces. Add ice water and mix until dough is smooth. Do not over mix. Shape dough into two equal balls. Dough should feel soft like a horse's nose. Wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 1 hour, or up to one day.
- Peel and slice peaches. Gently combine with tapioca and sugar.
- Roll out one dough ball in an even, round shape. Use just enough flour to prevent dough from sticking. Place in bottom of nine-inch pie plate. Add prepared peaches. Roll out second dough ball in even, round shape. Place on top of peaches.
- Trim edges so both top and bottom dough have ¼ inch extra. Dip a finger into cold water, wet the inside edges of the dough, and gently press top and bottom layers together to seal the edges. After all edges are sealed, dry hands and dust fingers with flour. Mix egg yolk and cream together. Using a pastry brush, apply a very thin layer of egg wash to top of crust. Avoid egg puddles! Dab a tiny bit of egg wash on fluted edges. (Too little egg wash on the flutes will cause the edges to look dry; too much egg wash on the flutes will cause the pie shield to stick.) Using a small sharp knife, cut vents into top crust. (Too much venting will cause large, unsightly gaps on your finished pie; too little venting will not allow enough heat to escape.) Gently cover pie edges with a pie shield or aluminum foil.
- Bake at 375 degrees for approximately one hour. Monitor pie closely and remove from oven when top is golden. Allow to cool so filling sets. Serve with vanilla ice cream, of course!



GO AS A RIVER PLAYLIST

Wildflowers—The Wailin' Jennys

Simple Twist of Fate—Sarah Jarosz

How Good It Is—Morningsiders

Peaches—Bob Schneider

To the Mountains—Lizzy McAlpine

He Calls Me River—Raye Zaragoza

Iris—Kina Grannis

Bloom—The Paper Kites

To Build A Home—The Cinematic Orchestra,
Patrick Watson

River—Leon Bridges

Light of a Clear Blue Morning—The Wailin' Jennys

Sacred Space—India.Arie

Stand Like An Oak—Rising Appalachia

Iffy—Caamp

letting go—Ziggy Alberts

Elk River Blues—Big Richard

Nobody's Stopping You Now—Lake Street Dive

You're Gonna Go Far—Noah Kahan

Rise Up—Andra Day

Follow the Sun—Xavier Rudd

Solid Ground—Drew Emmitt



Listen on Spotify by scanning the code to the right with your mobile device.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Shelley Read based *Go as a River* on an historical event—the destruction of the town of Iola, Colorado, which now lies at the bottom of Blue Mesa Reservoir. Discuss the way the idea of “home” is treated in the novel. What makes a home? Is one’s childhood home ever somewhere to which one can truly return? Victoria states, “The landscapes of our youths create us, and we carry them within us, storied by all they gave and stole, in who we become.” Is this true for you? Where and how does Victoria find another “home”?
2. Wil and Victoria’s relationship is a case of star-crossed lovers from different backgrounds and cultures. We know very little about Wil’s life before he arrived in Iola. Do you feel the novel should have revealed more about Wil and where he came from? Why do you think the author held back? Can you imagine a future in which Victoria and Wil might have been able to stay together? Why or why not?
3. When Victoria and Wil meet, Victoria has spent all of her life in one place, whereas Wil is a drifter. How does this contribute to who each of them is?
4. Many of the characters in the novel are shaped by the losses they have suffered. For Victoria, her father, Seth, and Og, the deaths of their loved ones in the car accident means they share a common tragedy, but they each respond to this trauma in different ways. Og also experiences the loss of his brother and his leg in the war, and Ruby-Alice, Inga, and Lukas suffer loss as well. Discuss the role of loss in the novel. Why do you think Victoria can move forward in her life, while many other characters cannot?



5. *Go as a River* turns on the brutal murder of Wil, which is the culmination of the racism he has suffered throughout his life. Discuss the role prejudice plays in the novel. How are Wil, Lukas, and Ruby-Alice affected by people's incorrect assumptions? How are Victoria and Inga also limited by societal norms?

6. When pregnant Victoria flees to the wilderness, she is exposed to the elements and must survive on her own. How do the forces of nature in the Big Blue contrast with those in Iola? As Victoria attunes herself to her new forest home, she finds herself changing: "Woven in some great and mysterious tapestry, the only sound I listened for was the steady pulse of the vast collection of beating hearts, the inhale and exhale of a million lives being lived alongside mine. I realized I had never been less afraid in my life." How would you characterize the role of the natural world in Victoria's development? What does her time in the wilderness allow her to discover about herself?

7. Victoria's decision to sell her family's farm to the government and leave Iola is seen by many in the community as an act of betrayal. What factors beyond the threat of the new reservoir compel Victoria to leave? Do you believe she had an obligation to stay? Why does Seth want to return to Iola? Was Victoria right to lie to Seth and remove the family's orchard without his knowledge?

8. Victoria expects Ruby-Alice's funeral to be a small affair, in keeping with her status as the town's outsider. But, to Victoria's surprise, a large gathering of townsfolk attend the burial, joining hands and singing the community funeral song for Ruby-Alice. Were you also surprised? How did this moment change or develop your opinion of the townspeople of Iola? Do you agree or disagree with Victoria's belief that most would have also attended a funeral for Wil, had they been given the chance?



9. The high arid climate of the Gunnison Valley is not a natural fit for peaches, yet the Nash family succeeds in adapting their Georgia peach trees to Lola, and, later, Victoria manages to transplant the orchard to Paonia. Why do you think she feels so strongly about transplanting the trees? The trees' ability to survive and then thrive under trying circumstances mirrors Victoria's own path. In what ways is the orchard a metaphor for Victoria's journey? Does saving the orchard give Victoria the purpose she is looking for?

10. Zelda compares the displacement of Lola residents for the creation of the reservoir to the forced removal of the Ute tribe, the indigenous people of Colorado's Western Slope, pointing out that the place the current inhabitants like to call their own once was another people's homeland. She acknowledges that the two circumstances are "not the same," but what is Zelda's point? Do you agree or disagree? How is Zelda's comment linked to Victoria's thoughts about "progress" as she is turned away from visiting Lola one final time?

11. While Inga and Victoria are initially bonded by their different circumstances—Inga's ability to provide what Victoria cannot—there are also many parallels between them. What similarities do you see between Inga and Victoria? What differences?

12. The title of the book refers to a phrase first spoken by Wil that eventually becomes a mantra for Victoria. Toward the end of the novel, Victoria ponders what she might say to her lost son: "I would explain that what I had learned most about becoming is that it takes time. I would say I had tried, as Wil taught me, to go as a river, but it had taken me a long while to understand what that meant." What do you think it means to "go as a river"?

13. What do you believe happened next for Victoria, Inga, Zelda, and Lukas after the final lines of the novel?

