Book Club Kit

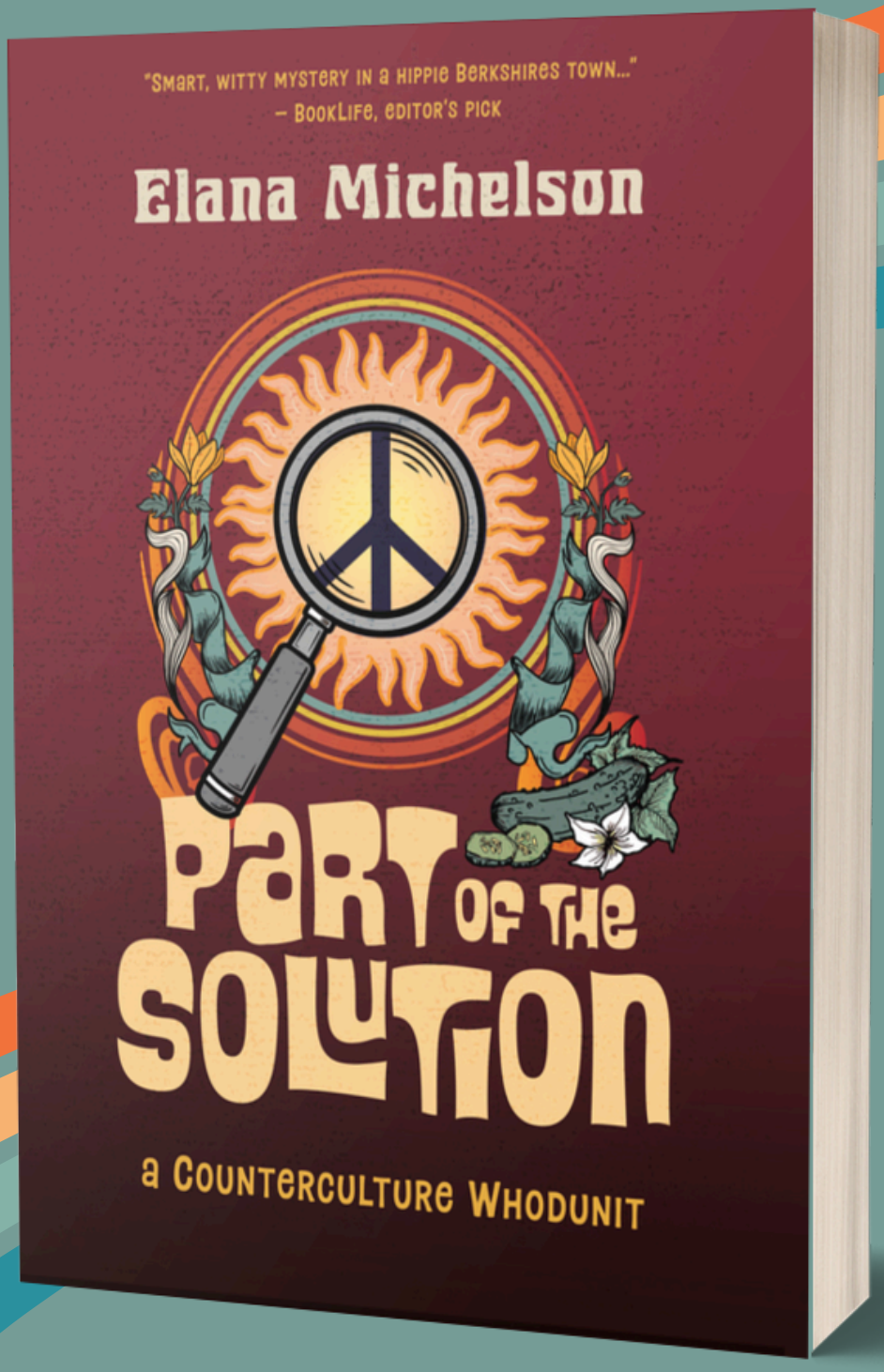
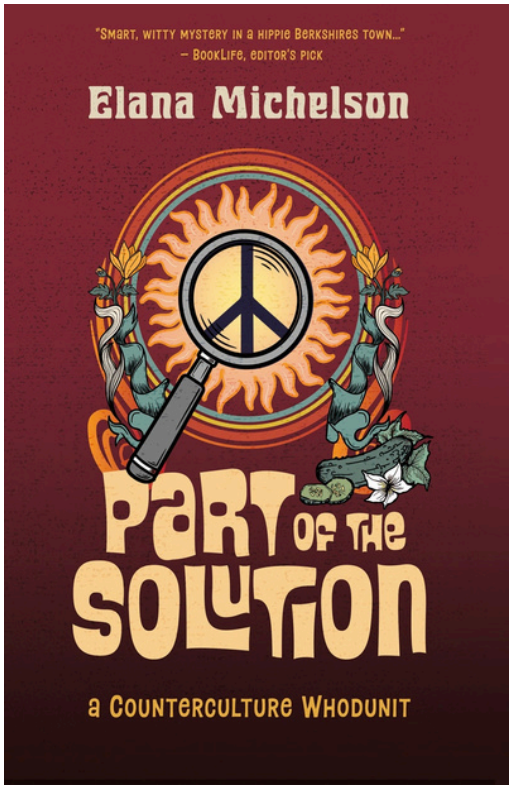


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Part of the Solution: A Counterculture Whodunit

Agatha Christie meets Woodstock in this witty, whip-smart mystery.

It's 1978, and Jennifer Morgan — a sharp-tongued New Yorker on the run from graduate school — has traded a dissertation on Emily Brontë for lava lamps, craft shops, and boysenberry muffins in Flanders, Massachusetts, a countercultural haven that smells faintly of patchouli and revolution. Then a body turns up, and Jennifer's hard-won idyll cracks wide open.

Egged on by her Tarot-reading housemate and stonewalled by the hippie-hating police chief, Jennifer takes it upon herself to solve the murder, trading theories (and sparks) with Ford McDermot, the young cop whose quiet intelligence might make him the unlikeliest ally, or something more. The suspects are all here: a gentle woodworker, a Yeats-wannabe poet, an anti-war hero, a peace-loving minister, and an organic farmer who knows how to hold a grudge.

With Dylan on the stereo and a joint making the rounds, *Part of the Solution* is a sharp, funny, unexpectedly moving trip back to the 1970s. It's a mystery for fans of *The Thursday Murder Club* and *Only Murders in the Building* who wish they knew those characters back in the day and like their mysteries flavored with snappy dialogue, classic oldies, and boho cultural panache.

More than a mystery, *Part of the Solution* brings us back to a living, breathing world whose offbeat charm and literary soulfulness can't stop the past from intruding on the present or stop time from moving on.

Dear Book Club Coordinator,

I'm excited to share this "counterculture whodunit" with you and your book club. The book is both a love letter to the earnest, wayward culture of the 1960s and 1970s and an exploration of the moment that every generation faces, when decisions we've made can never be undone and will haunt us forever.

Reviewers have noted the book's humor and the way in which it pulls the reader back to the sights, smells, and especially the sounds of the time -- the posters on the walls, the hint of patchouli oil in the air, the songs on the record player. My favorite comment might be from Literary Titan's review: "Reading it felt like stepping into a room that smells like coffee and incense and old books." *Part of the Solution* isn't a cozy – these are, after all, the days of sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll. But I did mean it as an immersion into a time, now long past, in which my particular generation made its own unique stab at changing the world.

Book club discussion questions are included in this packet. You can also download them at https://elanamichelsonauthor.com/book-details/. Scroll down.

If your book club chooses to read *Part of the Solution*, I'm happy to connect with you – in person if you are in New York City, the Berkshires, or the Hudson Valley, or else on Zoom or a similar platform. You can contact me through my website: elanamichelsonauthor.com.

Meanwhile, there is a playlist in this packet of the music that is always playing on the record player or tape deck. You can listen to the playlist as you read or talk about the book – the QR code for it is on page 8. And I've included the recipe for Annie's pickles, minus the, well, never mind. No spoilers.

Thank you so much for your interest in *Part of the Solution*.

Happy reading!

Elana Michelson

Book Club Discussion Guide

1. What was your experience of reading Part of the Solution? Were you immediately drawn into the story? Did the book intrigue you? Amuse you?

2. In various ways, many of the characters in Part of the Solution claim to be working for social justice. How did you understand the theme of social justice in the novel? Which of the characters embodied the political convictions of the 1960s and 1970s in ways that you found meaningful?

3. While all of the residents of Flanders are “countercultural,” they are very different from each other. What different aspects of the counterculture are represented by various characters? Who was your favorite character, and why?

4. There is always music playing at the Café Galadriel. What is the role of music in the novel?

5. What attracts Jennifer and Ford to each other? What tears them apart at the end? Do you think that they could have stayed together if circumstances had been different? Do you think that Ford was right in the decision he made?

6. A death goes unresolved for decades. Why do you think Jennifer kept what she knew to herself? Would you have made the same choice?

7. In the epilogue, Jennifer reflects that, over the course of her life, she has “learned what everything cost.” What has she learned? How did her time in Flanders impact the rest of her life?

8. If you lived through the 1970s, how did the novel's portrait of the era match or differ from your own memory of it? If you didn't, what resonated with you or surprised you about this period as depicted here?

9. Did you guess the solution to the mystery or were you surprised? Did you find the ending satisfying? If you could rewrite the ending, would you? If so, what ending would you have rather seen?

10. If you were to talk with author Elana Michelson, what would you want to tell her? What would you like to ask her? (Note: you can be in touch with Elana through her website: elanamichelsonauthor.com. She loves talking with book clubs and says that she always learns something about the book).

Reviwers' Praise

"Sassy and soulful... *Part of the Solution* is a **gem of a mystery novel** with an effusive cast, feisty language, sharp cultural insights, and a moving love story that transcends tragedy and time."
—*Foreword Clarion Reviews*, 5 Stars

"Michelson **captures the messy idealism of the counterculture era** with charm and also with a sharp pinch. I kept nodding because the book understands something about how people try to build a better world and then stumble right over their good intentions. The spiritual seekers. The radicals. The shy intellectuals who think too much and then think even more. I felt the book's tenderness toward them, and I felt its frustration too. The tension between hope and disillusionment had real weight."
—*Literary Titan*

"Michelson **will keep readers guessing** ... [She] **defies expectations** and invites contemplation about the nature of justice, and what it means to leave something in the past."
—*BookLife Reviews*, Editors Pick

"Michelson's strengths lie ... in her ability to re-create a specific cultural moment... The Café Galadriel and its eccentric patrons feel **luminous and alive**... Michelson captures both the intimacy and the corrosive weight of long-held secrets."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Delightful, **compelling**, and unexpected."
—*Midwest Book Review*

"Michelson's novel **does more than solve a crime**. It captures a moment when music, politics and personal identity were inseparable, weaving references to the era's soundtrack and ideals into every chapter."
—*New York Trend NYC*

Readers' Praise

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“What a treat! As a fan of mysteries (and one who has become a bit jaded) I was impressed with this clever and complex murder mystery... Part of the Solution is a welcome addition to the mystery genre and I'm hoping for more from Michelson.”
—Amazon Customer, 5-star review

“A wonderful escape. This book was such a fun read!... I loved the retro time frame, so lovingly described with delightful details of clothing, dining, and late-hippie lifestyle. The characters are a rogue’s gallery... charming, annoying, surprising and mysterious in turn. The murder mystery was a beguiling challenge. I actually sussed one of the “how-done-it” clues, but the perpetrator was a puzzle until the satisfying reveal.”
—M. Reid on Amazon, 5-star review

A **vibrant**, nostalgic whodunnit with a lively voice and a fantastically quirky cast... Jennifer Morgan is just that kind of mystery lead you want: sharp-tongued, spirited, and refreshingly relatable... But **what really stands out is the atmosphere of the novel**: the groovy soundtrack, the unconventional lifestyles, and the subtle but constant hum of the '70s cultural shift. It's all captured with wit and ease by the author. The mystery itself is satisfyingly twisty, and the reveal rooted in buried secrets and hidden pasts lands beautifully. **Snappy, nostalgic, and full of heart**, *Part of the Solution* is a delightful read for anyone who loves character driven mysteries wrapped in vintage vibes.”
—@pageswithsudeshna, Instagram

“*Part of the Solution* is a **sharply-written, cerebral novel**. I give high marks for the diction and cultural, historical, and literary references dropped throughout the book... The author provided a satisfactory, somewhat open-ended solution to the former and resolved the whodunit parts of the latter in unique and clever ways. And I appreciate that unlike many mysteries, the characters really struggled with the horror of what had happened and felt unsettled with the case unresolved.”
—Kristine at Hallways Blog

Readers' Praise

“The strength is this novel is the historical and cultural setting. If you lived through the era, much will be familiar and like a trip down memory lane. If you are younger, reading this mystery will give you a good sense of life for young adults at that troubling time. Michelson's writing style is good, making the novel quite interesting to read. She has **certainly done her research** to provide an authentic scene. The explanation of the murder is complex, but then, so was life for these young adults.”
—Book Reviews from an Avid Reader

“I loved reading this!... The literary and cultural allusions are beautifully intertwined with the dialogue and plot, and the descriptions and mood at times made me think of Louise Penny’s writing. **I didn’t want to put it down.**”
—D. Signer on Amazon, 5-star review

“I want to say how much I enjoyed reading *Part of the Solution*. The near contemporary setting, the ethos of the time lovingly yet unsparingly captured, the characters and their profiles all had a genuine resonance for me. It wasn't just that I had sympathy for the main characters and familiarity with the zeitgeist. The author had such a snappy, sarcastic, smart aleck take on their... well, characters. The element of mystery was so well done; it became **a page turner** for me. The final revelation was a satisfying release of the tension of bepuzzlement. The pleasant warmth, for the reader, of the chance meeting was both a literary device and as natural as can be. It satisfied a very human preoccupation: "Hmmmmm... Whatever became of so-and-so.”
—A. Schindler on Amazon, 5-star review

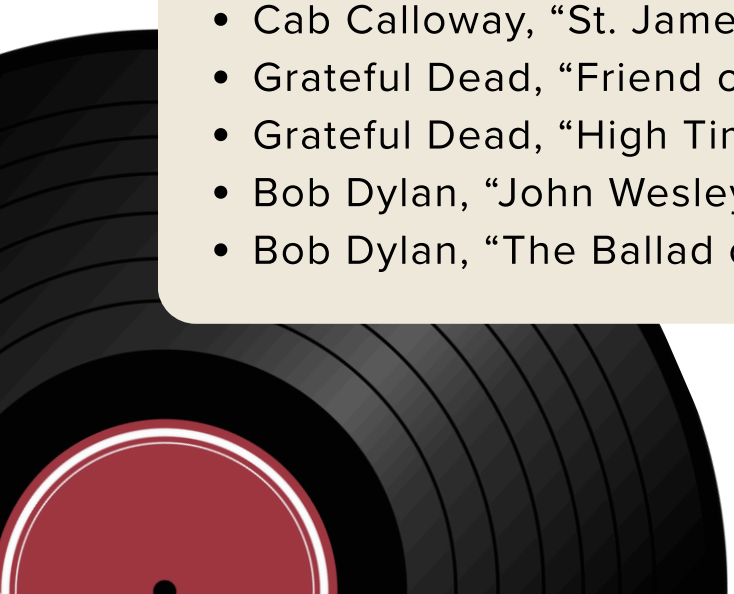
“A group of young friends is playing at adulthood, sharing a house in a cute Berkshires village while pursuing their dreams. Some work in the café, like Jennifer Morgan, and there are also a poet, a woodworker, a minister, an organic farmer, and an activist. Jennifer decides to investigate when one of them is murdered, and I was lulled by the mulled cider and her budding relationship with a police officer, but this is a mystery about friendship and human nature. For Jennifer, it’s about loyalty, and that’s why when she figures out what happened, she cannot say a word.”
—G.P. Gottlieb, author of the Whipped and Sipped Mystery series

Part of the Solution Playlist

There is always music playing at the Café Galadriel, often in dialogue with the story and main character Jennifer's thoughts and moods. Somehow, she has to solve the mystery in between quoting Bob Dylan lines and talking back to the lyrics of Leonard Cohen.

- Bob Marley, "Three Little Birds"
- Rolling Stones, "Honky-tonk Women"
- Joan Baez, "John Riley"
- Bob Dylan, "Desolation Row"
- Joni Mitchell, "Carey"
- Billy Holiday, "God Bless the Child"
- Eddie Cochran, "Weekend"
- Eddie Cochran, "Summertime Blues"
- Leonard Cohen, "Suzanne"
- Leonard Cohen, "Sisters of Mercy"
- Carole King, "Way Over Yonder"
- Jimmy Hendrix, "All Along the Watchtower"
- Edith Piaf, "Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien"
- Black Sabbath, "Paranoid"
- Joan Baez, "I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine"
- Tom Rush, "San Francisco Bay Blues"
- Cab Calloway, "St. James Infirmary"
- Grateful Dead, "Friend of the Devil"
- Grateful Dead, "High Time"
- Bob Dylan, "John Wesley Harding"
- Bob Dylan, "The Ballad of Franky Lee and Judas Priest"

Listen to the playlist: scan here



Annie's Pickle Recipe

Ingredients



- 2 lbs Kirby cucumbers
- 1 1/2 cups apple cider or white vinegar
- 1 1/2 cups water
- 2 tbsp pickling or kosher salt
- 6 whole, peeled garlic cloves
- 3 sprigs of fresh dill
- 1 tsp whole black peppercorns
- 1/4 tsp mustard seeds

Instructions

1. For refrigerator pickles, wash pint mason jars well. (See below about canning safely if you want to preserve the pickles for more than a month or two.)
2. Combine the vinegar, salt, and water in a saucepan and mix well. Bring it to a boil and then take it off the stove and let the mixture cool.
3. Quarter the cucumbers lengthwise, trimming as necessary to make sure they will fit in the jars.
4. Add the garlic, dill, peppercorns and mustard seed to the bottom of the jars.
5. Add the sliced cucumbers lengthwise.
6. Pour the brine over the pickles. The tops of all the cucumbers should be covered. Screw on the lid.
7. Let the pickles refrigerate overnight. (They're even better after two days.)
8. Eat them within a month or two.

Note on canning: If you want the pickles to keep longer than a month or two, follow safe canning guidelines:

- Boil the jars, lids, and any utensils for 10 minutes;
- Make double sure that the brine covers the cucumbers completely.
- Once the jars are sealed, boil them upright for 20 minutes in water that fully covers the jars.
- Remove from pot and let cool. Listen for the "pop" that lets you know that the jars are sealed.