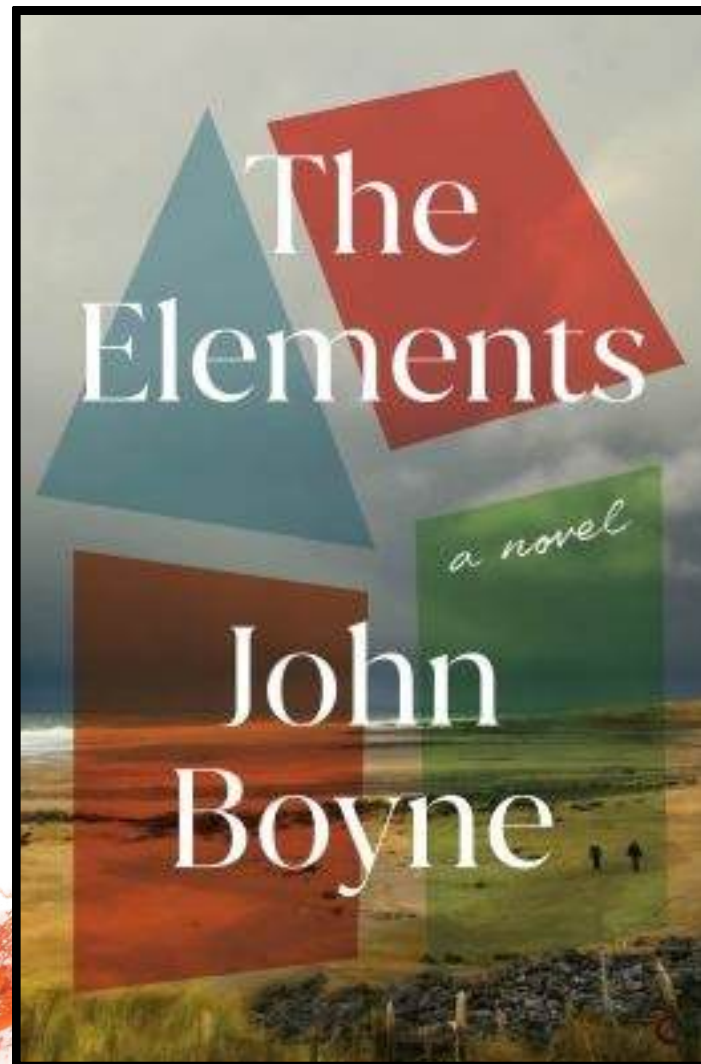


Book & Bake

April 25, 2026

An exploration of trauma as a transmissive force; four interconnected perspectives.....



- **The enabler**
- **The perpetrator**
- **The accomplice**
- **The victim**



Book & Bake

Vanessa Carvin/Willow Hale

- Wife to Brendan Carvin, pedophile
- Mother to Emma (deceased) and Rebecca

Ifechi

Local Catholic priest from Nigeria

Dr. Freya Petrus

- Juror number 6 in Evan's trial
- Buried alive at a construction site at age 12 by Arthur and Pascoe
- Daughter to "Beth," a teenage mother who left her with her grandmother

Evan Keogh

- Son to Mr. Keogh, an overbearing and abusive man
- Son to Mrs. Keogh, a quiet/passive woman who encourages Evan to leave the island
- Reluctant professional footballer
- Has strong feelings for Cormac, a local boy

Aaron Umber

- One of Freya's many victims
- Medical student working under Freya
- Father to Emmit
- Ex-husband to Rebecca

Book & Bake

1. Vanessa ignored signs about Brendan's crimes, focusing instead on her family's reputation. Can you sympathize with her choices, or do you think her inaction was unforgivable? How do you weigh the instinct to protect loved ones against the duty to protect others?
2. Both Freya and Brendan cause harm—Brendan out of selfishness, Freya driven by vengeance for her own trauma. Is it ever possible to empathize with an abuser when their motives are rooted in past wounds, or does this excuse nothing? Who, if anyone, seemed more human to you?
3. Evan's willingness to enable Robbie's actions, despite his own suffering under abusive control, raises tough questions. Is it fair to hold people responsible for their complicity when they're acting out of fear or need for acceptance? Can trauma ever excuse failing to intervene?

Book & Bake

4. Rebecca believes everyone experiences dark impulses, but morality comes from what we choose to do with them. Do you agree that choice always plays a role—or are some people truly unable to help themselves? Which character do you think best illustrates your view?
5. Aaron and Vanessa both struggle with the idea that trauma can be passed down. Should survivors focus on healing themselves first so that they do not spread trauma to others? How did you feel about the choices they made?
6. How (if at all) did your views of each protagonist change as you learned more about their past traumatic experiences?

Book & Bake

7. Which novella was your favorite and why?
8. How did you feel about the book's heavy subject matter? Was it difficult to read? What parts of the book were the most satisfying?
9. Who were your favorite and least favorite characters and why? Is there someone you wanted to like but had difficulty because of their actions in the book?
10. Parenting and different parenting styles are at the heart of many stories in *The Elements*. What lessons have you learned from parenting or being parented?
11. How do the events of the novel reflect current social views of toxic masculinity? How does Freya's response to the trauma inflicted upon her throughout childhood conflict with your views of toxic masculinity?

Book & Bake

12. What are your thoughts about how the author connects the elements to each protagonist of each novella and what do you think the elements represent?
13. Each novella is written in first person. Why did the author choose to do this and do you find each protagonist reliable? How does the first person point of view affect your views/understanding of each protagonist?
14. Compare/contrast each protagonist's response to trauma and particularly explore why only one of them became a predator.
15. Do you feel the author provided some sort of closure to each protagonist as well as the supporting characters? Why or why not, and how so?
16. What questions would you like to discuss/explore that are not mentioned here?

Book & Bake

Quotes - There are too many to include so feel free to bring some you would like to unpack with the group.

“Was I a terrible mother from the start, driven as I was, by status and my busy social life, viewing her as just another accessory [...] If I dwell on these questions too much, I will bang my head against the wall until I, like her, am dead.”

~Vanessa/Willow (Part 1, Chapter 4, page 27)

“My frantic longing for water. The sound of the earth as they flung spadefuls down upon my improvised coffin. And my desperate need for air as I sucked what I could through the small breathing tube they had left me with. Only one of the four elements—fire—was missing that night, but its time would come.”

~Freya (Part 3, Chapter 4, page 265)

“I wanted him to invite me to stay, to suggest that we watch the rest of the film together, for him to run his hands through my hair and put me to bed afterward in the spare room, to tuck me in. To be my father, to be my kind father. For me to be his obedient son.”

~Evan (Part 2, Chapter 4, page 147)

“Most parents are at their most protective when their children are infants, but I’m the opposite, having become increasingly vigilant since he turned fourteen a few months ago. I can’t help myself. I know the dangers out there for boys his age.”

~Aaron (Part 4, Chapter 1, page 363)