PARK CIRCLES

BOOK CLUB KIT

CAITE DOLAN-LEACH Dear Readers,

These days, I feel like we could all do with A Retreat—just a quiet place to go chill out and simmer down and not doom-scroll your way into anxious sleep every night. Frankly, the idea of being anywhere other than my house right now sounds pretty appealing, even if the doors are maybe locked at night and the diet is primarily violets and lentils. As my main girl Liv Reed says: who doesn't need to be more centered?

While this book may not get you out your house, my hope is that it can maybe at least get you out of yourself for a while.

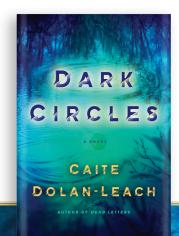
For years now, I've been fairly obsessed with podcasts as a narrative form. I've never really fallen in love with audiobooks, but the fortyish-minute radio show is a medium with which I engage almost every day—walking my ridiculous long dog through the cemetery, bingeing half a season with one of my five-hour cooking sessions (why not make boeuf borguignon and baguettes? What else would I be doing?). Back when I used to go places, podcasts were the soundtrack to airports and train rides and taxis; now they're the stories of my everyday, serial killers the voices who keep me company while I vacuum. I listen to a lot of podcasts. And to say you listen to a lot of podcasts is to say you listen to at least some true crime.

Like Liv (and, apparently, lots of millennials) I have vivid memories of watching *Unsolved Mysteries* and being both riveted and freaked out. For as long as I can remember, I've been interested in stories where people get murdered—real or fictitious. With this book I wanted to think about those kinds of stories and what they actually do, for their audiences and for the people involved in them.

I wanted to investigate why we can't look away from these violent stories, but I also wanted to think through some other kinds of complicated gazes: how we look at and inspect (particularly female) celebrities, and how we view our own mental and physical selves through the lens of the wellness industry. My aim is always to give people a story they can get lost in, but, with this book, I also hoped to give people a chance to think about and talk through complex ecosystems of attention—what we collectively give our time and energy to, and how it impacts our sense of self and wellness.

I hope I've earned a few hours of your attention, and that you can extract some pleasure from a dark little mystery set in one of my favorite places in the world.

Thanks for reading, Caite



DISCUSSION OUESTIONS

- 1. Characters from the author's previous book, *Dead Letters*, make frequent appearances in *Dark Circles*. Who did you recognize? Did you notice any other references or similarities?
- 2. If you haven't read *Dead Letters*, what was your first impression of Ava? Did it turn out to be right? If not, how was Ava different from what you initially expected?
- 3. Both Ava and Liv struggle with the pressure of maintaining a public image. How are the kinds of expectations Ava has to meet different from Liv's? What differs about how they cope with the pressure?
- 4. The intense backlash Liv tries to escape at the House of Light mirrors the kind of obsessive, love/hate relationship we have with celebrities today. Liv is consumed by the people who observe her, not just as an actress, but as a female celebrity—what do you think the distinction is? How does the book talk about celebrity culture in general?
- 5. Jess and Liv are the epitome of the saying, "opposites attract"—their differences are often what make and break the relationship. What do you think makes their friendship work? Did you empathize with either of them?
- 6. Liv has a complicated relationship with her father—one that's fueled by both love and self-interest. Besides Jess and Liv, can you think of any other characters with similarly complex relationships? What do you think they have in common?
- 7. Quietly confident, and a force of nature when she needs to be, Rain is a natural born leader—and things quickly start to fall apart without her. What do you think is Rain's most powerful asset? What makes her so influential?
- 8. While self-care isn't inherently sinister, there's something about the House of Light that feels unsettlingly realistic—it forces the reader to face the dark side of wellness. In what ways does the book talk about the wellness industry and some of its predatory qualities?
- 9. True crime podcasts play a big role in this book. What did you like most about *Vultures*? What's unique about true crime podcasts? Why do you think so many people are drawn to them?

10-MINUTE MORNING YOGA ROUTINE

- CHILD'S POSE (with side bends): Stretches hips, spine, thighs, and ankles.
- CAT AND COW: Mobilizes the vertebrae, creating more mobility and functionality in the spine.
- **DOWNWARD-FACING DOG**: Stretches the posterior chain (hamstrings, spinal extensors, and glutes). Strengthens arms, legs, and feet.
- LOW WARRIOR WITH HANDS BEHIND THE BACK: Stretches chest muscles and front of thigh. Works to open hips and shoulders.
- **HALF SPLITS** (hamstring stretch): Stretches hamstrings and calf muscles.
- **SEATED FORWARD FOLD**: Stretches posterior chain and creates flexibility in the spine and hips. Improves digestion.
- HALF-LEGGED FORWARD FOLD (Janu Sirsasana): Stretches hamstrings, spine, shoulders, and groin. Stimulates the liver and kidneys.
- **LEG SEATED TWIST** (Marichiyasana): Improves spinal mobility, opens the shoulders, and improves posture and breathing.
- **RECLINED TWISTS**: Improves spinal mobility. Lengthens supporting spinal muscles, and releases the lower back.
- BRIDGE: Strengthens hamstrings and glutes while engaging muscles of the front body.

RAIN'S MINDFUL MEDITATION PROMPTS

Take a moment to reflect and refocus with some wise words from Rain:

"You have just one [self], and you've forgotten it. Here, we'll help you move closer to it, understand it, and rebuild your life so that you never risk losing it again. There are more than enough selves in the world without you feeling entitled to multiply your own."

"The first day or two we find it beneficial to socially and physically detoxify, spend some time in silence with ourselves. You'll be in your room for most of today, and you can do what you like with that time. I find it invaluable to disconnect from others for periods throughout the work, and be really present in what arises from that solitude."

"The Process of Return isn't necessarily a pleasant one. This is not a weekend in Cabo. You're going to spend time with awake beings, and that can be uncomfortable. Waking up is painful, and you will feel that. It's my job to be Shiva to you, the destroyer of your world. Don't expect it to feel good."

"I invite everyone to fully inhabit their bodies and breath and take in this here and now, this presence. This presentness requires space, and this world is an overcrowded one, so carve out a circle of light. Invite the gratitude of this presence into yourself, and exhale with fully present beingness. With that exhale, let go of the pain demons that reside in you, of the negativity that poisons your body."

"This work, of confronting your shadow and moving toward light, can be very difficult. Painful. For some people, it can even be dangerous. You may touch things that are too dark, too powerful for you to combat, and your psychic energy might get siphoned off by the wrong things, further weakening you. This is the oldest struggle there is, the fight between dark and light. Get used to feeling unsure—unsafe, even. That's normal. It's not just normal, it's necessary."

Seneca Lake wine recommendations from

CAITE DOLAN-LEACH

Wine and wine lovers make frequent appearances in this book, largely because of Ava's right-next-door vineyard. These wines are all also from Seneca Lake, and mostly (with the exception of Dr. Frank) from the east side of the lake, where both *Dark Circles* and *Dead Letters* take place.



BOUNDARY BREAKS DRY RIESLING:

The Finger Lakes region is all about their Rieslings (the climate, with its deep lakes and cold winters, is well-suited for this varietal) and this is one of my favorites. It's complicated, flinty, and the perfect example of what the region does best. Honestly, all their wines are pretty great.



DAMIANI BOLLICINE:

I mostly drink sparkling wine, and this bubbly is my go-to when I'm home. One of my first errands is often to pop over to the vineyard with my sister to pick up a case—to have on hand for picnics, parties, or just evenings on the porch. It's dry, delicious and very reasonably priced— like a particularly nice Prosecco. If you're in more of a red mood, Damiani's Cab Franc is also delicious—another varietal that does well in this neck of the woods. And their rosé tastes like picnics and sunburns at the lake.



DR. KONSTANTIN FRANK BRUT:

Another superb bubbly. It's on the pricey end, but it's a nice treat for when you're feeling a bit fancy and glamorous (I feel like Liv would drink plenty of this stuff). Crisp, bone-dry, and with the creaminess that comes from the Methode Champenoise.



SHALESTONE:

Reds are tricky to make in this region because of the cold climate, but red is all that Shalestone does, and they're delicious. The Cabernet Sauvignon is a favorite of mine—earthy, complex, and with the classic Cab Sauv tannins that only get better with time.

Here are some other, well-known vineyards in the area, for your next visit to the Finger Lakes region:

LAMOREAUX LANDING • GLENORA • RAVINES
WAGNER • HERMANN J. WEIMER

Playlists from

CAITE DOLAN-LEACH

Here are three playlists of podcast episodes, seasons, or shows that were used for research while writing *Dark Circles*—along with a few personal favorites and some brief commentary.

PODCASTS ABOUT WELLNESS



MAINTENANCE PHASE

Highlights include the episodes on Moon Juice and The Master Cleanse, as well as "The Wellness to QAnon Pipeline"



THE DREAM

Season 2 is all about crystals

PODCASTS ABOUT CULTS



THE **OPPORTUNIST**

The Sherry Shriner season in particular is pretty bananas



DEAR FRANKLIN JONES

A personal testimonial with some nice human elements



THE DREAM

Season 1 deals with pyramid selling and MLMs, which are House of Light-adjacent



ESCAPING NXIVM Sex cults! Movie stars!



THE GATEWAY Teal Swan:

not your typical guru



HEAVEN'S GATE

Aliens



GURU: THE DARK SIDE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Deadly sweat lodges. self-help that kills . . . classic

PODCASTS ABOUT TRUE CRIME



TO LIVE AND DIE IN L.A.

Pretty aspiring starlet, listener involvement, and the story as it unfolds



BEAR BROOK

Serial killers, dead bodies in barrels, and some insight into how "armchair detectives" can solve crimes



MAN IN THE WINDOW

Listened to this before getting to I'll be Gone in the Dark



SOMEONE KNOWS SOMETHING

For pretty in-depth reporting