



THE LAST GUEST

TESS LITTLE

BOOK CLUB KIT

AUTHOR LETTER

Dear Reader,

This novel emerged—with eight limbs, three hearts, and nine brains—from my octopus obsession. Four years ago, I tumbled down a rabbit hole of online videos showing the mysterious creatures escaping their tanks, hunting, solving puzzles. I was mesmerised by the ways they moved, how their limbs crawled and curled, how soft and slippery their skin seemed beneath the water. They were otherworldly, alien. Eventually I found myself on a cephalopod forum, where people who owned octopuses as pets compared tips. In the days after, I kept returning to a needling question: how could someone keep such an intelligent, beautiful creature captive?

The answer became a character. Someone extravagant and rich, who lived somewhere unconventional; someone who enjoyed the mythological, the whimsical; someone creative, but also powerful, controlling—a film director, I posited. A man, certainly. As this character materialised, I realised two things. First, that I was seeing that character through the eyes of an ex-partner—someone who knew him intimately, yet would keep him at a distance. And second, that I wanted him dead.

So began the murder mystery. I never imagined my first novel would be a mystery, but it's a genre which I've always loved—the first adult books I read as a child of ten or eleven were Agatha Christie novels. It's an interesting genre for the writer, too. Mysteries encourage the author to peel away at the layers of a character, to view their relationships from different angles, and to uncover all the buried secrets.

And yet, as I wrote, I became less interested in who the killer was, and more concerned with why they would kill. The novel thus became a space for me to explore certain questions which had been percolating in my mind for some time. This is where the heart of the story lies: in an exploration of memory, power dynamics, guilt, control, and silencing.

I hope that in reading my novel, you consider these questions too—and that you'll find yourself as mesmerised by the magnificent, unknowable octopus as I was while writing the creature.

Yours,
Tess

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How effective was the author's use of plot twists? Author Tess Little's writing has been compared to Agatha Christie's style. Were you able to predict certain things before they happened, or were you guessing until the end of the story?
2. Did you enjoy the "locked room" aspect of the book? How did that element of storytelling build the tension and suspicion? Did it make it easier or harder to figure out what happened?
3. Memory plays a significant role in this book; in what ways does it inform identity? Do you think even the things you don't remember can affect who you become? What are the events in your life that have been important in shaping who you are?
4. The story is told through flashbacks – from the party and from the earlier days of Elspeth and Richard's relationship. How does moving between these timelines affect how the story is told and which characters you trust?
5. Persephone tried to escape from Richard regularly, since she was also trapped by him. What do you make of her intelligence? If you have a pet, what do you think they do and do not understand?
6. Over the last few years, the #MeToo movement has encouraged many people to share their own stories of abuse as Elspeth eventually does in the novel. But who was silencing her—was it Richard, society, or Elspeth herself? Does speaking out shift the power dynamics of the book?
7. If you were making this book into a movie or TV show, who would you cast in the lead roles?
8. Richard was a villain who thrived off cruelty. Did you find him to be a sympathetic, yet cruel, character? Or was he only all bad with no shades of gray?

"THE PERSEPHONE"

A MYTHOLOGICAL VARIATION ON THE CLASSIC CHAMPAGNE COCKTAIL FRENCH 75 . . .

INGREDIENTS:

SERVES ONE

- 2 tbsp. pomegranate juice, chilled (skip the syrup if your juice has added sugar)
- 1 tsp. sugar syrup
- 1 orange
- Orange bitters (or your bitters of choice)
- 6 pomegranate seeds
- Champagne, chilled

PREPARATION

1. Add the pomegranate juice, sugar syrup, and a squeeze of orange juice to a measuring jug, being careful to remove any orange pips. Add one dash of bitters—you can always add more to taste at the end. Mix together then pour into your glass of choice (a champagne flute or coupe will do). Top with champagne (or your sparkling white wine of choice).
2. To garnish: add the six pomegranate seeds. Slice a long, thin sliver of orange skin, and wind it around your finger to make a curl—rest this twist on the edge of the glass, like a tentacle emerging from the deep... Your drink is ready to serve—enjoy!



CLASSIC TIRAMISU

BY ALISON ROMA

YIELD 6 TO 8 SERVINGS

TIME 25 MINUTES, PLUS CHILLING



INGREDIENTS:

FOR THE CREAM

- 4 large egg yolks
- ½ cup/100 grams granulated sugar, divided
- ¾ cup heavy cream
- 1 cup/227 grams mascarpone (8 ounces)

FOR THE ASSEMBLY

- 1 ¾ cups good espresso or very strong coffee
- 2 tablespoons rum or cognac
- 2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
- About 24 ladyfingers (from one 7-ounce/200-gram package)
- 1 to 2 ounces bittersweet chocolate, for shaving (optional)

PREPARATION

1. Using an electric mixer in a medium bowl, whip together egg yolks and 1/4 cup/50 grams sugar until very pale yellow and about tripled in volume. A slight ribbon should fall from the beaters (or whisk attachment) when lifted from the bowl. Transfer mixture to a large bowl, wiping out the medium bowl used to whip the yolks and set aside.
2. In the medium bowl, whip cream and remaining 1/4 cup/50 grams sugar until it creates soft-medium peaks. Add mascarpone and continue to whip until it creates a soft, spreadable mixture with medium peaks. Gently fold the mascarpone mixture into the sweetened egg yolks until combined.
3. Combine espresso and rum in a shallow bowl and set aside.
4. Using a sifter, dust the bottom of a 2-quart baking dish (an 8x8-inch dish, or a 9-inch round cake pan would also work here) with 1 tablespoon cocoa powder.
5. Working one at a time, quickly dip each ladyfinger into the espresso mixture -- they are quite porous and will fall apart if left in the liquid too long -- and place them rounded side up at the bottom of the baking dish. Repeat, using half the ladyfingers, until you've got an even layer, breaking the ladyfingers in half as needed to fill in any obvious gaps (a little space in between is O.K.). Spread half the mascarpone mixture onto the ladyfingers in one even layer. Repeat with remaining espresso-dipped ladyfingers and mascarpone mixture.
6. Dust top layer with remaining tablespoon of cocoa powder. Top with shaved or finely grated chocolate, if desired.
7. Cover with plastic wrap and let chill in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours (if you can wait 24 hours, all the better) before slicing or scooping to serve.