

THE GUEST

EMMA CLINE

New York Times Bestselling
author of THE GIRLS

A Novel



Book
Club
Kit

A Letter from Emma Cline

Dear Readers,

The character of Alex has been with me a while now—I started writing this book in 2016, just as *The Girls* was making its way. I finished a collection of stories since then but always found myself returning to Alex and to this eerie world that she lingers on the edges of, living moment to moment, hour to hour.

I think of Alex as someone who is a ghost, even to herself—that void makes it easy for her to become what others desire, to form herself into the shape of their wishes. And she needs that skill: she lives by the kindness of strangers, having alienated everyone else she knows in the city. She’s canny, watchful, but also dissociated from her true nature, living in a kind of dream world out in Long Island, among the noxious, poisoned community of the wealthy. Everyone out there, she tells herself, is working some kind of trick, engaged in transactions of some sort. So maybe what she’s doing isn’t so wrong, after all.

I love characters like Patricia Highsmith’s Tom Ripley—characters who somehow, even as they make bad decision after bad decision, hold our attention, and even elicit, at least in me, a sort of sympathy. I love Alex, even as she cuts a path of destruction across this cloistered world. And I wonder what power she gets out of being someone who people are constantly underestimating, nothing more than a blank young woman, an “inert piece of social furniture.” What truths can you see when no one really sees you?

Yours,
Emma

Discussion Questions

1. How does Emma Cline characterize the world and the people of East Long Island? How does she characterize Alex?
2. What themes stood out to you in *The Guest*?
3. Alex steals a stone from Helen's home. What does this stone come to represent throughout the novel?
4. More than once, Alex gets the sense that she is ghost, and has a couple dangerous experiences in cars and in the water. What do you think is the significance of this?
5. Consider the people Alex encounters. Who was she taking advantage of? Who was taking advantage of her? Where did these lines become blurry?
6. How would you describe Simon? Do you think he treated Alex fairly? What about Dom? Jack?
7. How does Alex use her age and her femininity to her advantage? Do you think these are finite resources? What other tools does she employ to try to stay in this rarefied world?
8. Did you find yourself rooting for Alex? Why or why not? Was there a point at which your feelings about her changed? If so, when was it?
9. What emotions did the story—and Alex's behavior—evoke for you?
10. What does *The Guest* have to say about power dynamics and how they can shift?
11. What did you think of the ending? How did you imagine the events played out after you closed the book?

Playlist

1. "Chemtrails over the Country Club"
Lana del Rey
2. "The Stranger Song"
Leonard Cohen
3. "Weight of Water"
Low
4. "Ribbon Bow"
Karen Dalton
5. "Jubilee Street"
Nick Cave
6. "I Just Don't Know What to Do with Myself"
Bryan Ferry
7. "Back of Your Head"
Cat Power
8. "Benz Truck"
Lil Peep
9. "Delete Forever"
Grimes
10. "Black Swan"
Thom Yorke
11. "Hiroshima Street"
Molly Nilsson
12. "Ultraviolence"
Lana Del Rey
13. "Nothing Really Matters"
Cat Power
14. "Stardust"
Nat King Cole
15. "Summer's Almost Gone"
The Doors
16. "Reason or Rhyme"
Bryan Ferry
17. "Everybody Knows"
Leonard Cohen
18. "Thème de l'eau"
Hikaru Hayashi