

Sea Crow Press Reader's Guide

HERMIT



ABOUT



The Book: Holly's carefully ordered life is falling apart. Seeking a reset, she builds a DIY home retreat—but peace proves fleeting. Desperate, she takes a job as a garden hermit on a historic estate, embracing solitude, silence, and simplicity. Winter bites, the estate hides secrets, and the person who once took everything returns. Sharply funny and unexpectedly wise, *Hermit* is a story of chaos, reinvention, and finding oneself in the mayhem.

The Author: Susan Blood is the recipient of an Arts Foundation of Cape Cod Written Word Fellowship and Provincetown Community Compact dune shack residency, where this novel was first drafted. Her work has been published in *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Magazine of Yoga*, *Bachtrack*, *The Petrigu Review*, and regional newspapers. A collection of Susan's essays, *How Not to Do Things*, was published by Surface Popper Publications in 2017. Her radio show – *Opera Betty: opera for people who hate opera* – has aired since 2010 on community radio WOMR. She has read and presented at fundraising events for organizations including the Arts Foundation of Cape Cod, WOMR Community Radio, and Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, and she continues to support writers and visual artists as the Institutional Giving Manager at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown.

Discussion Questions for Hermit

- Holly begins the novel looking for stability, yet repeatedly makes impulsive choices. What do her decisions reveal about the difference between wanting change and being ready for change?
- Holly imagines solitude as a retreat where she can work on herself, do yoga, and write. What does she actually discover once she is alone? How does her experience complicate the idea of solitude as self-improvement?
- The garden hermit role is deliberately ambiguous. Holly has to decide for herself what her benefactor expects. How does creating her own boundaries shape her understanding of the job—and of herself?
- Holly wants to become a “different version” of herself. Do you think she actually succeeds in changing, or does she ultimately become more fully herself? What is the difference?
- The novel balances humor with uncertainty and vulnerability. Where did you find the humor most effective? Did Holly's mistakes make you more sympathetic toward her?
- Winter becomes more than simply a setting in the novel. How does the harshness and isolation of winter affect Holly's choices and her emotional journey?

Discussion Questions for Hermit

- Holly's retreat is supposed to give her control over her life, but things continually go off course. What kinds of control does she think she needs, and what does she ultimately have to learn to accept?
- The idea of the hermit carries several meanings—withdrawal, wisdom, eccentricity, even performance. How does Holly's experience change your understanding of what it means to be a hermit?
- The novel asks whether we can truly reinvent ourselves. What does Hermit ultimately suggest about changing who we are? Is reinvention possible, or are we always bringing our old selves with us?
- If you could deliberately step away from your own life for one month—with no obligations and no expectations—what would you hope to discover about yourself? What might you be afraid to discover?