



BOOK CLUB KIT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Throughout the novel, the author comments on vanity, body positivity, and the traditionally fraught connection between image and self-worth. Discuss the double-standards women face when it comes to physical appearance and aging, especially in a male-dominated, beauty-obsessed environment like Hollywood.
2. What do you think it takes to build a career in entertainment? Stamina? Charisma? Perseverance? Knowing the immense pressures actors face to look and behave a certain way, how do Stella's struggles with substance abuse reflect the real-life consequences of stardom?
3. Taylor was recruited to produce *The Siren* because Cole's media company, Power Pictures, was criticized for being too much of a "boy's club," yet she's still certain she was intentionally left out of Cole's fishing trip because of her "extra X chromosome." Based on the reckoning the entertainment industry faced during #MeToo, how do you think expectations regarding safety and pay equity have changed on movie sets? How do you hope other industries have changed as a whole?
4. In a conversation with Cole, Stella admits that she's "transported by beauty . . . It makes me feel alive." Reflect on the positive effects of beauty in your personal life and in your community, whether that be through art, architecture, fashion, movies, or people.

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5. The author plays with the structure in the novel, peppering the primary narrative with news articles, gossip bulletins, and more formal interviews. Why do you think she employed this holistic media approach, and how did it add to your experience of *The Siren*?

6. In an interview with *HorrorFansOnline*, Stella admits that channeling the pain of her characters often results in more believable, cathartic performances. Cole, similarly, is praised for his method acting abilities. How was the umbrella of “method acting” used to disguise what was really going on, psychologically, between Stella and Cole? Based on their roles in *The Siren*, were the two even acting at all?

7. In the same interview, Stella says, “Sometimes good people do bad things. And bad people do bad things too, of course. And sometimes a bad person or a bad moment can influence a good person to do a bad thing.” How does this statement make you feel? Do you agree or disagree with Stella?

8. Stella invests heavily in Astrology, and often calls attention to mannerisms or behaviors that are associated with certain star signs. She describes Cole, for example, a Scorpio, as a person who “always has something up his sleeve.” How did the author use star signs to foreshadow the actions or dispositions of certain characters? When it comes to fate and horoscopes, are you a believer?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

9. Taylor, in conversation with Rick, comments that in the age of social media, people are “more interested in capturing the moment than living it.” Do you think social media has increased or decreased our ability to live in the moment? Why or why not? On the whole, do you think social media has been a positive or negative influence on society?

10. Rick gives up a lucrative career in New York to live a happier, less-stressful life in the Caribbean. Taylor admires him for this, calling his decision brave: “To know what you want and give up the things society tells you you’re supposed to desire to live your best life—I wish I could do that.” Have you ever hesitated to do something that would make you happy because of the way it could be perceived by others? Why? Can you see yourself making brave decisions like Rick in the future?

11. Discuss the significance of names in the novel: Cole, meaning “swarthy” or “coal-black”; Stella, meaning “star”; and Phoenix, referencing a mythological bird that rises from the ashes. Where is the irony in Phoenix’s chosen pseudonym of Felicity?

12. Most of the characters in *The Siren* have two sides: the one they show the world, and the one they keep to themselves. Secrets and artifice run rampant in the novel—no one ever presents as completely honest or completely duplicitous. Do you think it’s possible for secrets to stay secret? Or, as many of the characters come to realize, is honesty more compelling than deceit?

A QUICK Q+A WITH KATHERINE ST. JOHN

What inspired you to write this story?

I spent over a decade working in Hollywood, both in front of and behind the camera, so the world of film production is very familiar to me, as are the personality types and problems central to it. I have known actresses similar to Stella, desperate to regain the spotlight while still smarting from its burn, producers like Taylor, convinced their next film will be the one that makes their career, and stars like Cole, who live in a different stratosphere and by different rules than the rest of us mortals. I was inspired by watching what the vulture-like media has done to vulnerable young celebrities like Britney Spears and Lindsay Lohan, and by the horror stories told by both friends and stars during the #metoo movement. The Siren uses media and shifting points of view throughout the book to delve into how we judge one another based on appearances or misconceptions, and how dangerous that can be.

How do you relate to the main character?

The Siren is told from three different points of view: Stella, the star of the film, who is struggling to regain her career in the wake of the multiple, very public breakdowns that derailed it over a decade ago, Taylor, the producer of the film who is desperate to salvage her reputation after her last job ended in scandal, and Felicity, Stella's young, beautiful assistant who harbors a hidden agenda that threatens to upend all their plans. Though I thankfully haven't been through what these women have, there are always parts of me in every character I create. At the end of the day, we all want the same things: love, security, and equity.

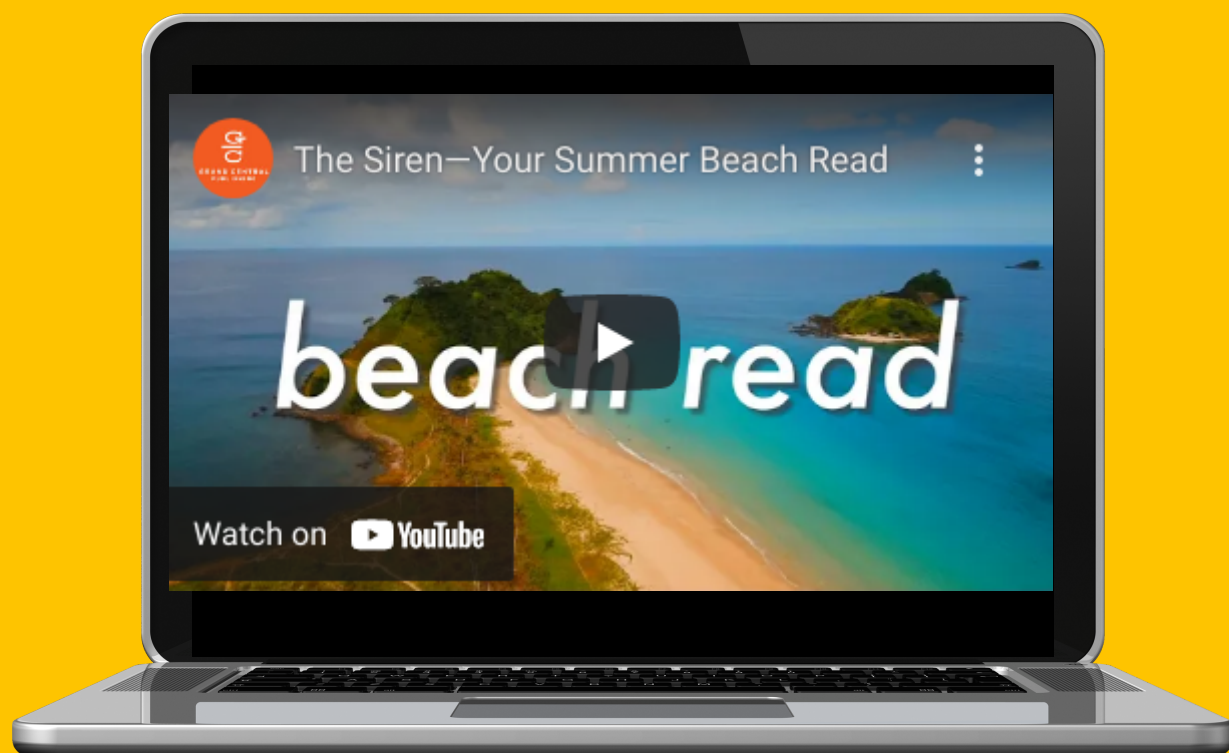
What's the next book?

My next book follows Sveta, a former model who inherits her estranged uncle's estate after he suddenly and mysteriously dies. She travels from NY to Mexico to pay her respects, only to find his enigmatic wife leading an ardent spiritual group at their colossal villa deep in the jungle. The place first seems like a dream with its tumbling gardens, beautiful people, and transcendent vibe, but soon the mystical façade wears thin and the disturbing belief system of the group comes into focus. Trapped by a powerful adversary, Sveta must find a way out before the darkness lurking beneath engulfs them all.

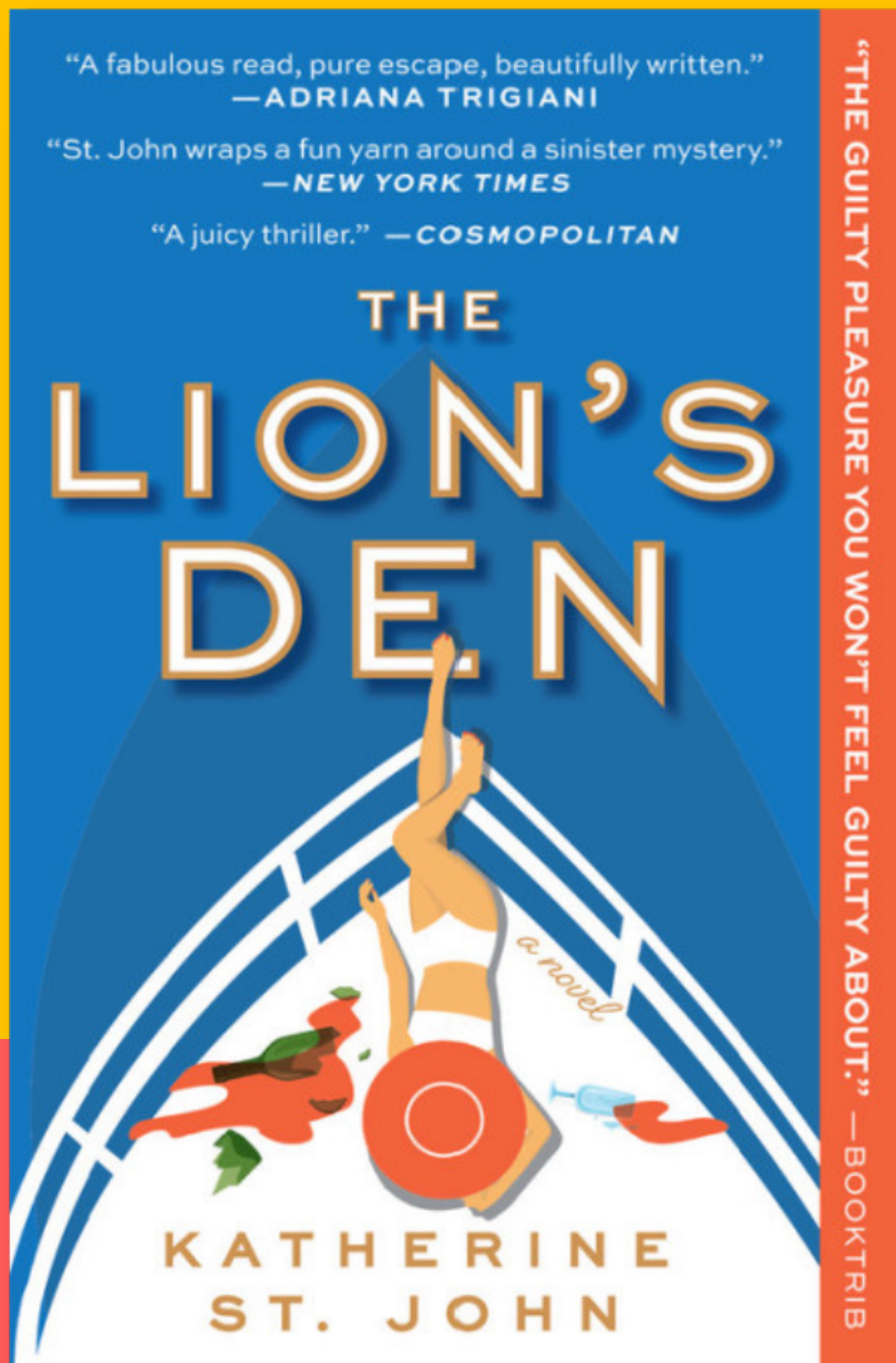


Author: Katherine St. John
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