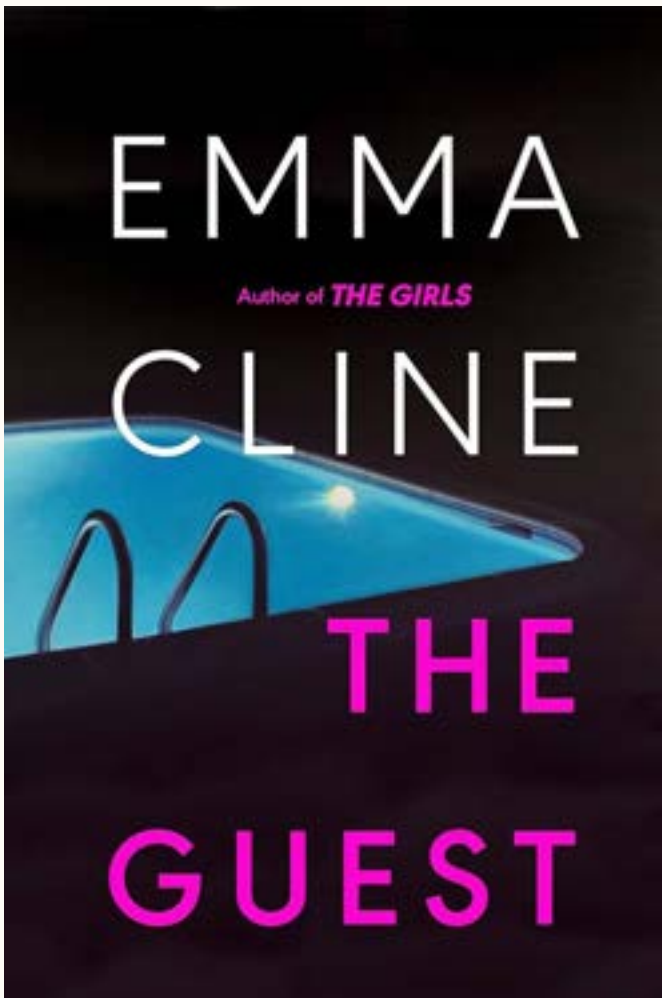


Dua's Monthly Read  
**SERVICE95 BOOK CLUB**

# The Guest

by **EMMA  
CLINE**



Discussion Guide  
*January 2024*



# Emma Cline is an American writer and novelist from California.

Emma Cline is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Girls* and the story collection *Daddy*. *The Girls* was a finalist for the Center for Fiction's First Novel Prize in 2016, the National Book Critics Circle's John Leonard Prize, and the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize. It was also a *New York Times* Editors' Choice and the winner of the Shirley Jackson Award in the same year.

Cline's stories have been published in *The New Yorker*, *Granta*, *The Paris Review* and *The Best American Short Stories*. She received the Plimpton Prize from *The Paris Review* and an O. Henry Award, and was chosen as one of *Granta*'s Best Young American Novelists.

In 2021, Cline conceived and launched her own imprint with Gagorian: Picture Books, publishing fiction by leading authors alongside contributions by contemporary artists.

## THE GUEST *Synopsis*

*Summer is coming to a close on Long Island, and Alex is no longer welcome...*

One misstep at a dinner party and the older man she's been staying with dismisses her with a ride to the train station and a ticket back to the city. With few resources, but a gift for navigating the desires of others, Alex stays on the island. She drifts like a ghost through the gated driveways and sun-blasted dunes of a rarefied world, trailing destruction in her wake.

Taut, sensual and impossible to look away from, *The Guest* captures the latent heat and potential danger of a summer that could go either way for a young woman teetering on the edge.



# Why we loved it



“Every page of this book raised so many questions for me! The story takes place over just one week, during which we learn almost nothing about the young protagonist Alex. We never leave a small affluent area of what we assume is Long Island. No one dies (or do they?), no major world events take place. And yet... the strange atmospheric pace of the novel doesn't let up and I found myself literally on the edge of my seat from beginning to end.

“In Alex, Emma Cline has created a character who is so intriguing that she kept me guessing throughout. We never really find out who she is – is she a thief, an escort, or just a young girl figuring it out? She is such an enigma, but also like someone you feel you might have known. The kind of girl you meet on a crazy night out who is a little bit lost and whose story you never entirely understand.

“Just like the infinity pools and the crystal calm sea that serve as metaphors throughout, under the surface this book shimmers with tension, flirts with danger and begs questions about class, privilege, excess and survival. I can't wait to dive into this with you”

— Dua Lipa



“IN THE WATER, SHE WAS JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE... NO WAY TO TELL WHETHER SHE BELONGED HERE OR DIDN'T”

# What others say

“Under Cline's command, every sentence as sharp as a scalpel, a woman toying the line between welcome and unwelcome guest becomes a fully destabilizing force”  
— *The New York Times*

“Cline weaves through settings and characters with intentional disorientation, shifting ever darker, ever more suspenseful... Cline proves herself to be one of the boldest, most complicated writers working today”  
— *San Francisco Chronicle*

“Cline is a master of depicting the nefarious and atmospheric menace that often lurks adjacent to our most glittery environments, and she does so here with subdued but no less cutting aplomb”  
— *Vogue*

# How The Hamptons Became Home To The Power Elite



*"From here, the sand was immaculate. The light – the famous light – made it all look honeyed and mild: the dark European green of the scrub trees, the dune grasses that moved in whispery unison. The cars in the parking lot. Even the seagulls swarming a trash can"* – Emma Cline, *The Guest*

Each summer, the power elite of New York City reconstruct themselves in the Hamptons on Long Island's South Fork. This community of the hyper-wealthy is Cline's canvas for *The Guest*, where you can't park near the beach without a resident pass, where bags, bikes, and unlocked cars are left unattended because, as Cline writes, it is, "A system that existed only because everyone believed they were among people like themselves."

The Hamptons' monied have their 'vacay' homes, with varying degrees of fanciness, depending on whether the towns are north or south of the Montauk Highway. Southampton is old money Conservative. Bridgehampton and East Hampton Village are newer money. The hamlet, Amagansett, known for its artist residents (from Joseph Heller and Paul McCartney to Gwyneth Paltrow) has a hipper vibe. Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe escaped the press (temporarily) at a converted windmill at [64 Deep Lane](#), where Marilyn prepared for *Some Like It Hot*. East Hampton will forever be immortalised in the 1976 documentary [Grey Gardens](#).

Once farming, fishing and whaling communities, the expansion of the Long Island railroad in the late 19th century brought wealthy New Yorkers keen to escape the city heat. This was America's 'gilded age' of rapid economic growth (and corruption, hence 'gilded'). In the Hamptons, oceanfront estates shot up on land considered least workable for farming (land that had already been grabbed from the Shinnecock Indian Nation by the English and Dutch in the 17th century).

In the 1980s, the economic boom of the Reagan years brought new millionaires and hedonistic excess to the Hamptons. Farmland became exclusive building sites, pricing out locals even further. 'Hollywood East' was born when celebrities from the worlds of film, fashion, and media moved in. As money breeds money, this exclusivity has only multiplied, and now the Hamptons holds some of the costliest real estate in the world. The workers who create the frictionless world you find in *The Guest* must commute in – many of them living further west in the Long Island suburbs.

But there's more than a gilded surface to the Hamptons. Its beauty has also created a history of artists and writers' colonies from the 20th century to the present day. Originally renting or buying cheap bungalows and cottages, this tradition can be seen most pointedly to the north of that Montauk highway. [Springs](#) was once the heart of the American [abstract expressionist](#) movement, with residents Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and John Ferren. Pollock died in a car crash on Springs-Fireplace Road in 1956. Lou Reed and Laurie Anderson had a home here, where Lou returned to die looking at the trees in his garden, in 2013.

[Sag Harbor](#) has an even more fascinating recent history. Writers were residents there, including John Steinbeck, until his death in 1968. In the mid-20th century, it also became the site of Azures: 70 lots on a private beachfront for Black professionals, designed by Black architect Amaza Lee Meredith. Soon other Black neighbourhoods formed, collectively known as Historic Black Beachfront Communities (HBBC). Figures such as [Langston Hughes](#), [Harry Belafonte](#) and [Lena Horne](#) would visit and create. Colson Whitehead spends his summers there and his novel [Sag Harbor](#) was published in 2000.

The [Shinnecock Indian Nation](#) have over 1,589 enrolled tribal members, about half living on the Reservation at Shinnecock Neck in Southampton. In the Algonquian language, 'Shinnecock' roughly translates as 'people of the stony shore'. Today they continue the fight to protect what remains of their original land here. The 2019 documentary *Conscience Point* follows this ongoing battle, highlighting the tireless work of Shinnecock activist Rebecca "Becky" Hill-Genia. Meanwhile, Southampton properties such as the beachfront mansion La Dune are listed at \$150 million.



# Questions

Here are a few questions to help you think about the book from different angles, whether you do that on your own, discuss them with your friends or take them to your local or virtual book club.



1. “Nothing that bad had happened.” How does Cline maintain suspense in *The Guest*?
2. Cline has said she wanted to resist the backstory for Alex and draw her in ‘negative space’. Do we get to know her?
3. Do you believe everything Alex is telling you?
4. Cline has said, “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.” How does the narrative play with the theme of ‘the ghost’?
5. “The women she passed on the sidewalks looked like mothers and daughters... They were dressed to invoke the wives they either already were or would one day become, future domestic totems.” What other female ‘performances’ does the *The Guest* explore?
6. “In the water, she was just like everyone else. Nothing strange about a young woman, swimming alone. No way to tell whether she belonged here or didn’t.” What significance does water play in *The Guest*?
7. What role does Alex’s mobile phone play in *The Guest*? Would the story have been different if her phone was working?
8. Cline has called this world a ‘façade of frictionless luxury’. How does the ‘frictionless’ operate on the surface? Who is behind the scenes?
9. In a 2023 *Vanity Fair* interview, Cline said, “I didn’t know what the specifics were, but I knew where I wanted the book to leave this character.” Where does she leave Alex?
10. If *The Guest* was adapted into a film, what options would a director have for the ending?



# Interviews with Emma Cline

## Read

[“I was a bad child actor. Extremely bad”: Emma Cline On The Follow Up To Her Hit Novel \*The Girls\* – Guardian, 2023](#)

Emma Cline talks about the power of being an outsider, growing up in a family of seven siblings and exploring the Hamptons in her first novel since her Manson-inspired bestseller.



[Emma Cline On Examining The Hamptons’ Frictionless Façade In New Book \*The Guest\* – NPR, 2023](#)

The novelist talks about *The Guest* and why she is drawn to writing characters looking in from the outside.

## Listen

[The Waterstones Podcast With Emma Cline - 2023](#)

Emma Cline speaks about literary influences, avoiding the obvious and portraying femininity.

[Emma Cline On \*The Guest\*, Creative Vulnerability, And Finding Inspiration In Playboy Bunny Memoirs – Vanity Fair, 2023](#)

Cline talks about her literal beach read and finding inspiration by following the heat.

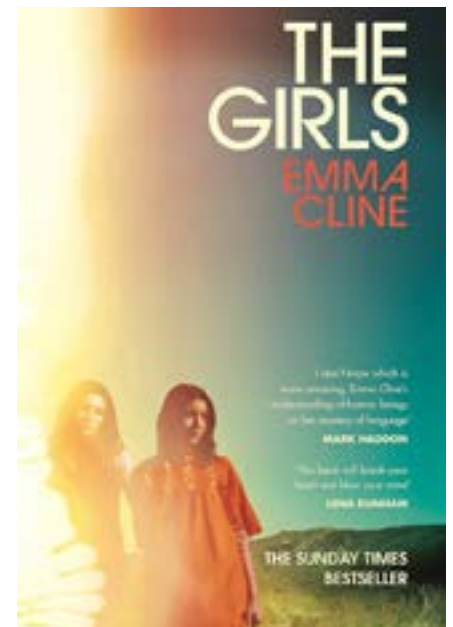
## Further Reading

[‘The Ending Of \*The Guest\* Is Anyone’s Guess’ – Vanity Fair, 2023](#)

Cline’s summertime tale of a sex worker roaming the Hamptons has everyone talking, but nobody can agree on the enigmatic final scene. *Vanity Fair* staff and friends debate. Spoilers galore!

[The Guest Is The Anxious-Girl Book Of The Summer – Time, 2023](#)

*Time Magazine* chose *The Guest* as one of its 100 Must-Read Books of 2023. This review explains why.



[The Girls By Emma Cline](#)

Emma Cline’s debut novel, *The Girls*, tells the story of a bored and groundless teenage girl in the '60s who joins a Manson-like cult.

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