



Reading Group Guide

The Hermit Bookstore

a novella



INTRODUCTION TO *The Hermit Bookstore*

Unexplained events happen every day. This is just one event.

On Tuesday the old farmhouse on Lotus Road is empty and locked, with a For Sale sign out front. On Wednesday of the same week, it's a charming used bookstore. How is this possible? That's the mystery Mary June, Mario, and Elisa haven't been able to figure out. And it's not the only surprise they encounter. The eccentric owner, Jolene Fields, happens to know exactly what book they should be reading.

The Hermit Bookstore takes place in the small California gold rush town of Lotus, where three friends get the unexpected push they need to make fateful shifts in their lives. Come along and discover with these three characters one of life's magical moments.

Sometimes all you need is a little push to change your life in a big way.

A CONVERSATION WITH *Linda Westphal*

Q. What's your favorite quote?

Thomas Edison said it: "Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up."

Q. What writing technique do you include in all your books?

I love to travel, so my stories always have a strong sense of place. I try to connect readers to the story's location through all their senses.

Q. Does writing energize or exhaust you?

It energizes me, especially when I'm in the writing zone. Hours disappear when I'm in this zone.

Q. How do you select the names of your characters?

I start by collecting a list of names. I search online directories for first and last names of people who currently live in the area where my story takes place. If the story takes place in the South, I search for Southern names. If it takes place in the Midwest, I search for names of people who live in the Midwest. I also consider the time period of my story. To keep myself organized, I create a chart that lists various male and female first names, as well as a chart of last names. When I'm writing and I need a character's name, I refer to the charts and mix and match first and last names until I get a combination that feels right. I keep working at it until the vibration of the character matches the vibration of the name.

Q. Do you believe in love at first sight?

Yes, but I think it rarely happens.

Q. If you could go to the past or future, where would you go and why?

I'd visit the past, because I'm more interested in history than the future. I would go to New York City in the mid-1800s to early 1900s, when American innovation was exploding. During this time Americans were introduced to the sewing machine, dishwasher, washing machine, zipper, typewriter, fountain pen, telephone, mail-order catalog, safety pin, elevator, escalator, internal combustion engine, air brakes, traffic lights, man-made plastic, talking motion pictures, electric light bulb, photographic film, the Pullman Sleeping Train Car, airplane, Model T automobile, and the expansion of the U.S. railway. It must have been an exciting time to be alive.

Q. If given a chance, who would you like to be for a day?

Oprah. I would love to spend a day at her Montecito, California home.

Q. If you were a tree, what would you be?

I'd be a tree that has been on Earth for thousands of years – either a strong oak tree with massive branches or a California redwood.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

The Hermit Bookstore

1. One of the themes in the story is: There is no such thing as a coincidence. Have you ever experienced a coincidence that did not feel like a coincidence?
2. The characters are thrilled that a used bookstore has opened in their tiny community. Do you have a favorite used bookstore in your city? What do you like about it?
3. The bookstore owner, Jolene, suggests that books can help people with lessons they need to work through. Do you agree? Has a book ever helped you work through a problem? Has a book ever inspired you to take action? Do you think books are a form of therapy?
4. Mary June felt as if the whole universe was pushing her to do something about her family in Georgia. Have you ever felt this way – as if the whole universe was pushing you to do something?
5. Who's your favorite character in the story? Why?

6. Jolene selects the book TRAVELS WITH CHARLEY by John Steinbeck for Mary June, KIPPS by H. G. Wells for Mario, and WHERE THE HEART IS by Billie Letts for Elisa. Have you read any of these books? Have you seen the movies?
7. Another theme in the book is: Even if you are not aware of it, there are moments when you are receiving hints, a nudge, or support from a loved one who has passed, an angel, or a spirit guide. Have you ever sensed a hint or a nudge?
8. The story takes place in Lotus, a small California gold rush town. Have you been to any of the California gold rush towns – Placerville, Coloma, Lotus?
9. Did you recognize the Rider-Waite tarot deck reference – the #9 Major Arcana card The Hermit – in the carving of the sign in front of the bookstore? In numerology, the #9 represents the end of something important, followed by a new beginning (#10). Did you notice the other references to the number nine? Elisa dated Francisco for 9 months; Mary June had been away from her family home for 9 years; Mary June was 18 (1+8) years and 27 (2+7) days old when her father told her the family secret.
10. The bookstore owner, Jolene, doesn't feel like a stranger to the three characters. Why do you think this is? Do you think they sense that she is there to help them? Do you think they know her from another lifetime?
11. The story was inspired by a real-life event: Two men were lost, driving for hours, in a car that was nearly out of gas. They saw a lit up 1950s-style restaurant down a country road, so they stopped to ask for directions. The restaurant was empty except for the man behind the counter. He gave them directions to the nearest gas station. At the gas station the two men mentioned the kind man at the restaurant down the road. The gas station attendant said the restaurant closed years ago, when the owner, a man who matched the description of the man behind the counter, died. What do you make of this?
12. A Gallup Poll conducted in June 2016 revealed that 72% of Americans believe in angels. Do you? Do you think Jolene, the bookstore owner, was an angel?

Relax.
Indulge in the meditative
experience of reading.

Connect with Linda Westphal

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