



Book Club Set

The Mystery Guest

By Nita Prose

About the Author

Nita Prose is the author of *The Mystery Guest* and *The Maid*, which has sold over 2 million copies worldwide and was published in more than forty countries. A #1 *New York Times* bestseller and a *Good Morning America* Book Club pick, *The Maid* won the Ned Kelly Award for International Crime Fiction, the Fingerprint Award for Debut Novel of the Year, the Anthony Award for Best First Novel, and the Barry Award for Best First Mystery, and was an Edgar Award finalist for Best Novel.



About the Book



A new mess. A new mystery. It's up to Molly the maid to uncover the truth, no matter how dirty

Molly Gray is not like anyone else. With her flair for cleaning and proper etiquette, she has risen through the ranks of the glorious five-star Regency Grand Hotel to become the esteemed Head Maid. But just as her life reaches a pinnacle state of perfection, her world is turned upside down when J. D. Grimthorpe, the world-renowned mystery author, drops dead—very dead—on the hotel's tearoom floor.

As Molly's old foe, Detective Stark, investigates the author's unexpected demise, it becomes clear that this death was murder most foul. Suspects abound, and everyone wants to know: Who killed J.D. Grimthorpe? Was it Lily, the new Maid-in-Training? Or was it Serena, the author's secretary? Could Mr. Preston, the hotel's beloved doorman, be hiding something? And is Molly really as innocent as she seems?

As the high-profile death threatens the hotel's pristine reputation, Molly knows that she alone holds the key to unlocking the killer's identity. But that key is buried deep in her past: Long ago, she knew J. D. Grimthorpe. Molly begins to comb her memory for clues, revisiting her childhood and the mysterious Grimthorpe mansion where she and her dearly departed Gran once worked side by side. With the entire hotel under investigation, Molly must solve the mystery posthaste. Because if there's one thing she knows for sure, it's that secrets don't stay buried forever.

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Discussion Questions



1. Who did you first suspect might be responsible for J.D. Grimthorpe's death? What did you think about the red herrings in the story? Who was your favorite supporting character, and why?
2. Gran has some of the best one-liners! What were some of your favorite quotes from Gran?
3. Molly says, "I've always been attuned to what others ignore." Why do you think Molly is able to see what others cannot? Do you think of yourself as someone who is often attuned to what others ignore?
4. Molly says, "Sometimes, fate has an uncanny way of delivering exactly what's deserved." In both good and bad ways, do you think fate delivered the proper ends for each character?
5. Did the ending surprise you?
6. How has Molly Gray grown as a character? What changes did you notice since first meeting Molly in *The Maid*? What do you think is next for our favorite maid?
7. Mr. Peterson is in fact Molly's grandfather. Why do you think it took so long for him to tell her?
8. The hotel is abuzz about the upcoming event for the hugely successful author, J. D. Grimthorpe. Why do you think Molly didn't let anyone know about her past with him, until much later?

Retrieved from:

<https://www.randomhousebooks.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/The-Mystery-Guest.Book-Club-Kit.pdf>

Author Interview



I've heard you wrote *The Maid* in secret. But given your success, everyone knew you were writing *THE MYSTERY GUEST*. How did this change your writing experience?

I did write *The Maid* in utter secrecy. I didn't want thoughts about anything else except the story and whether I could get through that maze of the narrative to the end of the story. This time, it's like, Wow! There's a lot of pressure! But I had to just sort of ignore all that noise and just focus on the story, focus on Molly, and finding a new terrain.

With *The Maid*, I Frankensteined together the mystery genre and feel-good fiction. I had a murder mystery on the one hand, and on the other, a journey of spirit and hope. Those two things don't readily go together.

The second time [with *THE MYSTERY GUEST*], it was all about genre again. Once I figured out that it was going to be a mystery on the front end and on the back end a sort of fairy tale for adults, it opened up my imagination where I could pursue the story and ignore everything else.

You start *THE MYSTERY GUEST* with a fable about the maid, the rat, and the spoon. Where did this fable come from, and why use it as the theme for *THE MYSTERY GUEST*?

It came to me while I was on tour for *The Maid*. I was visiting a museum outside of Brighton and came across the most unusual display. It included the mummified body of a rat and a single silver spoon in a display case. And I thought, "This is so weird. What is this doing here?" And then I read the description.

It turns out, in the 17th century, there was a maid servant who used to work in the castle, and she was unceremoniously dismissed after being accused of having stolen a

piece of silverware. Many years later, they were reconstructing the castle. They opened up the walls, and inside one of those walls, they found a nest with the mummified body of a rat and a single silver spoon beside it.

Many of the clues in THE MYSTERY GUEST are told in flashbacks of a young Molly cleaning with Gran. Why structure the novel this way?

I wanted Molly to have to investigate her past in order to solve the present mystery. For me, that allows [her to experience] a journey of growth. In *The Maid*, Molly is coming into herself and finding confidence in herself, which she really lacks. At the beginning, she struggles so much, but by the end of that short week of growth, she has changed considerably.

Now, four years later, in *THE MYSTERY GUEST*, she has grown. She has confidence, and she's also head maid. So, my question was, how do we grow when we know ourselves? For me, the answer to that question—in life as well as on the page—is that once we feel more settled with who we are, that's when we can grow empathy and compassion and understanding for others. So, the second book is about Molly investigating who Gran was and the incredible unconditional sacrifices that Gran made for her to thrive and prosper.

Cheryl, the B-level villain from *The Maid*, is back in *THE MYSTERY GUEST*. But Molly seems better equipped to deal with Cheryl's underhandedness. Was this an intentional way of showing us Molly's growth over the last four years?

The way I create a character is to sit inside them. I know I'm in the flow when I feel I'm not myself anymore. I am Molly, and that's where the real magic happens. Obviously, there's a conscious force driving that, but it doesn't feel that way when you're in it.

What I tried to do was show how much Molly had evolved and grown as a person. While Molly is a portrait of growth, Cheryl is her polar opposite. Cheryl is precisely and exactly

the same. She's a portrait of getting stuck in the same selfish conceits. She never, ever moves—which highlights Molly's growth. You can't see the growth [of a character] unless it's reflected in character dynamics.

You said Molly sort of takes over as you're writing. Are you living the moment, or are you seeing the plot cinematically in your head?

It's more about living the moment. You find with your conscious mind what is going to happen in that scene and then let the dialogue flow out. In a way, that can sometimes [create scenes] that are very surprising.

So, are you more of a hybrid plotter where you know what must happen in each scene and then let the scene develop organically? Or are you pretty prescriptive in your writing?

I'm a little bit of both. I need to know the big beats, the big twists and turns. I also need to know the inciting incident of a chapter in order to write it. I need a little bit of knowing and then a lot of not knowing, and then, somehow, the magic sort of makes it happen.

Who was your favorite character to write?

I had a lot of fun with Angela. She's so sassy, and she's one of these people who treats Molly with great respect. But on the other hand, she isn't going to dumb anything down or be overly coddling with her. I loved those personality traits. They were really fun to play with on the page.

What are you reading?

I just read an advanced copy of A. J. Finn's next novel, *End of Story*, which will come out in February. It's such a clever, twisty mystery. It's very dark, but it almost has a *Great Gatsby* feel about it too.

What's coming up next? I know you've said you won't write another Molly mystery unless you really feel like you have something to say about her. But is she speaking to you?

She is. I'm interested in figuring out if this is a trilogy. I'm exploring some new genres to pair with the mystery. So far, so good, but I've got a long way to go. It's always a journey.

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Other Links and Resources



- Apple: Author Interview Podcast with Nita Prose:
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/author-interview-with-nita-prose-the-mystery-guest/id1597507355?i=1000654074351>
- The Maid - Book 1: <https://www.nitaprose.com/the-maid.html>
- The Maid's Secret - Book 3: <https://www.nitaprose.com/the-maids-secret.html>

Share your thoughts with other readers!



DATE: _____

BOOK CLUB: _____

BOOK TITLE: _____

As a group we rated this book:

1	2	3	4	5
Ugh!		It was OK...		Loved it!

Would we recommend this book to other book clubs?

Yes No Undecided

Why/why not?

Our discussion: