

Blake's dead. His wife killed him.
The question is...which one?

black widows

A NOVEL

CATE QUINN

Reading Group Guide

1. What did you think of Blake Nelson? Did your opinion change throughout the book?
2. Do you think Rachel, Emily, and Tina are really so different from each other? What similarities do they have?
3. What do you think keeps the three women together after Blake's death? Why don't they go their own separate ways?
4. Because of their polygamy, Rachel, Emily, and Tina struggle to find acceptance. How would you feel in their place, rejected by people both within and without your religious community?
5. What did you think of Emily's outburst at the funeral? What was the final straw for her?
6. On the Homestead, in her marriage, and in her questioning by her lawyer, Rachel gets used to men making decisions about how she should behave. How does this shape her character?
7. How would you compare Officer Brewer and Detective Carlson? Who would you rather have on your case?
8. What did you make of Rachel's memories/visions?

9. Blake passed his fear of cameras and surveillance along to his wives, even though he wasn't actually being watched. Do you think surveillance is becoming more common? Would Blake's fears be justified?

10. Were you surprised by the identity of the killer? What did you think of her motivation?

A Conversation with the Author

What was your starting point for *Black Widows*? What did you draw on as you developed the story?

The idea just came to me, and with it, all three characters appeared as if by magic. Once it was there, I just couldn't stop writing. It was like a book that couldn't wait to be written. I wrote a lot from Rachel's perspective but always bookmarked by what the other wives might think or feel about the same given moment. There's probably a whole other book edited out; I wrote so much.

Those women felt so real that it felt very natural to draw them out. I also did a lot of research on the LDS faith and in particular more fundamental branches.

How does *Black Widows* compare to your other books? Did you have to change your writing process at all?

It's a very different book. The structure is entirely new. Other books I've written have been thrillers with a very linear plot, so this one, which bounced around characters, represented a completely new process for me.

Rachel, Emily, and Tina are all very distinct. Did you have a favorite while you were writing? Which was the most challenging?

I love them all, and I think they're probably subconsciously all parts of my character. I'd probably like to identify with Tina the most, but in real life, I'm more like Rachel. They always felt like

archetypes to me though. The homey wife, the adolescent, and the good-time girl. Emily was probably the most challenging in terms of dialect, in that she would fall a little less rural Utah than Rachel but still have her own unique turns of phrase that are quite provincial.

The story surrounding Blake's death gets more and more complicated as it unravels. How did you keep all the details, motivations, and secrets straight?

Is it complicated? It doesn't feel that way to me! I actually took a couple of strands out to make it clearer. There's so much in that world that's fascinating, it's hard not to use all of it.

The areas around Salt Lake City are well characterized—the differences between the ranch and Waynard's Creek come to mind. What kind of work did you do to familiarize yourself with Utah?

I read a lot of books and watched a lot of YouTube. In particular, I love watching the kind of online clips people make that no one else ever sees. Trips to the grocery store, things like that. It gives you real insight into what people are doing in their daily lives.

How did you research radical religious movements to get *Homestead* right? Was there any interesting information that didn't make it into the final book?

Luckily for me, those kinds of radical religious movements are quite tirelessly reported, so there's plenty of news material and ex-member accounts to draw from. I come from a background of writing historical thrillers, so it felt like a real breeze to be able to access real-life statements and videos at the click of a mouse.

For all its darkness, *Black Widows* ends on a hopeful note. Do you believe in happy endings in real life?

I absolutely do. I think you do your best, be a good person, treat

people well, and though the path might be winding and unpredictable, good things will come.

What advice do you have for prospective thriller writers?

I'm excited to see what you're going to write!