



SENTA RICH

READING GROUP GUIDE

Introduction Noelle is an efficient, friendly hotel cleaner—a model employee. Or so she'd have you think . . . trouble is, she can't help but take little "souvenirs" from the rooms she cleans. Nothing of value—a lipstick, a hair clip, some tweezers. By the time the guest has noticed, she's long gone. As Noelle begins work at her twenty-first hotel, she's determined to last longer than her record of one month on the job. But then she meets her new colleagues. These women are real: they live lives full of happiness and worry, pain and joy. They make her wonder what it might be like to have true friends, people to stick round for—and someone to love. . . . Will they give her the courage to claim the life she deserves, or will her old habits come back to haunt her?



A Personal Note from Senta Rich on the Inspiration for

Hotel 21: The idea for *Hotel 21* came to me when I was staying in a small hotel in Lisbon and I accidentally annoyed the hotel cleaner. She wanted to get in to clean the room and I kept asking her to come back later. When I finally left, she was standing outside, arms crossed, giving me a dirty look. I felt terrible. When I got back that night, my hairbrush was missing. Looking back, I most likely lost it in transit, but at the time, I was convinced it was her—a "revenge steal" for annoying her earlier. I was immediately intrigued and excited by this woman. Who was she? Did she take things from hotel rooms a lot? Did she ever get caught? Perhaps she took things to feel like she was taking back control over her life. Two days later, I wrote the first 4,000 words of *Hotel 21*.

Topics and Questions for Discussion

1. Noelle refers to herself as a "taker of things," but is she really simply a thief? Do you forgive her? And if so, why?
2. What are the main themes in the book? And what do they say about the chaotic state of being human?
3. Noelle's unique kleptomania is a response to childhood trauma. If she hadn't started "taking things," what do you think would have happened to her?
4. Other than being a love interest, what is Phil's deeper role in Noelle's journey?
5. You could say this is a story about healing by becoming whole. Are Mali, Gaby, Phil, Rose, Julia, and Fatima aspects of Noelle's personality that she needs to integrate in order to heal? If so, what are their roles?
6. What are the references to good and evil in the book and how do they impact Noelle's journey?

7. What are the themes around parenting? Do they resonate with you?
8. Is Noelle brave? If so, why?
9. Noelle's mother had the ability to pose as someone other than her true self in public and, in essence, live a double life. Do you ever feel sympathy for her, and if so, why? Does she deserve our sympathy?
10. What is Noelle's final assessment of her mother, Erica, after she dies? What does this say about human nature and being a good person?
11. Noelle's saving grace is her ability to read people (she has a very high emotional intelligence). Is this a natural ability, or do you think she has been forced to develop these skills over time in order to serve her needs? Are human beings able to develop certain skills when it is a necessity to survive? Would she not be as good at reading people if she hadn't experienced a traumatic childhood?
12. *Hotel 21* is set in 2019. Given that the global pandemic crisis began in 2020, where do you think Noelle would be today? If she hadn't met the women in *Hotel 21*, how do you think she would have coped with COVID and lockdowns?



Praise for Hotel 21 "Those who enjoyed Nita Prose's *The Maid* will enjoy the setting and draw comparisons between Noelle and that novel's protagonist."

—*Booklist*, starred review

About the Author Senta Rich began her career as an advertising copywriter. During this time, she also wrote radio plays and articles for magazines. As soon as she could, she left advertising and moved into the world of film and TV. She currently writes for TV shows in Ireland and the UK, including drama and animation for RTE, the BBC, and Nickelodeon, and she also has a feature film in development.



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