

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Linda Holmes is a pop culture correspondent for NPR and the host of *Pop Culture Happy Hour*. She began her professional life as an attorney. In time, however, her affection for writing, popular culture, and the online universe eclipsed her legal ambitions. She shoved her law degree in the back of the closet, gave its living room space to DVD sets of *The Wire*, and never looked back.

Holmes was a writer and editor at *Television Without Pity*, where she recapped several hundred hours of programming — including both *High School Musical* movies, for which she did not receive hazard pay. Her first novel, *Evvie Drake Starts Over*, was published in the summer of 2019.

NPR.org.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Did you think Laurie and her relationship problems were believable or realistic? If not, was Holmes trying to make them realistic, and why or why not did she fail?
2. Did Holmes do a good job at depicting realistic characters? Which Character could you relate to the best and why? Did any of the secondary characters feel like not enough attention was drawn towards them? Did any stand out?
3. How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"? Which emotion stood out to you the most when reading? Was it amused, sad, disturbed, confused, bored... or maybe something else?
4. Talk about the Holmes use of language/writing style. Was the language appropriate to the story? Was it more poetic or vernacular? Did it stand in the way of your appreciation of the book, or enhance your enjoyment of it?

5. Was Holmes author fairly descriptive? Was she better at describing the concrete or the abstract? Was she clear about what she was trying to say, or were you confused by some of what you read? How did this affect your reading of the book?
6. Talk about the plot. What was more important overall, Laurie or her quest to find out about the duck? Was the plot moved forward by her decisions, or was Laurie more at the mercy of the quest she was invested in?
7. What were some of the major themes of the book? Are they relevant in your life? Did Holmes effectively develop these themes? If so, how? If not, why not?
8. What else struck you about the book as good or bad? What did you like or dislike about it that we haven't discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Did this book make you want to read more work by Holmes?
9. Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it?
10. Compare this book to others your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book? What will be your most vivid memories of it a year from now? Or will it just leave a vague impression, and what will that be? Or will you not think of it at all in a year's time?

## BOOK REVIEWS

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### Booklist

As a child, Laurie Sassalyn would escape to her Aunt Dot's to get away from the chaos and hubbub of her own home. Years later, Laurie returns to Calcasset, Maine, to help clear out Aunt Dot's house. Much of what Laurie finds is the usual mementos of a life well lived, but hidden inside one of Aunt Dot's chests is an unexpected treasure: a beautifully painted duck decoy. Why did Aunt Dot hide it away? Laurie enlists Matt, the handsome "bereavement declutterer" who is helping sort through Aunt Dot's belongings, but when Laurie discovers that Matt has nefarious intentions, she, her childhood best friend, June, and her high-school boyfriend, Nick, band together to solve the mystery. There's still a spark between Laurie and Nick, and Laurie has to figure out a path forward that satisfies both her need for solitude and independence and her desire for a relationship. Holmes (*Evvie Drake Starts Over*, 2019) blends humor, emotional depth, and small-town charm in this delightful story about the bonds of family and friendship, showing how even the most independent people need someone to lean on. Readers will love spending time with Laurie and her friends; suggest to fans of Katherine Center and Abbi Waxman.

### Publisher's Weekly

Holmes (*Evvie Drake Starts Over*) serves up a sweet romance with a side of mystery in this fun page-turner. Laurie Sassalyn, having recently called off her wedding and on the cusp of her 40th birthday, returns to her Maine hometown to clean out the house of her recently deceased great-aunt Dot. Sorting through Dot's belongings, Laurie finds a wooden duck decoy and an old letter with an inscrutable reference to ducks. She investigates the story behind the decoy with the help of a few friends, including her high school sweetheart Nick. Laurie and Nick renew their romance, but to his disappointment, Laurie has no plans to stay in town or settle down. Meanwhile,

Laurie hires a man to help clean out the house, but when he finds out the duck might have a connection to a famous artist, he swindles Laurie and buys it for much less than it's worth. After she realizes her mistake, she and her friends hatch a harebrained scheme to recover the decoy. Holmes's colorful cast of characters pop off the page, and the sure-footed plot entertains. Readers will be eager to see what Holmes does next. (*June*)

### Kirkus Reviews

When Laurie Sassalyn's beloved great-aunt Dot dies at the age of 93, Laurie takes on the job of cleaning out her house. Even as a child, Laurie idolized Dot and the life she lived as a single, adventurous woman. Dot traveled, never got married, and (most important to Laurie, who grew up with four brothers and a constant stream of noise) had a silent house. Now that Laurie's almost 40, she's re-created Dot's life for herself in Seattle, where she lives in peace, enjoying her job as a freelance nature writer and spending her free time with her many friends. Cleaning out Dot's house is a big task, but Laurie thinks Dot deserves the respect of having someone go through her stuff instead of just trashing everything. Alongside the many books and boxes full of old photos, Laurie finds something surprising—a wooden duck, carefully kept in a cedar chest. Laurie can sense that this duck was important to Dot, and she enlists the help of a "bereavement declutterer" to help her discern its value. She also reconnects with librarian Nick Cooper, the high school boyfriend she dumped when she realized that he wanted to stay in Calcasset. Nick and Laurie have both changed over the years—he's been married and divorced, and she's broken off an engagement—but what hasn't changed is their deep connection. Nick and Laurie grow closer as they search for answers about the mysterious duck—especially when their search leads them to what might be the world's first wooden duck heist. As Laurie's feelings for Nick grow, she starts to wonder if her friend June is right when she says, "You don't have to be single to be independent. And you don't have to be married to be loved." As in her debut, *Evvie Drake Starts Over* (2019), Holmes displays a gift for warm, richly drawn characters and situations that are as cozy as a steaming cup of tea. Laurie is refreshing as a heroine who is entering her 40s, a size 18, and completely comfortable with her life as an unmarried, child-free woman. There are no dramatics or big fights between her and Nick—just a believable adult relationship with real-world obstacles.

A charming and easygoing look at all kinds of love and the beauty of independence, featuring supremely likable characters.

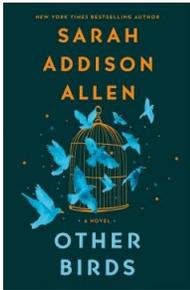
## READALIKES

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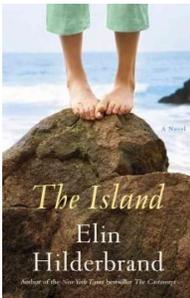
### **Early Morning Riser by Katherine Heiny**

Jane, 26, an elementary school teacher, meets Duncan, a woodworker, soon after moving to a small town in Michigan. After they quickly become involved, Jane eventually realizes that Duncan is regarded as a local Lothario, a complication intensified by Duncan's curious friendship with his ex-wife, Aggie, and his intention to never marry again. Then there's Duncan's very close relationship with his coworker, Jimmy. Years later, Jane's life path is forever altered by a tragic accident for which she feels responsible, leaving her struggling to reconcile her guilt with her hopes and desires for the future while maintaining her long-held, if often challenging connection with Duncan



***Other Birds* by Sarah Addison Allen**

“To keep a connection to her late mother, Zoey relocates into her old apartment on Mallow Island, S.C. She quickly connects to her endearing neighbors as well. This book is a quick and sweet read about the stages of love from the tickle of a spark to the longing its absence can bring.”



***The Island* by Elin Hilderbrand**

After her daughter, Chess, breaks off an engagement and her fiancé subsequently dies in a rock-climbing accident, divorcee Birdie Cousins encourages her younger daughter, Tate, and her sister, India, to join her and Chess on Tuckernack Island for a month, a time when deep secrets are soon revealed.