

DISMANTLED

By Jennifer McMahon

Reading Group Guide & Discussion Questions

Introduction

The *New York Times* bestselling author of the acclaimed *Island of Lost Girls* and *Promise Not to Tell* returns with a chilling novel in which the secrets of the past come back to haunt a group of friends in terrifying ways.

Dismantlement = Freedom

Henry, Tess, Winnie, and Suz banded together in college to form a group they called the Compassionate Dismantlers. Following the first rule of their manifesto—"To understand the nature of a thing, it must be taken apart"—these daring misfits spend the summer after graduation in a remote cabin in the Vermont woods committing acts of meaningful vandalism and plotting elaborate, often dangerous, pranks. But everything changes when one particularly twisted experiment ends in Suz's death and the others decide to cover it up.

Nearly a decade later, Henry and Tess are living just an hour's drive from the old cabin. Each is desperate to move on from the summer of the Dismantlers, but their guilt isn't ready to let them go. When a victim of their past pranks commits suicide—apparently triggered by a mysterious Dismantler-style postcard—it sets off a chain of eerie events that threatens to engulf Henry, Tess, and their inquisitive nine-year-old daughter, Emma.

Is there someone who wants to reveal their secrets? Is it possible that Suz did not really die—or has she somehow found a way back to seek revenge?

Full of white-knuckle tension with deeply human characters caught in circumstances beyond their control, Jennifer McMahon's gripping story and spine-tingling plot prove that she is a master at weaving the fear of the supernatural with the stark realities of life.

Questions for Discussion

1. Henry and Tess, in the present day, both feel that in their own ways, they have let their former selves down by not passionately pursuing their art, that they have settled for mundane lives. Do you think this is true, or are they just living in the real world? How can one reconcile youthful dreams with the responsibilities of adulthood?

2. In *Dismantled*, identity is a fluid concept: Val is transformed into Winnie, Winnie poses as Suz, Suz questions her identity as leader of the Dismantlers, Danner is never quite who she seems to be. How much of our identity is influenced by outward appearances, and by how others perceive us? How easy is it to reinvent yourself?

3. The Compassionate Dismantlers believe that by following their manifesto, they can transform art, themselves, and ultimately society. When relatively harmless pranks evolve into more destructive acts, the members have to decide where to draw the line. How far would you go in the name of something you believed passionately?

4. Emma's quirks and obsessions drive much of the action in the present day narrative of *Dismantled*. Do you think her idiosyncrasies are a reaction to something in her upbringing? What do you think of Henry's and Tess's different approaches to dealing with Emma's "imaginary friend" and other issues?

5. What are some of the differences in the ways Suz, Winnie, Tess, and Henry define the "truth" of what happened with the Dismantlers? The private investigator, Bill Lunde thinks he can sort out the objective truth of that summer -- is there such a thing?

6. *Dismantled* is told from multiple points of view. Did you think this technique was effective? Did you trust certain points of view more than others?

7. As a reader, you come to know Suz both through others memories of her and through her diary. Is Suz a sympathetic character? Is she misunderstood or misguided? Do you see her as a hero or villain?

8. Throughout the novel, Henry and Tess must reevaluate their marriage and their feelings for each other. Much of their current state is dictated by their past. Do you think it's possible to overcome past hurts and reestablish the love in a relationship? How do you think the set-up of Henry living in his studio affects Emma?

9. Tess finds outlets from the stresses of her life through boxing and through art. Winnie suggests to Emma that she also find a creative outlet through art. How important do you think it is for people to find a place or activity they can go to forget about the world around them? Are there things you do to combat stress in your life?

10. Much of the action is set off by the characters' need to feel a sense of belonging: Spencer desperately wants to be a dismantler, Winnie wants to be

loved by Suz, Henry wants to back with his family, and Emma is looking for a friends who understands her. How does there need to be a part of something dictate how they act? Would you classify them as outsiders?

About the Author

Jennifer McMahon is the author of *Island of Lost Girls* and *Promise Not to Tell*. She lives in Vermont with her partner, Drea, and their daughter, Zella.

Learn more at www.jennifer-mcmahon.com