Tayler Heuston

“Hostages”

Reader’s Guide

A. Discussion Questions

1. “Hostages” deals with many kinds of traumas and violent or aggressive acts. How do these stories reinforce or rewrite our cultural narratives about crimes against women and survivorship?
2. Who is Cora and how do her voice, her story, and your understanding of her evolve throughout the narrative?
3. How is history used in the narrative? What, if anything, do the stories of Patty Hearst, the Japanese Embassy Hostage Crisis, and Peruvian history complicate or clarify in the strange case of Henry and Therese Hines?
4. Consider what you know about Henry and Therese. Where does this information come from? Is it reliable? Why or why not?
5. Who are the women in Cora’s life? Who are the men? How are these relationships similar and different?
6. Cora describes several pieces of her own Art and the Art inside the Hineses home. What role does Art and art-making play in this narrative?
7. What do you make of the conversations between Cora and Mr. Carter, Cora and Mike Nelson?
8. Consider Cora’s personal traumas. Cora says, “In one version of this story, this is the key. In another version, this is only something that happened to me when I was young.” Which do you believe is truer? Why?
9. Why is this story titled “Hostages”? Who are the hostages? What kinds of hostage-hood are there?
10. How do you choose to account for the relationship between Henry and Therese?

B. Writing Exercises

1. Consider a historical event that has haunted you. Write the moment of discovery with as much detail as you can recall, i.e. How old were you? Where were you? How were you informed (radio, television, newspaper, internet, an overheard conversation)? What facts of the event do you remember?

Now, research the historical event. What did you remember correctly? What did you get wrong? How do you account for the differences? Why would you remember this particular way?

Reflect upon why this historical event was particularly resonant to you.

1. What else was happening in your life at the time? Consider a piece of Art – sculpture, painting, collage, photograph, performance, installation, etc. – or imagine a piece of art. Be as detailed as you can in describing it.

Now, write the story behind it. Imagine the person who made this piece. Who are they? What does this work mean to them? When did they make it? How did they make it?

C. Suggested Reading

Books that inform or support the reading of this story:

*The Red Parts: Autobiography of a Trial* by Maggie Nelson

*The Other Side* by Lacy M. Johnson

*Men Explain Things to Me* by Rebecca Solnit

*The Boys of My Youth* by Jo Ann Beard

*Bastard Out of Carolina* by Dorothy Allison

*Find Me* by Laura Van Den Berg

*Bobcat* by Rebecca Lee

*Cowboys Are My Weakness* by Pam Houston

*Mothers Tell Your Daughters* by Bonnie Jo Campbell

*I Want to Show You More* by Jamie Quatro

*Both Ways is the Only Way I Want It* by Maile Meloy

*The Collected Stories* by Amy Hempel