

## Discussion Questions for *A Sharp Solitude*:

1. As do all of Carbo's novels, *A Sharp Solitude* has a very strong sense of place, in this case the remote regions of the Rocky Mountains of Northwest Montana near Glacier Park and the small towns in the surrounding areas. How do you think the setting influences the mood of the novel? How does it affect each of the main characters, Reeve and Ali, both directly and indirectly?
2. When Reeve says, "I can feel the timelessness out here, the sense of eternity mocking me, pointing out my futile efforts to move through it each day, all day, to gather DNA, to survive myself. It's a terrible feeling, as if the massive, unforgiving wild is snickering at my uselessness," do you feel this is existentialist or nihilistic thinking on Reeve's part because of his traumatic backstory or do you feel that anyone who spends such a large amount of time in such austere wilderness is bound to have such feelings?
3. *A Sharp Solitude* touches on a variety of issues, but one particular is Montana as a landscape for personal reinvention—particularly for Reeve and in some ways for FBI agent Ali Paige. Do you consider Montana, or even the west in general, a place where people go to find themselves or reinvent themselves? And if not for reinvention, what about escape?
4. The structure of the novel goes from 'present' Thursday and then 'present' Friday to returning repeatedly to what really happened on 'the day before,' Wednesday. Did this structure work for you and make it more suspenseful or was it confusing?
5. How does Ali's upbringing in New Jersey affect how she responds to the situation with Reeve? Would Ali have helped him if they didn't have a child together? If he was a past boyfriend who just needed a favor?
6. The tragic incident from Reeve's youth brings up issues surrounding one of the most divisive topics in America. Did you find Reeve's desire to take the middle ground plausible given what had happened to him? Do you find Reeve's desire to take the middle ground symbolic of a greater need to find

a middle ground in the national debate over guns and gun control or simply a survival mechanism for him? Or both?

7. At one point, Ali has an internal observation about a squirrel in her yard and she draws attention to the endless vigilance it takes to survive. Do you agree with her when she refers to the squirrel's busyness and says, "That's what it takes to survive – an endless vigilance. Busyness, acquisition, sustenance. And if it's not food, as it is for the animals, it's money, security, trust, love, truth, or acceptance. It never ends, the journey to find sustenance, even when you convince yourself you're seeking something different. It's really just the same effort in disguise."
8. After reading the story, do you feel there is a difference between solitude and loneliness? If they are on a continuum, where does solitude end and loneliness begin, and what might be the key to finding the right balance?
9. Were you surprised to find out who killed Anne Marie Johnson? Was her confession completely believable? Why or why not?
10. At the end of the novel, what does the future of Ali and Reeve look like, both individually and as a family unit?