

Book Club Bags: Spring 2022

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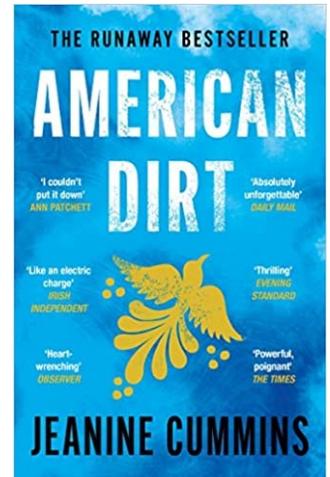
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FICTION

***American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins**

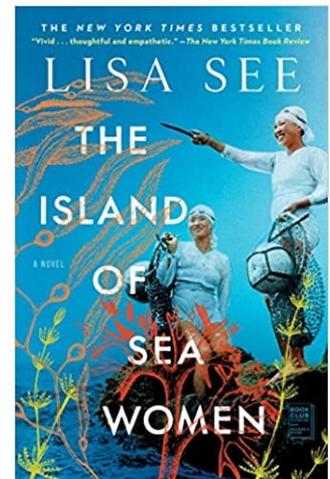
Lydia lives in Acapulco. She has a son, Luca, the love of her life, and a wonderful husband who is a journalist. And while cracks are beginning to show in Acapulco because of the cartels, Lydia's life is, by and large, fairly comfortable. But after her husband's tell-all profile of the newest drug lord is published, none of their lives will ever be the same.

Forced to flee, Lydia and Luca find themselves joining the countless people trying to reach the United States. Lydia soon sees that everyone is running from something. But what exactly are they running to?



***The Island of Sea Women* by Lisa See** Donated by Another Evening Book Club

Set on the Korean island of Jeju, *The Island of Sea Women* follows Mi-ja and Young-sook, two girls from very different backgrounds, as they begin working in the sea with their village's all-female diving collective. Over many decades—through the Japanese colonialism of the 1930s and 1940s, World War II, the Korean War, and the era of cellphones and wet suits for the women divers—Mi-ja and Young-sook develop the closest of bonds. Nevertheless, their differences are impossible to ignore: Mi-ja is the daughter of a Japanese collaborator, forever marking her, and Young-sook was born into a long line of *haenyeo* and will inherit her mother's position leading the divers. After hundreds of dives and years of friendship, forces outside their control will push their relationship to the breaking point.

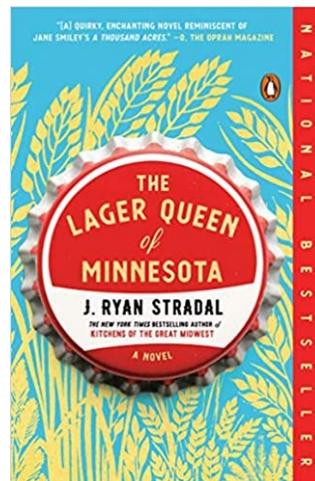


This beautiful, thoughtful novel illuminates a unique and unforgettable culture, one where the women are in charge, engaging in dangerous physical work, and the men take care of the children. A classic Lisa See story—one of women's friendships and the larger forces that shape them—*The Island of Sea Women* introduces readers to the fierce female divers of Jeju Island and the dramatic history that shaped their lives.

***The Lager Queen of Minnesota* by J. Ryan Stradal**

Two sisters, one farm. A family is split when their father leaves their shared inheritance entirely to Helen, his younger daughter. Despite baking award-winning pies at the local nursing home, her older sister, Edith, struggles to make what most people would call a living. So she can't help wondering what her life would have been like with even a portion of the farm money her sister kept for herself.

With the proceeds from the farm, Helen builds one of the most successful light breweries in the country, and makes their company motto ubiquitous: "Drink lots. It's Blotz." Where Edith has a heart as big as Minnesota, Helen's is as rigid as a steel keg. Yet one day, Helen will find she needs some help herself, and she could find a potential savior close to home. . . if it's not too late.

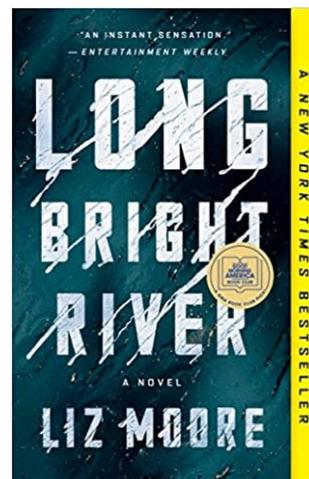


***Long Bright River* by Liz Moore**

In a Philadelphia neighborhood rocked by the opioid crisis, two once-inseparable sisters find themselves at odds. One, Kacey, lives on the streets in the vise of addiction. The other, Mickey, walks those same blocks on her police beat. They don't speak anymore, but Mickey never stops worrying about her sibling.

Then Kacey disappears, suddenly, at the same time that a mysterious string of murders begins in Mickey's district, and Mickey becomes dangerously obsessed with finding the culprit--and her sister--before it's too late.

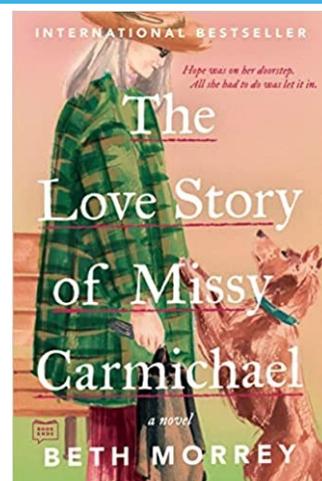
Alternating its present-day mystery with the story of the sisters' childhood and adolescence, *Long Bright River* is at once heart-pounding and heart-wrenching: a gripping suspense novel that is also a moving story of sisters, addiction, and the formidable ties that persist between place, family, and fate.



***The Love Story of Missy Carmichael* by Beth Morrey**

The world has changed around Missy Carmichael. At seventy-nine, she's estranged from her daughter, her son and only grandson live across the world in Australia, and her great love is gone.

Missy spends her days with a sip of sherry, scrubbing the kitchen in her big empty house and reliving her past--though it's her mistakes, and secrets, that she allows to shine brightest. The last thing Missy expects is for two perfect strangers and one spirited dog to break through her prickly exterior and show Missy just how much love she still has to give.



***The Night Watchman* by Louise Erdrich**

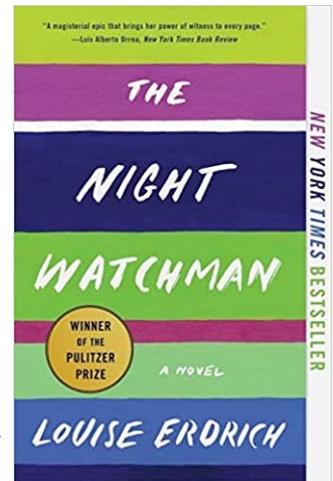
Donated by Happy Annes Book Club

Thomas Wazhashk is the night watchman at the jewel bearing plant, the first factory located near the Turtle Mountain Reservation in rural North Dakota. He is also a Chippewa Council member who is trying to understand the consequences of a new “emancipation” bill on its way to the floor of the United States Congress. It is 1953 and he and the other council members know the bill isn’t about freedom; Congress is fed up with Indians. The bill is a “termination” that threatens the rights of Native Americans to their land and their very identity. How can the government abandon treaties made in good faith with Native Americans “for as long as the grasses shall grow, and the rivers run”?

Since graduating high school, Pixie Paranteau has insisted that everyone call her Patrice. Unlike most of the girls on the reservation, Patrice, the class valedictorian, has no desire to wear herself down with a husband and kids. She makes jewel bearings at the plant, a job that barely pays her enough to support her mother and brother. Patrice’s shameful alcoholic father returns home sporadically to terrorize his wife and children and bully her for money. But Patrice needs every penny to follow her beloved older sister, Vera, who moved to the big city of Minneapolis. Vera may have disappeared; she hasn’t been in touch in months, and is rumored to have had a baby. Determined to find Vera and her child, Patrice makes a fateful trip to Minnesota that introduces her to unexpected forms of exploitation and violence, and endangers her life.

Thomas and Patrice live in this impoverished reservation community along with young Chippewa boxer Wood Mountain and his mother Juggie Blue, her niece and Patrice’s best friend Valentine, and Stack Barnes, the white high school math teacher and boxing coach who is hopelessly in love with Patrice.

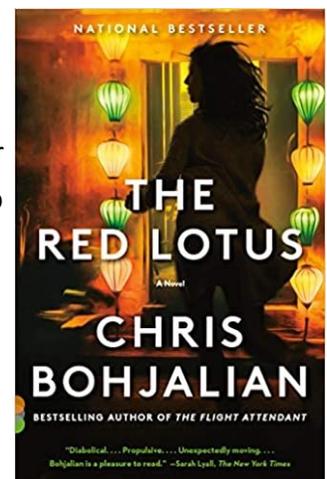
In the *Night Watchman*, Louise Erdrich creates a fictional world populated with memorable characters who are forced to grapple with the worst and best impulses of human nature. Illuminating the loves and lives, the desires and ambitions of these characters with compassion, wit, and intelligence, *The Night Watchman* is a majestic work of fiction from this revered cultural treasure.



***The Red Lotus* by Chris Bohjalian**

The first time Alexis saw Austin, it was a Saturday night. Not in a bar, but in the emergency room where Alexis sutured a bullet wound in Austin's arm. Six months later, on the brink of falling in love, they travel to Vietnam on a bike tour so that Austin can show her his passion for cycling and he can pay his respects to the place where his father and uncle fought in the war. But as Alexis sips white wine and waits at the hotel for him to return from his solo ride, two men emerge from the tall grass and Austin vanishes into thin air. The only clue he leaves behind is a bright yellow energy gel dropped on the road.

As Alexis grapples with this bewildering loss, and deals with the FBI, Austin's prickly family, and her colleagues at the hospital, Alexis uncovers a series of strange lies that force her to wonder: Where did Austin go? Why did he really bring her to Vietnam? And how much danger has he left her in?



Refugee by Alan Gratz

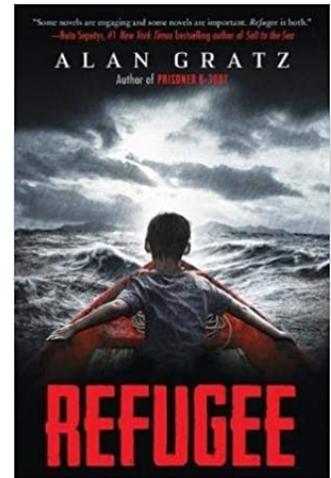
Three different kids. One mission in common: ESCAPE.

Josef is a Jewish boy in 1930s Nazi Germany. With the threat of concentration camps looming, he and his family board a ship bound for the other side of the world...

Isabel is a Cuban girl in 1994. With riots and unrest plaguing her country, she and her family set out on a raft, hoping to find safety and freedom in America...

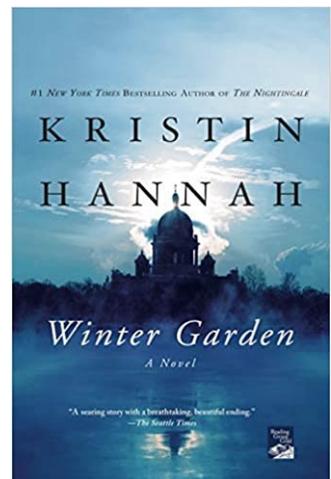
Mahmoud is a Syrian boy in 2015. With his homeland torn apart by violence and destruction, he and his family begin a long trek toward Europe...

All three young people will go on harrowing journeys in search of refuge. All will face unimaginable dangers—from drownings to bombings to betrayals. But for each of them, there is always the hope of tomorrow. And although Josef, Isabel, and Mahmoud are separated by continents and decades, surprising connections will tie their stories together in the end.



Winter Garden by Kristin Hannah Donated by Newcomers Book Club

Meredith and Nina Whitson are as different as sisters can be. One stayed at home to raise her children and manage the family apple orchard; the other followed a dream and traveled the world to become a famous photojournalist. But when their beloved father falls ill, Meredith and Nina find themselves together again, standing alongside their cold, disapproving mother, Anya, who even now, offers no comfort to her daughters. As children, the only connection between them was the Russian fairy tale Anya sometimes told the girls at night. On his deathbed, their father extracts a promise from the women in his life: the fairy tale will be told one last time—and all the way to the end. Thus begins an unexpected journey into the truth of Anya's life in war-torn Leningrad, more than five decades ago. Alternating between the past and present, Meredith and Nina will finally hear the singular, harrowing story of their mother's life, and what they learn is a secret so terrible and terrifying that it will shake the very foundation of their family and change who they believe they are.



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NONFICTION

***Blood Brothers* by Deanne Stillman** Donated by MONA Book Club

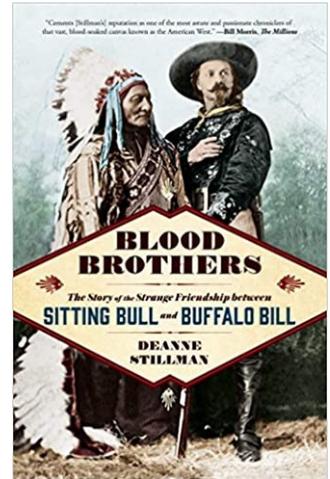
The little known story of the unlikely friendship of two famous figures of the American West—Buffalo Bill Cody and Sitting Bull—told through their time in Cody's Wild West show in the 1880s.

It was in Brooklyn, New York, in 1883 that William F. Cody—known across the land as Buffalo Bill—conceived of his Wild West show, an “equestrian extravaganza” featuring cowboys and Indians. The idea took off. For four months in 1885 the Lakota chief Sitting Bull appeared in the show. *Blood Brothers* tells the story of these two iconic figures through their brief but important collaboration.

Blood Brothers flashes back to 1876, when the Lakota wiped out Custer's 7th Cavalry unit at the Little Big Horn. Sitting Bull did not participate in the “last stand,” but was nearby—and blamed for killing Custer. The book also flashes forward to 1890, when Sitting Bull was assassinated. Hours before, Cody rushed to Sitting Bull's cabin at Standing Rock, dispatched by the army to avert a disaster.

Deanne Stillman unearths little told details about the two men and their tumultuous times. Their alliance was eased by none other than Annie Oakley. When Sitting Bull joined the Wild West, the event spawned one of the earliest advertising slogans: “Foes in '76, Friends in '85”—referring to the Little Big Horn. Cody paid his performers well, and he treated the Indians no differently from white performers. During this time, the Native American rights movement began to flourish. But with their way of life in tatters, the Lakota and others availed themselves of the chance to perform in the Wild West. When Cody died in 1917, a large contingent of Native Americans attended his public funeral.

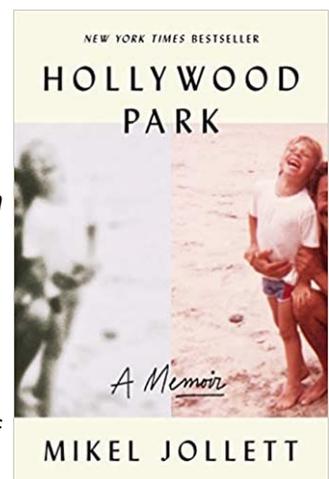
An iconic friendship tale like no other, *Blood Brothers* is truly a timeless story of people from different cultures who crossed barriers to engage each other as human beings. And it foretells today's battle on the Great Plains.



***Hollywood Park* by Mikel Jollett** Donated by Wild Women Book Club

We were never young. We were just too afraid of ourselves. No one told us who we were or what we were or where all our parents went. They would arrive like ghosts, visiting us for a morning, an afternoon. They would sit with us or walk around the grounds, to laugh or cry or toss us in the air while we screamed. Then they'd disappear again, for weeks, for months, for years, leaving us alone with our memories and dreams, our questions and confusion. ...

So begins *Hollywood Park*, Mikel Jollett's remarkable memoir. His story opens in an experimental commune in California, which later morphed into the Church of Synanon, one of the country's most infamous and dangerous cults. *Continued...*



***Hollywood Park* by Mikel Jollett, continued...**

Per the leader's mandate, all children, including Jollett and his older brother, were separated from their parents when they were six months old, and handed over to the cult's "School." After spending years in what was essentially an orphanage, Mikel escaped the cult one morning with his mother and older brother. But in many ways, life outside Synanon was even harder and more erratic.

In his raw, poetic and powerful voice, Jollett portrays a childhood filled with abject poverty, trauma, emotional abuse, delinquency and the lure of drugs and alcohol. Raised by a clinically depressed mother, tormented by his angry older brother, subjected to the unpredictability of troubled step-fathers and longing for contact with his father, a former heroin addict and ex-con, Jollett slowly, often painfully, builds a life that leads him to Stanford University and, eventually, to finding his voice as a writer and musician.

Hollywood Park is told at first through the limited perspective of a child, and then broadens as Jollett begins to understand the world around him. Although Mikel Jollett's story is filled with heartbreak, it is ultimately an unforgettable portrayal of love at its fiercest and most loyal.

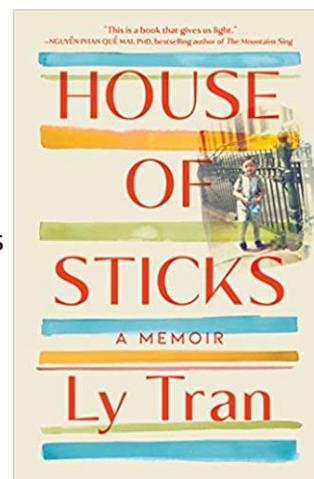
***House of Sticks* by Ly Tran Donated by Wild Women Book Club**

Ly Tran is just a toddler in 1993 when she and her family immigrate from a small town along the Mekong river in Vietnam to a two-bedroom railroad apartment in Queens. Ly's father, a former lieutenant in the South Vietnamese army, spent nearly a decade as a POW, and their resettlement is made possible through a humanitarian program run by the US government. Soon after they arrive, Ly joins her parents and three older brothers sewing ties and cummerbunds piece-meal on their living room floor to make ends meet.

As they navigate this new landscape, Ly finds herself torn between two worlds. She knows she must honor her parents' Buddhist faith and contribute to the family livelihood, working long hours at home and eventually as a manicurist alongside her mother at a nail salon in Brooklyn that her parents take over. But at school, Ly feels the mounting pressure to blend in.

A growing inability to see the blackboard presents new challenges, especially when her father forbids her from getting glasses, calling her diagnosis of poor vision a government conspiracy. His frightening temper and paranoia leave a mark on Ly's sense of self. Who is she outside of everything her family expects of her?

An "unsentimental yet deeply moving examination of filial bond, displacement, war trauma, and poverty" (NPR), *House of Sticks* is a timely and powerful portrait of one girl's coming-of-age and struggle to find her voice amid clashing cultural expectations.



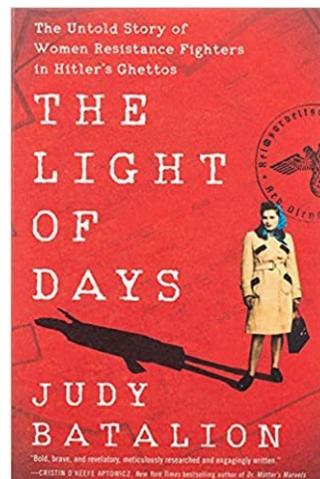
***Light of Days* by Judy Batalion** **Donated by Wild Women Book Club**

One of the most important stories of World War II, already optioned by Steven Spielberg for a major motion picture: a spectacular, searing history that brings to light the extraordinary accomplishments of brave Jewish women who became resistance fighters—a group of unknown heroes whose exploits have never been chronicled in full, until now.

Witnesses to the brutal murder of their families and neighbors and the violent destruction of their communities, a cadre of Jewish women in Poland—some still in their teens—helped transform the Jewish youth groups into resistance cells to fight the Nazis. With courage, guile, and nerves of steel, these “ghetto girls” paid off Gestapo guards, hid revolvers in loaves of bread and jars of marmalade, and helped build systems of underground bunkers. They flirted with German soldiers, bribed them with wine, whiskey, and home cooking, used their Aryan looks to seduce them, and shot and killed them. They bombed German train lines and blew up a town’s water supply. They also nursed the sick and taught children.

Yet the exploits of these courageous resistance fighters have remained virtually unknown.

As propulsive and thrilling as *Hidden Figures*, *In the Garden of Beasts*, *Band of Brothers*, and *A Train in Winter*, *The Light of Days* at last tells the true story of these incredible women whose courageous yet little-known feats have been eclipsed by time. Judy Batalion—the granddaughter of Polish Holocaust survivors—takes us back to 1939 and introduces us to Renia Kukielka, a weapons smuggler and messenger who risked death traveling across occupied Poland on foot and by train. Joining Renia are other women who served as couriers, armed fighters, intelligence agents, and saboteurs, all who put their lives in mortal danger to carry out their missions. Batalion follows these women through the savage destruction of the ghettos, arrest and internment in Gestapo prisons and concentration camps, and for a lucky few—like Renia, who orchestrated her own audacious escape from a brutal Nazi jail—into the late 20th century and beyond.



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