

Book Talk ~ Summer 2022

Recommendations from JTL Book Group

***Empty Mansions: The Mysterious Life of Huguette Clark and the Spending of a Great American Fortune* by Bill Dedman and Paul Clark Newell Jr.**
Intriguing story of heiress Huguette Clark (1906–2011), daughter of copper baron and US senator William A. Clark, who lived to be 104. She spent the last twenty years of her life in a hospital, and left \$30 million to her aide.

—LLW and SK

***Still Life* by Sarah Winman**

Really enjoyed this book about misfit people coming together to build a family.

(from Amazon.com): Set in Tuscany, 1944; as Allied troops advance and bombs fall around deserted villages, a young English soldier, Ulysses Temper, finds himself in the wine cellar of a deserted villa. There, he has a chance encounter with Evelyn Skinner, a middle-aged art historian who has come to Italy to salvage paintings from the ruins and recall long-forgotten memories of her own youth. In each other, Ulysses and Evelyn find a kindred spirit amongst the rubble of war-torn Italy, and set off on a course of events that will shape Ulysses' life for the next four decades.

—JK

***Oh William* by Elizabeth Strout**

Unique writing style; very good fiction.

(from Amazon.com): Strout returns to her beloved heroine Lucy Barton, a successful writer living in New York, navigating the second half of her life as a recent widow and parent to two adult daughters. A surprise encounter leads her to reconnect with William, her first husband, and longtime, on-again-off-again friend and confidante. Recalling their college years, the birth of their daughters, the painful dissolution of their marriage, and the lives they built with other people, Strout weaves a portrait, stunning in its subtlety, of a tender, complex, decades-long partnership.

***The Murmur of Bees* by Sophia Segovia**

Life in Mexico set against the Mexican Revolution and the influenza pandemic of 1918, with elements of magical realism, including a newborn covered in bees.

(from Amazon.com): *The Murmur of Bees* captures both the fate of a country in flux and the destiny of one family that has put their love, faith, and future in the unbelievable. Disfigured and covered in a blanket of bees, little Simonopio is for some locals the stuff of superstition, a child kissed by the devil. But he is welcomed by landowners Francisco and Beatriz Morales, who adopt him and care for him as if he were their own. As he grows up, Simonopio becomes a cause for wonder to the Morales family, because when the uncannily gifted child closes his eyes, he can see what no one else can—visions of all that's yet to come, both beautiful and dangerous.

***The Premonition: A Pandemic Story* by Michael Lewis**

(from Amazon.com): Michael Lewis's taut and brilliant nonfiction thriller pits a band of medical visionaries against the wall of ignorance that was the official response of the Trump administration to the outbreak of COVID-19.

***The Lioness* by Chris Bohjalian**

Rich American movie star goes on a photo safari; turns into a riveting adventure.

(from Amazon.com): Tanzania, 1964. When Katie Barstow, A-list actress, and her new husband, David Hill, decide to bring their Hollywood friends to the Serengeti for their honeymoon, they envision civilized adventure. What Katie and her glittering entourage do not expect is this: a kidnapping gone wrong, their guides bleeding out in the dirt, and a team of Russian mercenaries herding their hostages into Land Rovers, guns to their heads. A blistering story of fame, race, love, and death set in a world on the cusp of great change.

—JC

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Hamish Macbeth and Agatha Raisin series by M. C. Beaton

Rereading these enjoyable books.

(from M. C. Beaton's website):

The idea for **Hamish Macbeth** formed during a fishing holiday in Scotland. M.C. Beaton created the laconic, unambitious Highland village policeman whose quick wit has made him the unlikely sleuth that has solved dozens of crimes.

Agatha Raisin is M.C. Beaton's most recent creation, an advertising executive who retires to the Cotswolds only to find that there is nothing cozy about village life. Beginning with a poisoning at a village fête in *The Quiche of Death*, Agatha finds that she has a talent for getting herself into trouble.

The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry and The Love Song of Miss Queenie Hennessy by Rachel Joyce *Again, rereading and enjoying these favorites.*

(from Amazon.com): Rachel Joyce's unforgettable debut, *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry*, became a runaway international bestseller as readers fell in love with her unassuming hero as he embarked on an incredible adventure spurred by a letter from his old friend Queenie. In *The Love Song of Miss Queenie Hennessy*, Joyce reveals the other side of the story in a journey just as remarkable as Harold's. Together these exquisite parallel novels illuminate the feelings we all bury deep within our hearts, and the small yet pivotal moments that can change a person's life.

—JJ

The Great Circle by Maggie Shipstead

An unforgettable story of a daredevil female aviator determined to chart her own course in life: circumnavigating the globe by flying over the North and South Poles.

Hour of the Witch by Chris Bohjalian

(from Amazon.com): Boston, 1662. Mary Deerfield is twenty-four-years-old. Her skin is porcelain, her eyes delft blue, and in England she might have had many suitors. But here in the New World, amid this community of saints, Mary is the second wife of Thomas Deerfield, a man as cruel as he is powerful.

When Thomas, prone to drunken rage, drives a three-tined fork into the back of Mary's hand, she resolves that she must divorce him to save her life.

The Venice Sketchbook by Rhys Bowen

(from Amazon.com): Caroline Grant is struggling to accept the end of her marriage when she receives an unexpected bequest. Her beloved great-aunt Lettie leaves her a sketchbook, three keys, and a final whisper . . . Venice. Caroline's quest: to scatter Juliet "Lettie" Browning's ashes in the city she loved and to unlock the mysteries stored away for more than sixty years.

—LM

The Happiest Man on Earth: The Beautiful Life of an Auschwitz Survivor by Eddie Jaku

(from Amazon.com): Born in Leipzig, Germany, into a Jewish family, Eddie Jaku was a teenager when his world was turned upside-down. On November 9, 1938, during the terrifying violence of Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass, Eddie was beaten by SS thugs, arrested, and sent to a concentration camp with thousands of other Jews across Germany. Every day of the next seven years of his life, Eddie faced unimaginable horrors in Buchenwald, Auschwitz, and finally on a forced death march during the Third Reich's final days. The Nazis took everything from Eddie—his family, his friends, and his country. But they did not break his spirit.

—RK

These Days by Lucy Caldwell

Well-written and engrossing story of two sisters in the midst of the Belfast Blitz during World War II.
(from Amazon.com): April, 1941. Belfast has escaped the worst of the war—so far. Over the next two months, it's going to be destroyed from above. Following the lives of sisters Emma and Audrey as they try to survive the horrors of the four nights of bombing which were the Belfast Blitz. A timeless and heart-breaking novel about living under duress, about family, and about how we try to stay true to ourselves.

—MJH