

The image is a book cover with a black background and gold-colored geometric patterns. At the top, a sunburst or fan-like shape radiates downwards. Below this, a large rectangular frame contains the title. The title is written in a stylized, Art Deco font. At the bottom, another rectangular frame contains the text 'COMPLIMENTARY COPY'. The entire design is composed of straight lines, rectangles, and triangles, creating a symmetrical, architectural feel.

ROARING READS
FOR 2020

COMPLIMENTARY
COPY



BORROW. READ. REPEAT.

LOVE YOUR LIBRARY, BUT HATE THE HOLDS LIST?

Join our Borrow.Read.Repeat. community and be the first to learn about the best new books from Penguin Random House. Get recommendations of just-published and forthcoming books, access to book trailers and reviews, and hear about the books we're betting will become future bestsellers.



Visit us at **BorrowReadRepeat.com**.

Follow us at:

Facebook.com/BorrowReadRepeat

Instagram.com/BorrowReadRepeat

Twitter.com/BorrowReadRepeat

Sign up for our monthly eNewsletter at:

TinyUrl.com/BorrowReadRepeat.



Penguin
Random
House

ROARING READS
FOR 2020

THESE ARE UNCORRECTED PROOFS.
PLEASE DO NOT QUOTE FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL
YOU CHECK YOUR COPY AGAINST THE FINISHED BOOK.

Excerpt from *The Immortals of Tehran*
© 2020 by Ali Araghi

Excerpt from *The Holdout*
© 2020 by Graham Moore

Excerpt from *Weather*
© 2020 by Jenny Offill

Excerpt from *The Authenticity Project*
© 2020 by Clare Pooley

Excerpt from *Darling Rose Gold*
© 2020 by Stephanie Wrobel

All rights reserved.

First published by Melville House.

First published by Random House, Knopf, Pamela Dorman Books, and Berkley,
divisions of Penguin Random House.

First Printing, 2020

Copyright 2020
All rights reserved



REGISTERED TRADEMARKS

Printed in the United States of America.

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The Immortals of Tehran, *The Holdout*, *Weather*, *The Authenticity Project*, and *Darling Rose Gold* are works of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the authors' imaginations or a used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

This publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party Web sites or their content.

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

SAMPLE THESE ROARING READS

The Immortals of Tehran

by *Ali Araghi* 5

The Holdout: A Novel

by *Graham Moore* 13

Weather: A Novel

by *Jenny Offill* 21

The Authenticity Project: A Novel

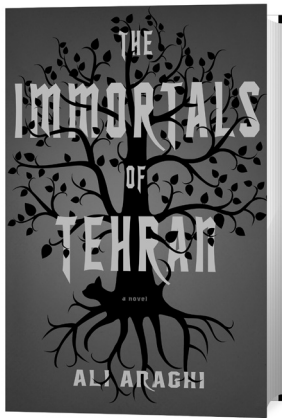
by *Clare Pooley* 27

Darling Rose Gold

by *Stephanie Wrobel* 33

COMING SOON TO
YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY!

BE SURE TO PLACE YOUR HOLDS EARLY FOR THE
WINTER READS EVERYONE WILL BE TALKING ABOUT!



Available April 2020 • Melville House • Hardcover and eBook Editions

For fans of *Homegoing*, *Pachinko*, and *Exit West*.

This generations-spanning novel carries one extraordinary family to the brink of the Iranian Revolution—and marks the debut of a literary talent to watch.



MULLA ALI PLACED HIS HANDS on Ahmad’s shoulders and pushed him gently forward. “Nosser,” he shouted into the white above, “can you see Ahmad? He’s here, right here with me! Don’t bring God’s wrath upon the people. Don’t do this to the House of God. For the sake of your son.” A heavy silence fell upon the crowd who looked up into the fog listening for a reply. Crows cawed somewhere deep in the white murk from their perches atop plane trees. Sparrows chirped their morning songs. “Nosser Khan!” shouted Mash Akbar, Salman’s father. “Nosser Khan, can you hear us?” Ahmad slowly removed his hands from his ears. “Nosser Khan!” The crows stopped their baleful shrieks and now it was only the song of the sparrows piercing the shroud of the fog that had enveloped Tajrish and its people. Ahmad turned at the sound of footsteps to

see his mother rushing toward them. He wiggled out of Mulla's hands and ran to her.

"What's your father doing?" Pooran whispered as she approached the edge of the crowd.

"He's shooting flying Russians," Ahmad answered, squeezing his mother's chador in his fist.

"What?" she turned her eyes to the crowd as if, not believing Ahmad, she was looking to see what was really happening.

"I got up and I was going to feed the chickens and come help you. But Salman knocked and we ran here. Father is up there at the top of the minaret. He's hunting the Russians, and Nemat said we are crazy. Father is fine, right?"

"God willing, son, God willing."

"Nosser Khan," shouted Salman's father, "your wife is here, too. Come down. Nosser, can you hear me?" But no human sound seemed able to descend from the invisible top. The sparrows had become silent too and now Ahmad could even hear the wheezy breathing of Mohammad the Carpenter, who had tilted his large head back and looked up into the fog with an open mouth. Sweat slid from his temple down his round, fleshy cheek. Time had stopped. The villagers had turned into stone figures in a hushed apocalypse. Then Nosser's voice blasted from the heart of the fog:

"Send the boy up."

Faces turned to Ahmad. He looked at his mother.

"God bless your father, Mr. Nosser," shouted Mulla Ali toward the minaret. "May your family live long. He's coming right up to you now. Just put the pickax down and don't throw any more bricks, Nosser Khan. All right? We don't want the boy hurt, do we?" Ahmad's mother gave him a soft tap on the back meaning, Go to your father. Everything is going to be all right. Mulla Ali accompanied him through the crowd. "He is at the foot of the stairs, Mr. Nosser." The door was open wide. It was a small, old, wooden door leading to a dark and narrow spiral stairwell that went up as if to a

white hell in the sky. A broken lock lay on the floor. “Go, go.” Mulla Ali pushed Ahmad in.

The jagged triangular steps curled around the inside of the minaret toward the crown. Ahmad wanted to hurry, but he had to place each foot carefully, avoiding the fallen chunks of brick. He ran, a groping hand on the wall, but the blackened plaster provided nothing to hold on to. Small openings in the wall allowed the softened morning light to penetrate the darkness. If the openings had been lower, Ahmad could at least peek down at the people, but all he could see now was the fog.

“Who is that?” his father barked from above. “Who’s coming up? I have bricks. I’ll throw. Who is there?”

“It’s me.”

“Ahmad?”

“Yes, Father.”

“Come on up here, son,” he snapped. “Quick.”

As Ahmad hurried up, each step more covered by dust and pieces of brick, he began to hear his father’s hoarse breathing. A few more steps and there he was, sitting on the stairs. Behind him on higher steps lay his leather boots and the pickax he had used to pry out bricks. Ahmad looked at the pockmarked wall, then at his father’s rifle sticking out of the opening in the wall. The stock rested in his strong arms like a baby. The soft light from the opening lit the left side of his face. Deep wrinkles burrowed his dusty, sweaty forehead. He looked more like Grandfather. But Khan *was* old. Nasser was not.

“There you are,” he said, his voice rasping, his eyes fixed on Ahmad with an unwavering intensity. “Where have you been?”

“I was down there,” Ahmad replied, “with the others.”

“Are you afraid?”

Ahmad was not sure what to answer.

“I said are you afraid?”

Ahmad shook his head.

“Then hold up your head and let me hear your voice. Are you afraid?”

“No, Father, no.”

Nosser rolled over to look out the opening and a button popped off his shirt, bounced off the step where Ahmad was standing, and landed on the one below it. Ahmad fished the button from dust and debris. In the palm of his hand, it reflected the subdued white of the fog outside, as if it were pearl. Ahmad looked at his father’s shirt. The dark-brown pinstripes cascaded and surged like waves. “Is your mother there, too?” Nosser asked, squinting down into the fog.

“Yes.”

Nosser placed his cheek on the rifle and tilted it up. “They’re there,” he said with an eye closed. “Are you listening to me?”

“Yes, Father.”

“Who’s up there, if you are listening?”

Nosser had not said who was up there. Ahmad threw a furtive look out the opening from where he was standing: nothing was there but the milky sky. “Russians?” he mumbled.

“Yes!” Nosser roared with excitement as he turned to face his son. “Yes, boy, yes! They’re up there spying on us. Of course. Why not? It’s a war. Isn’t it a war?” He paused for a second. “Is it not?”

“Yes, it is, Father,” Ahmad said, slipping the button into his pants pocket.

“Listen, Ahmad,” he lowered his voice as he leaned forward and grabbed the boy’s shoulders in a firm grip. “Listen, Ahmad, they’re going to come, put their filthy boots on our soil. From the North. Maybe others, too. They’re here to make us a war country. I don’t have much time left. But you have a lot of time. As much as you wish. You’re still a little boy. I want you to be watchful. Keep an eye on land and sky. Do you understand?” Ahmad did not remember having seen white strands in his father’s beard before. He had aged overnight. His cheeks were sunken and the black rings made the sparks in his eyes menacing. For an instant, Ahmad thought he was

talking to a stranger. But the voice was familiar. “Do you understand what I’m saying?” Ahmad nodded, not sure what his father was talking about. “Good. Now there’s one thing I need to tell you. Here.” He lifted the rifle and nested it in Ahmad’s arms. “This is like a baby. You have to hold it in your arms very carefully; tightly but gently. Like a baby. You have to take care of it.” He took Ahmad’s hand and placed it on the rifle. “And you know why?”

“Mr. Nosser, yo!” Mulla Ali’s voice came from the foot of the stairwell. “How is the boy? Are you coming down? Can you send him down?”

Nosser looked around and picked up half a brick behind him. “Step aside,” he ordered Ahmad and hurled it down the stairs. The brick ricocheted off the wall, tore a chunk off of the plaster, and disappeared into the darkness.

“You know why this is happening?” Nosser pulled Ahmad back in front of him. “Because the world is in a war. A big war. It isn’t only us, it’s the whole world, and the second time, too. It’s been going on for years and now it’s crawling toward us. I want you to hold onto your gun and promise to take care of your home and your mother and sister. If you see a sparrow in the air, don’t shoot it, but if you see a Russian in the air, shoot it. Do you understand, Ahmad?”

He did not understand. He had chased chickens in the yard, hidden in the large copper cauldron in the basement while playing hide-and-seek, ridden on top of apple crates on the back of Khan’s wagons, and even snuck into Rakhsh’s stable without his grandfather’s permission, but he had never held a gun in his hands. He had never shot anything except for crows, sparrows, and empty tins with a slingshot. His father was waiting for an answer. Ahmad nodded. With the nod came the slap in his face.

“Don’t you lie to me! You don’t understand. You have no clue what you are holding in your hands. You don’t have the slightest idea your country is in danger and neither does anyone down there.” Ahmad’s ear was burning, but he did not dare let go of the

gun to press it and soothe the pain. Tears welled up in his eyes. “Now listen to me: strangers will come, from the land and from the sky. There is a war going on. War is when strangers come to our village to take our things and kill our people, to turn us into a second Poland. They have guns and rifles like this one. So we need to have guns of our own to save our lives and protect our loved ones. Others can’t see this now. But they will. You’ll live a long life. Remember, you need to fulfill your responsibilities. Now repeat so I know you understand. You need to do what?”

“Fulfill my responsibilities,” Ahmad answered, fighting back tears.

“Good boy, which is what?”

Against his will, a tear slid down Ahmad’s cheek. “To protect my mother and sister and Khan and Agha.”

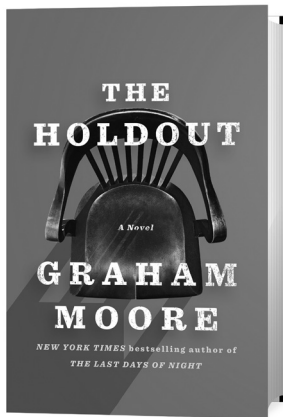
“That’s my boy.” A smile flashed on Nosser’s face. “It’s not that bad. Collect yourself. All you have to do is accept them and cherish them and savor them as if you were drinking from a glass of cold barberry juice, as if you were sucking on a piece of ice in the summer.” And with that he grabbed the barrel and put the tip in his mouth.

Ahmad’s hands were drenched in cold sweat. It looked like he had shoved a gun in his father’s mouth. Like he was going to kill him. But he was not. What he meant to do that day was to get up, feed the chickens, and go to the Orchard where everyone was preparing for the wedding: women of the village sailing around the steaming cauldrons, checking how much longer the stew needed to cook or if there was enough salt in the rice, others sitting on blankets and rugs, in front of heaps of herbs to be cleaned and crates of apples and cucumbers to be washed; men sweeping the ground and laying more rugs, carrying big bags of rice to the women and putting the watermelons in the narrow creek that ran through the Orchard. Ahmad had looked forward to the wedding tunes that the duo of musicians would blow into the sorna and beat on the

dohol all through the evening and night. He had wanted to bet with Salman and the other boys who could keep his hands in the cold creek water the longest, watch the men dance, and maybe dance a little himself somewhere behind the crowd. He wanted to see if Agha would come out of his tree for Maryam's wedding. What he had never meant to do was put a rifle in his father's mouth.

At that moment Khan's strong voice echoed up the staircase. "Nosser, I'm coming up." It was not a request, nor was a trace of doubt in it. Khan was finally there to right the wrong. Ahmad watched his father's strong hand slide slowly along the barrel to rest peacefully over his frail fingers, as if to help him bear the burden. The hand's skin was darker and more wrinkled than Ahmad remembered, but its weight felt fatherly and familiar. Ahmad could hear Khan's footsteps. His father's hand was talking to him. Everything is going to be okay, it said. Ahmad's arms were tired from the weight of the rifle and his father's hand. He wished he could put it down for a second. But then it went off.

It was sudden. It was loud. Then it was silent. Not a caw from a distant crow, nor the faintest rustling of villagers' shoes on the dirt. There was no sound. But there was color. Red had splashed behind his father on the steps, on his boots and pickax, and on the bending walls that ascended still higher. Was his father's head there or had it disappeared? Had it bent back? It seemed that the fog had started to leak in through the opening to dissolve Nosser. And Ahmad too—until he felt his father's body, leaning heavily on the barrel of the rifle. He could not hold it anymore. He made no attempt at escape as his father tilted toward him, toppled, and everything went black.



Available February 2020 • Random House • Hardcover, eBook, and Audio Editions

For fans of John Grisham, Laura Lippman, and Scott Turow.

“A page-turning legal thriller with a twisty and absolutely riveting plot . . .
You won’t be able to put this one down!”

—Lisa Scottoline, #1 bestselling author of *Someone Knows*



H-O-P-E

NOW

I’m Maya Seale,” she said to the production assistant who met her in the lobby of the Omni Hotel. “Juror 272.”

“Yes, you are!” the energetic PA said without consulting the clipboard nestled in the crook of her arm. “Everyone is thrilled that you’re here! I’m Shannon!”

Maya surveyed the lobby. It was late morning on a Wednesday, a month after Rick had appeared at her evidentiary hearing. The

wall art had changed in the past ten years. So had the furniture and the staff uniforms, though their aesthetic was still the sort of timeless, placeless, generic hotel style that you could find in any city, anywhere in the world. It was just a different shade of bland.

Avoiding this place for the past decade had not been difficult.

Shannon gestured to the elevator banks. “Why don’t I take you to your room so you can get settled? The hosts will call you in for singles. Today and tomorrow morning.”

“Singles?”

“Interviews. One on one. Just the hosts and you.”

“That’s two on one.”

Shannon looked like she was trying to figure out whether she’d done something wrong. “It looks like . . .” She consulted her clipboard. “Your single will be in the morning. But whoever isn’t being interviewed at any point is invited to get together in the restaurant. It’ll be informal. We reserved the back room. We’ll do the official re-vote tomorrow.”

“Have the others arrived?”

Shannon nodded.

“What about Rick Leonard?”

So much for nonchalance. It had taken her all of twenty seconds to reveal both that she was anxious and why. But then, why should she care what a PA thought about her anxiety level?

Shannon didn’t seem to find the question noteworthy. “I don’t think he’s arrived yet.”

MAYA HAD GOOGLED Rick thoroughly since he’d appeared at the courthouse. But she could find no recent information about him. Nothing about where he worked, what his job was, where he

lived. He wasn't on any social media that she could find.

There were only old photos. Old vitriol directed at her. Watching pixelated YouTube clips of old interviews surrounding the release of his book, she'd once again felt stung by what he'd said about her and the other jurors.

"When will I have an opportunity to see his new evidence? If I'm going to respond to it, I need to have time to examine it."

"All I know is that he wanted to be interviewed last. And then you'll all hear what he has to say before you re-vote."

Maya looked at her watch. It was going to be a long day.

Shannon removed an electronic keycard from a manila folder and handed it to Maya. "We're really glad you're here."

. . . .

ROOM 1208 WAS *exactly* the same. The paintings, the desk, the chairs, even the coffee table appeared to be the very same ones that she'd lived with, every day and every night, for five months. She imagined that this was what an escaped zoo animal felt when returned to captivity.

She walked across the familiar patterned carpet. She touched the polished wood of the chairs. She stared at the paintings on the walls, the depictions of what looked like English fields. She used to imagine herself running through those fields. Being outside, feeling wind against her cheeks. Being anywhere, anywhere at all, other than where she was then . . . and, now, again.

Instinctively, she squeezed the key in her hand. Unlike last time, she could leave whenever she wanted.

"Pretty cool, right?" said Shannon. "Accuracy—historical accuracy—that stuff is really important to us."

Maya ran her fingers along the desk. The wood had a well-oiled shine. But something was off. The surface was too smooth. She felt for the pockmark on the front ridge of the desk. She'd made it with a pen one long, frustrating night. The mark wasn't there.

"We found hotel suppliers who had older models of the furniture," Shannon offered. "We brought everything in last week."

"These are copies?" Maya's fingertips brushed the leather frame of the desk blotter.

"Same make, same model, same year. We got them from a hotel in Atlanta."

Maya was standing inside a simulacrum of her old life.

The bedroom was identically furnished. There was a basket of fruits and chocolates on one of the side tables and a card that read "Thank you for joining us." It was signed "*Murder Town.*"

That's when she saw it, right beside the basket.

Maya had to step back.

"H-O-P-E" read the small, square button, its red, white, and blue lettering smudged and worn.

"What the *fuck*?" Maya said.

Shannon hurried into the bedroom. When she saw what Maya was staring at, she relaxed. "That was yours, wasn't it? We thought it would be another fun reminder."

"I used to have one of these on my backpack," Maya said.

"Yes! I totally remember seeing it when you left the courtroom, after the verdict. That image of all twelve of you, walking away . . . I mean, that shit was iconic." She paused. "Sorry."

Maya couldn't take her eyes off the button. "I still have this. I still have *mine*."

"For saying 'shit,' I mean."

"You got this online or something?"

“eBay. They’re collector’s items now. That was fifty bucks.”

It occurred to Maya that what once had been her actual life had been reduced to collectibles. Her memories had become memorabilia. They’d been commodified, boxed and traded, sold at a healthy markup.

She cringed.

She was complicit, wasn’t she, by being here? She was selling her past, or at least the only part of her past that anyone cared about, which was the part devoted to someone else’s tragedy. She’d watched in horror, over the years, as other people made fortunes off what she’d done. The networks, the memoirists, the journalists with “access.” How many people had gotten rich off the murder of Jessica Silver? There was the *New York Times* reporter whose book contextualized Jessica’s death within the nationwide epidemic of sexual violence against women—for a two-million-dollar advance. Who could doubt that reporter’s good intentions? And who wouldn’t be envious of her new brownstone in Cobble Hill? Or what about the famed documentarian whose six-part HBO examination of the case took such pains to highlight the LAPD’s long history of racial discrimination—surely his two Emmys and expanding production company were but the by-products of his honest convictions? There wasn’t a cause in this world so pure that someone couldn’t figure out how to make it profitable.

Maya had considered them all grave robbers. But now, standing inside the television re-creation of her former life, how could she claim to be any better? The fact that she’d given away her fee for being on this show, anonymously, to a Skid Row charity, did not absolve her of guilt. If the faded button in Maya’s hand proved anything, it was that her youthful good intentions had been worse than useless. The button was a reminder of the dangers of believing yourself to be better than you were. Salvaged, it had become a

curiosity, like a rusted spoon recovered from the wreckage of the *Titanic*. It was now an object to be studied by scholars of a once-promising history.

What she missed the most about the person she'd been, Maya realized, was her hope for a coming world that turned out never to have been possible. She was nostalgic for an imaginary future.

Maya looked at Shannon, trying to guess just how young she was. Twenty-three, maybe. "Did you follow the trial?" Maya asked.

The girl brightened. "Oh my God, follow it? I was in junior high but yeah, I was *obsessed*. I still am. I begged for this job. To be assigned to you. I hope you don't mind my saying . . . I mean, I don't want to . . . If it's unprofessional or whatever . . ."

"What?"

Shannon took a breath. "You're my hero."

Maya had no idea what to say in response to something so absurd.

"Why would I be your hero?"

"Because you took a stand. If everything Rick Leonard said is true . . . Well, you believed something, and you stood up for it. Maybe you were wrong. But you believed that Bobby Nock was innocent. And because you believed it, you talked all the others into seeing it your way—you fought not to let an innocent man be convicted and you *won*." Shannon became suddenly embarrassed. "You know . . . right or wrong, you won. Fair and square."

"I won," Maya said. "Yeah . . . look at what I won."

She gestured to the re-creation of a mid-priced corporate hotel suite around them. This wasn't a canonization; it was an embalming.

Shannon frowned. The Maya she'd met had clearly not lived up to her expectations.

Then it was Maya's turn to feel embarrassed. She ran her thumb over the smooth edge of the H-O-P-E button. "Some advice?"

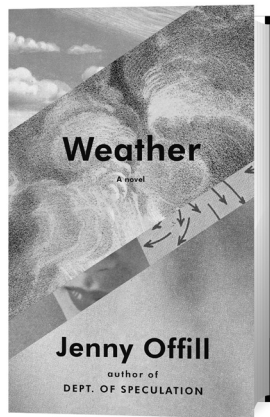
Shannon crossed her arms in front of her chest. "Never meet your heroes?"

Maya smiled. Maybe this girl was tougher than she'd thought. "That shouldn't be a problem," she said. "If you can manage never to have any in the first place."

THE FIRST TIME Maya had debated the evidence in the case of *The People v. Robert Nock*, she had been without legal training. Now, she had the advantage of both law school and four years as a practicing criminal defense attorney.

After ushering Shannon out, she performed a familiar pretrial ritual. She'd printed each major point of evidence out on a separate sheet of paper, and now she laid them across the coffee table.

She'd had a month to gather it all together. Not that she'd needed so much time. She'd been amazed by how little of it she'd forgotten. Looking over the actual, concrete physical evidence, she felt more confident than ever that Bobby's acquittal had not only been just, it had been necessary.



Available February 2020 • Knopf • Hardcover, eBook, and Audio Editions

From the author of the nationwide bestseller *Dept. of Speculation*—one of the *New York Times Book Review*'s Ten Best Books of the Year—a shimmering tour de force about a family, and a nation, in crisis.

“Clever and seductive . . . Offill is good company for the end of the world.”
—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)



...

I don't know what to do about this car service man. He told me business is down; no one is calling anymore. He had to let all his drivers go and is down to one car. He sleeps at work now so as to never miss a call. His wife has said she is going to leave him.

Mr. Jimmy. That's the name on the card he gave me. I try to use only his service now, not the better, faster one. Sometimes when I call his voice is groggy. He says always that he will be there in seven minutes, but it is much longer now.

I used to take a car service only if I was going to be late, but now I find I am building in double the amount of travel time. A bus would be the same or faster. Also, I could afford it. But what if I am the only customer he has left?

I'm late for the lecture now. And I was wrong about which building it's in. By the time I get there, Sylvia is almost through speaking. There's a big crowd. Behind her is a graph shaped like a hockey stick.

“What it means to be a good person, a moral person, is calculated differently in times of crisis than in ordinary circumstances,” she says. She pulls up a slide of people having a picnic by a lake. Blue skies, green trees, white people.

“Suppose you go with some friends to the park to have a picnic. This act is, of course, morally neutral, but if you witness a group of children drowning in the lake and you continue to eat and chat, you have become monstrous.”

The moderator makes a gesture to show it is time to wrap up. A line of men is forming behind the microphone. “I have both a question *and* a comment,” they say. A young woman stands up to wait in line. I watch as she inches forward. Finally, she makes it to the front to ask her question.

“How do you maintain your optimism?”

I can't get to Sylvia afterward. There are too many people. I walk to the subway, trying to think about the world.

Young person worry: What if nothing I do matters?

Old person worry: What if everything I do does?

...

For almost two years, I have managed not to run into this mother from the old preschool. At times, it takes some doing. I definitely have to be eagle-eyed if I venture into the fancy bakery or the co-op. Her name is Nicola and her son's name, inexplicably, is Kasper.

She had this way that she would talk about our zoned elementary school, in one breath praising the immigrant kids who went there and in the next talking about the tutors she'd hired to get her son out of it. Strivers, she called them. Like they were all cleaning chimneys or selling papers hot off the press.

Nicola used to carry flash cards with her, and she'd greet her son at pickup with a snack that she said the name of in another language. *Pomme. Banane.*

Eli was enamored with her. He wanted me to wear nicer clothes. He wanted me to teach him the foreign names of fruit. One day I brought him an orange (in French: *orange*). I told him he could take the test if he wanted, but that there would be, of course, no pricey tutors.

A few days later, I yelled at him for losing his new lunch box, and he turned to me and said, Are you sure you're my mother? Sometimes you don't seem like a good enough person.

He was just a kid, so I let it go. And now, years later, I probably only think of it, I don't know, once or twice a day.

...

I finally tried the meditation class. My knee was hurting so I sat on a chair. The mostly enlightened woman was there on a cushion. I'd wondered what happened to her. At the end, she asked Margot a question or what she seemed to think was a question.

"I have been fortunate enough to spend a great deal of time in the melted ego world. But I find I have trouble coming back to the differentiated world, the one you were just talking about where you have to wash the dishes and take out the garbage."

She was very pregnant, six months maybe. Oh, don't worry, I thought, the differentiated world is coming for your ass.

...

As it turned out, Eli did fine on that test. Not well enough for the citywide schools, but well enough to be placed in something the district called EAGLE. (They never said what it stood for, but who cares, because, duh, eagles soar!) For Nicola, though, all of this was the culmination of a year's work. I remember how she came in beaming the day after the results. We've had quite a week, she told me. We've just learned that Kasper is gifted *and* talented.

Oh my, I said.

Soon after that he came over to our house for a playdate. The boys played Legos, then ran around jumping on and off different things. They were soldiers, ninjas, nothing particularly surprising or revealing of hidden depths. But then Eli took out his favorite toy, which was a set of plastic ice-cream cones and scoops. He asked his friend if he wanted to play ice-cream truck, but Kasper crouched under the table and played his own game. It was called Time, he said.

What is better when you are older?

Picnics.

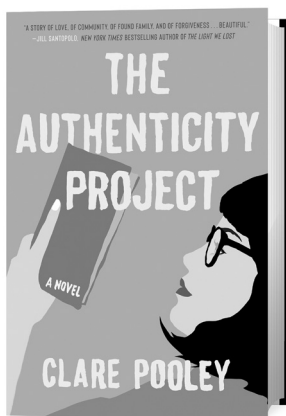
Picnics?

People bring better things.

...

Sylvia comes by the library. “I have a proposal for you,” she says. She wants to pay me to answer her email. There’s a lot of it these days because of the podcast. She’s been answering it herself, but she can’t keep up anymore.

I ask her what sorts of things she gets. All kinds, she tells me, but everyone who writes her is either crazy or depressed. We need the money for sure, but I tell her I have to think about it. Because it’s possible my life is already filled with these people.



Available February 2020 • Pamela Dorman Books • Hardcover, eBook, Audio, and Large Print Editions

For fans of *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*,
The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry, *The Rosie Project*,
and *The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry*.

“Cracks the facades that people present to the world and shows what happens when you’re willing to share your true self. . . . A beautiful book with a poignant message, perfect for our time.”

—Jill Santopolo, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Light We Lost*



ONE

Monica

She had tried to return the book. As soon as she realized it had been left behind, she’d picked it up and rushed after its extraordinary owner. But he’d gone. He moved surprisingly swiftly for someone so old. Maybe he really didn’t want to be found.

It was a plain, pale-green exercise book, like the one Monica had carried around with her at school, filled with details of homework assignments. Her friends had covered their books with graffiti of hearts, flowers, and the names of their latest crushes, but Monica was not a doodler. She had too much respect for good stationery.

On the front cover were three words, beautifully etched in copperplate script: *The Authenticity Project*. In smaller writing, in the bottom corner, was the date: *October 2018*. Perhaps, thought Monica, there would be an address, or at least a name, on the inside so she could return it. Although it was physically unassuming, it had an air of significance about it.

She turned over the front cover. There were only a few paragraphs on the first page.

How well do you know the people who live near you? How well do they know you? Do you even know the names of your neighbors? Would you realize if they were in trouble, or hadn't left their house for days?

Everyone lies about their lives. What would happen if you shared the truth instead? The one thing that defines you, that makes everything else about you fall into place? Not on the internet, but with those real people around you?

Perhaps nothing. Or maybe telling that story would change your life, or the life of someone you've not yet met.

That's what I want to find out.

There was more on the next page, and Monica was dying to read on, but it was one of the busiest times of the day in the café, and she knew it was crucial not to fall behind schedule. That way madness lay. She tucked the book into the space alongside the till with the

spare menus and flyers from various suppliers. She'd read it later, when she could concentrate properly.

MONICA STRETCHED OUT on the sofa in her apartment above the café, a large glass of sauvignon blanc in one hand and the abandoned exercise book in the other. The questions she'd read that morning had been niggling away at her, demanding answers. She'd spent all day talking to people, serving them coffees and cakes, chatting about the weather and the latest celebrity gossip. But when had she last told anyone anything about herself that *really mattered*? And what did she actually know about them, with the exception of whether they liked milk in their coffee or sugar with their tea? She opened the book to the second page.

My name is Julian Jessop. I am seventy-nine years old, and I am an artist. For the past fifty-seven years I've lived in Chelsea Studios, on the Fulham Road.

Those are the basic facts, but here is the truth: I AM LONELY.

I often go for days without talking to anyone. Sometimes, when I do have to speak (because someone's called me up about payment protection insurance, for example), I find that my voice comes out in a croak because it's curled up and died in my throat from neglect.

Age has made me invisible. I find this especially hard, because I was always looked at. Everyone knew who I was. I didn't have to introduce myself, I would just stand in a doorway while my name worked its way around the room in a chain of whispers, pursued by a number of surreptitious glances.

I used to love lingering at mirrors, and would walk slowly past shop windows, checking the cut of my jacket

or the wave in my hair. Now, if my reflection sneaks up on me, I barely recognize myself. It's ironic that Mary, who would have happily accepted the inevitability of aging, died at the relatively young age of sixty, and yet I'm still here, forced to watch myself gradually crumble away.

As an artist, I watched people. I analyzed their relationships, and I noticed there is always a balance of power. One partner is more loved, and the other more loving. I had to be the most loved. I realize now that I took Mary for granted, with her ordinary, wholesome, pink-cheeked prettiness and her constant thoughtfulness and dependability. I only learned to appreciate her after she was gone.

Monica paused to turn the page and take a mouthful of wine. She wasn't sure that she liked Julian very much, although she felt rather sorry for him. She suspected he'd choose dislike over pity. She read on.

When Mary lived here, our little cottage was always filled with people. The local children ran in and out, as Mary plied them with stories, advice, fizzy pop, and Monster Munch chips. My less successful artist friends constantly turned up unannounced for dinner, along with the latest of my artist's models. Mary put on a good show of welcoming the other women, so perhaps only I noticed they were never offered chocolates with their coffee.

We were always busy. Our social life revolved around the Chelsea Arts Club, and the bistros and boutiques of the King's Road and Sloane Square. Mary worked long hours as a midwife, and I crossed the country, painting the portraits of people who thought themselves worth recording for posterity.

Every Friday evening since the late sixties, at 5:00 p.m. we'd walk into the nearby Brompton Cemetery, which,

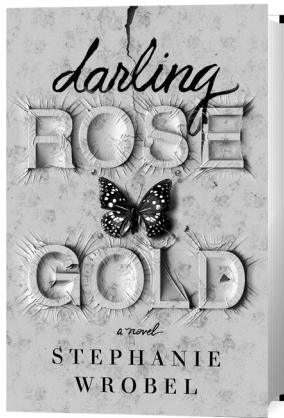
since its four corners connected Fulham, Chelsea, South Kensington, and Earl's Court, was a convenient meeting point for all our friends. We'd plan our weekend on the grave of Admiral Angus Whitewater. We didn't know the Admiral, he just happened to have an impressive horizontal slab of black marble over his last resting place, which made a great table for drinks.

In many ways, I died alongside Mary. I ignored all the telephone calls and the letters. I let the paint dry solid on the palette and, one unbearably long night, destroyed all my unfinished canvases; ripped them into multicolored streamers, then diced them into confetti with Mary's dressmaking scissors. When I did finally emerge from my cocoon, about five years later, neighbors had moved, friends had given up, my agent had written me off, and that's when I realized I had become unnoticeable. I had reverse metamorphosed from a butterfly into a caterpillar.

I still raise a glass of Mary's favorite Bailey's Irish Cream at the Admiral's grave every Friday evening, but now it's just me and the ghosts of times past.

That's my story. Please feel free to chuck it in the recycling. Or you might decide to tell your own truth in these pages and pass my little book on. Maybe you'll find it cathartic, as I did.

What happens next is up to you.



Available March 2020 • Berkley • Hardcover, eBook, and Audio Editions

For fans of Gillian Flynn, Leïla Slimani, and Jessica Knoll.

“A killer premise, twisty plotting, crisp writing, and compelling characters.

Dazzling, dark, and utterly delicious.”

—JP Delaney, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Girl Before*



1

Patty

DAY OF RELEASE

My daughter didn't have to testify against me. She chose to. It's Rose Gold's fault I went to prison, but she's not the only one to blame. If we're pointing fingers, mine are aimed at the prosecutor and his overactive imagination, the gullible jury, and the bloodthirsty reporters. They all clamored for justice.

What they wanted was a story.

(Get out your popcorn and Buncha Crunch, because boy, did they write one.)

Once upon a time, they said, a wicked mother gave birth to a daughter. The daughter appeared to be very sick and had all sorts of things wrong with her. She had a feeding tube, her hair fell out in clumps, and she was so weak, she needed a wheelchair to get around. For eighteen years, no doctor could figure out what was wrong with her.

Then along came two police officers to save the daughter. Lo and behold, the girl was perfectly healthy—the evil mother was the sick one. The prosecutor told everyone the mother had been poisoning her daughter for years. It was the mother’s fault the girl couldn’t stop vomiting, that she suffered from malnutrition. Aggravated child abuse, he called it. The mother had to be punished.

After she was arrested, the press swooped in like vultures, eager to capitalize on a family being ripped apart. Their headlines screamed for the blood of “Poisonous Patty,” a fiftysomething master of manipulation. All the mother’s friends fell for the lies. High horses were marched all over the land; every lawyer, cop, and neighbor was sure they were the girl’s savior. They put the mother in prison and threw away the key. Justice was served, and most of them lived happily ever after. The end.

But where were the lawyers while the mother was scrubbing the girl’s vomit out of the carpet for the thousandth time? Where were the cops while the mother pored over medical textbooks every night? Where were the neighbors when the little girl cried out for her mother before sunrise?

Riddle me this: if I spent almost two decades abusing my daughter, why did she offer to pick me up today?

Connolly approaches my cell at noon sharp, as promised. “You ready, Watts?”

I scramble off my Pop-Tart of a bed and pull my scratchy khaki uniform taut. “Yes, sir.”

I have become a woman who chirps.

The potbellied warden pulls out a large ring of keys and whistles as he slides open my door. I am Connolly’s favorite inmate.

I pause at my cellie’s bed, not wanting to make a scene. But Alicia is already sitting against the wall, hugging her knees. She raises her eyes to mine and bursts into tears, looking much younger than twenty.

“Shh, shh.” I bend down and wrap the girl in my arms. I try to sneak a peek at her bandaged wrists, but she catches me. “Keep applying the ointment and changing those dressings. No infections,” I say, wiggling my eyebrows at her.

Alicia smiles, tears staining her face. She hiccups. “Yes, Nurse Watts.”

I try not to preen. I was a certified nursing assistant for twelve years.

“Good girl. Díaz is going to walk the track with you today. Thirty minutes. Doctor’s orders.” I smile back, petting Alicia’s hair. Her hiccups have stopped.

“You’ll write me?”

I nod. “And you can call me whenever.” Squeezing her hand, I stand again and head toward Connolly, who has been waiting patiently. I pause at the threshold and look back at Alicia, making a mental note to send her a letter when I get home. “One hour at a time.”

Alicia waves shyly. “Good luck out there.”

Connolly and I walk toward I&R. My fellow inmates call out their farewells.

“Keep in touch, you hear?”

“We’ll miss you, Mama.”

“Stay outta trouble, Skeeto.” (Short for “Mosquito,” a nickname given as an insult but taken as a compliment. Mosquitoes never give up.)

I give them my best Queen Elizabeth wave but refrain from blowing kisses. Best to take this seriously. Connolly and I keep walking.

In the hallway Stevens nearly plows me over. She bears an uncanny resemblance to a bulldog—squat and stout, flapping jowls, known to drool on occasion. She grunts at me. “Good riddance.”

Stevens was in charge until I got here. Never a proponent of the flies-and-honey approach, she is vinegar through and through. But brute force and scare tactics only get you so far, and they get you nowhere with a woman of my size. Usurping her was easy. I don’t blame her for hating me.

I wave my fingers at her coquettishly. “Have a glorious life, Stevens.”

“Don’t poison any more little girls,” she growls.

Strangling her isn’t an option, so I kill her with kindness instead. I smile, the epitome of serenity, and follow Connolly.

The intake & release center is unremarkable: a long hallway with concrete floors, too-white walls, and holding rooms with thick glass windows. At the end of the hallway is a small office area with desks, computers, and scanners. It could be an accounting firm, if all the accountants wore badges and guns.

At the reception desk, the clerk’s chair is turned toward the radio. A news program plays. *After a short break*, the reporter says,

we have the story of a baby boy gone missing in Indiana. That's next on WXAM. I haven't watched, listened to, or read the news since my trial. The press destroyed my good name. Because of them, my daughter didn't speak to me for four years.

I glare at the radio. The chair swivels toward me, and I realize I know the clerk sitting in it. I privately refer to the bald and brawny man as Mr. Clean. I met him five years ago. He flirted with me all day, asking what perfume I was wearing while I batted him away. I'd feigned breeziness, but internally I was seesawing between fury at the injustice of my verdict and fear of the next five years. I hadn't seen him again until now.

"Patty Watts?" he says, turning off the radio.

I nod.

"I remember you." He smiles.

Mr. Clean pulls a form from his desk drawer, then disappears into the storage room. After a few minutes, he comes back with a small cardboard box. He hands me a piece of paper. "I need you to look through the inventory list and sign at the bottom to confirm you're leaving with everything you brought here."

I open the box and glance through it before scribbling my signature.

"You can change back into your street clothes now," Mr. Clean says, gesturing to the bathroom and winking at me when Connolly isn't looking. I tip my head and shuffle away, clutching the cardboard box.

In a stall, I rip off the jacket with *DEPT. OF CORRECTIONS* emblazoned across its back and dig into the box. After five years of prison food, my favorite pair of jeans, with the forgiving elastic in the waistband, is a little loose. I put on my Garfield T-shirt and a red sweatshirt embroidered with the initials of my community

college, GCC. My old socks are stiff with sweat, but they're still better than the rough wool pair I've been wearing. I pull on my white gym shoes and notice a final item at the bottom of the box. I pick up the heart-shaped locket and think about putting it in my pocket, but instead clasp it around my neck. Better for her to see me wearing her childhood gift.

I leave the bathroom and hand the empty box back to Mr. Clean.

"You take care of yourself." He winks again.

Connolly and I walk down the fluorescent-lit hallway of the admissions building toward the parking lot. "Someone coming to pick you up, Watts?"

"Yes, sir. My ride should be here soon." I'm careful not to say who my ride is; though Rose Gold is twenty-three now, some people still imagine her as a sickly little girl. Some people would not be overjoyed to see us reunited. They don't care that I stayed up all night monitoring her vitals during every hospital stay. They don't know the depths of this mother's love.

We stop at the door. My fingertips tingle as they reach for the push bar.

Connolly scratches his Ditka-esque mustache. "That pierogi recipe was a real hit with my in-laws."

I clap my hands. "I told you it would be."

Connolly hesitates. "Martha was impressed. She didn't sleep on the couch last night."

"Baby steps, sir. She's coming around. Keep reading that book." I've been coaching the warden on *The Five Love Languages* for the past few months.

Connolly smiles and looks lost for a second.

"Now, don't get all emotional," I joke, slapping his shoulder.

He nods. “Good luck out there, Patty. Let’s not meet again, okay?”

“That’s the plan,” I say. I watch him stride away, his clown-sized shoes smacking against the linoleum. He hefts his bulk into an office and closes the door behind him, and then there’s nothing left to face but a spooky silence. Just like that, the Illinois Department of Corrections is finished with me.

I try to ignore the wild thumping in my chest. Pushing the door open, I walk outside into blinding sunlight, half expecting an alarm to sound or a red light to flash. But it really is that easy: enter a building, leave a building, no one minds. I can go to a movie or church or the circus. I could get stuck in a thunderstorm without an umbrella or mugged at gunpoint. I am free, and anything can happen to me. I stretch out my fingers and marvel at the breeze on this crisp November day. Shielding my eyes, I scan the parking lot for the old Chevy van. But it’s a sea of sedans. No people.

She should be here any minute now.

I sit on the flimsy bench, scowling as the plastic protests under my weight. After several minutes of struggling to get comfortable, I stand. Back to pacing.

In the distance, my maroon van turns onto the long single-lane road that leads to the admissions building. As it creeps closer, I do my best to flatten any frizzies and straighten my sweatshirt. I clear my throat like I’m about to speak, but all I do is stare. By the time the van reaches the parking lot, I can make out my little girl’s narrow shoulders and blond-brown hair.

I watch Rose Gold back into a parking spot. She turns off the engine and leans against the headrest. I picture her closing her eyes for a minute. The ends of her chest-length hair rise and fall with

every unsuspecting breath. Rose Gold has wanted long hair since she was a little girl, and now she has it.

I read somewhere the average person has a hundred thousand hairs on their head—more for blonds, fewer for redheads. I wonder how many strands it takes to fill a fist. I imagine pulling my daughter in for a warm embrace, twirling her locks through my fingers. I always told her she was better off with her head shaved. You're much less vulnerable that way—nothing to grab hold of.

Daughters never listen to their mothers.

When she lifts her head, her eyes meet mine. She raises her arm and waves like the homecoming queen on a parade float. My own arm glides into the air and mirrors her excitement. I spot the outlines of a car seat in the van's second row. My grandson must be buckled in back there.

I take a step off the curb toward my family. It's been almost twenty-five years since my last baby. In seconds his tiny fingers will be wrapped around mine.



FILL 2020 WITH #ROARINGREADS




20-BOOK READING CHALLENGES FOR 2020

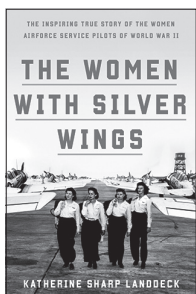
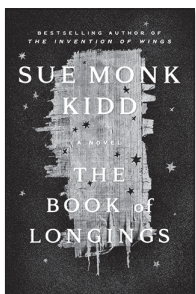
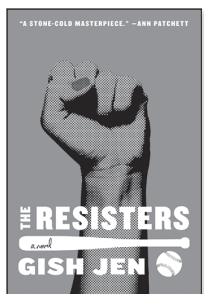
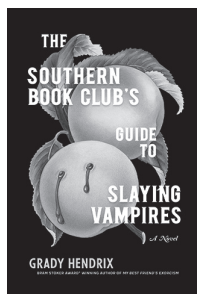
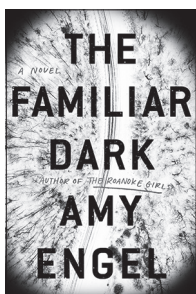
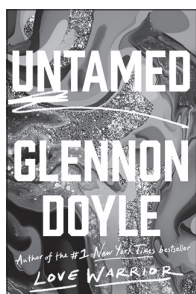
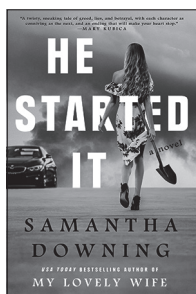
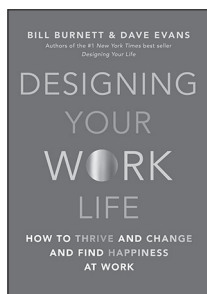
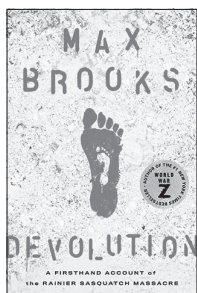
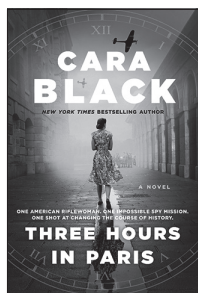
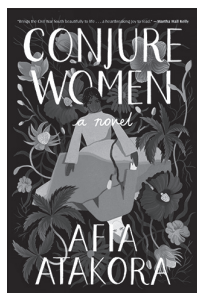
**MAKE 2020 YOUR
YEAR OF ROARING READS.**

Join **Borrow.Read.Repeat.** to set your 20-Book Reading Challenge (or challenges!) for 2020. Find downloadable book lists and suggestions, discussion guides, our 20-Book Sweepstakes, and more!

To learn more and sign up to participate, visit:
TinyUrl.com/RoaringReadsChallenge

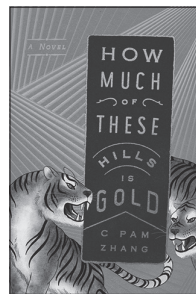
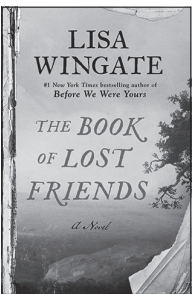
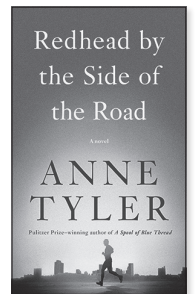
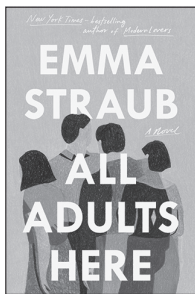
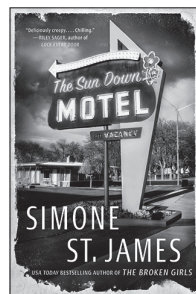
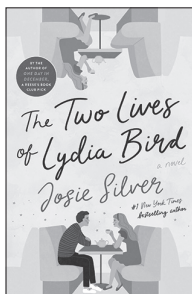
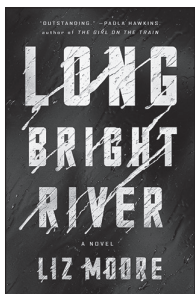
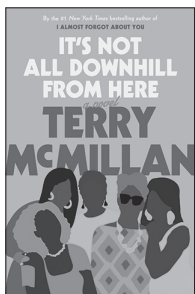
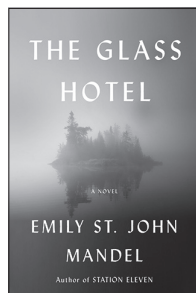
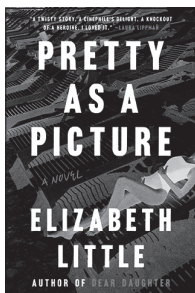
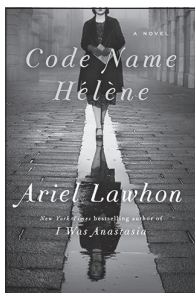


FILL 2020 WITH #ROADTORGREADS



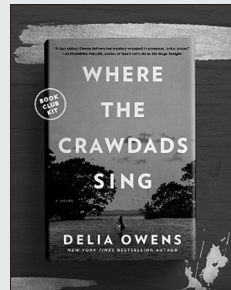
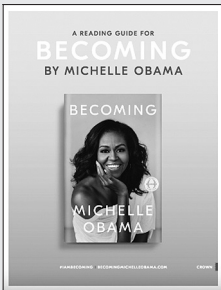
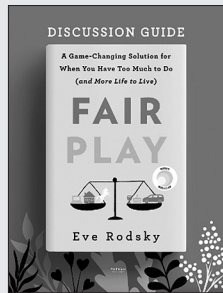
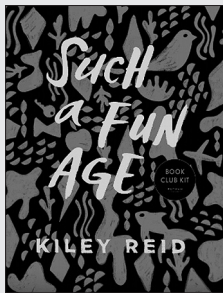
To learn more about these and other Penguin Random House books, sign up for our monthly eNewsletter at:

from
Penguin Random House



TAKE YOUR BOOK CLUB TO THE NEXT LEVEL WITH OUR BOOK CLUB KITS!

View and download free kits including discussion questions, Q&As, recipes, programming ideas, and more.



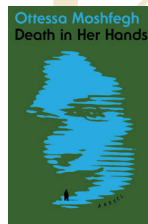
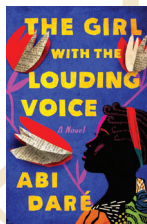
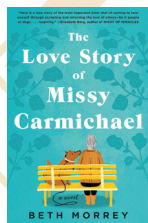
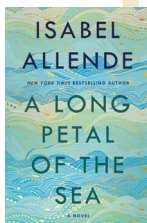
TinyUrl.com/BRRBookClubKits

MORE GREAT EXCERPTS DELIVERED RIGHT TO YOUR INBOX

first look
book club

Wondering what the next great read will be?
The next author that everyone will be talking about?
Join First Look Book Club and discover them first!

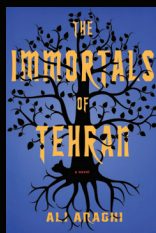
Sign up for our free email book club and receive daily excerpts from just-published books. We'll bring you the best in Mystery, Suspense, Romance, Memoir, Literary Fiction, and more. Get a first look before you commit to a book, plus be eligible for weekly book giveaways!



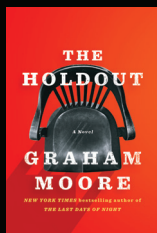
Join Now at:
TinyUrl.com/FirstLookBookClub.

ROARING READS FOR 2020

Look inside for a sampling of novels sure
to jazz up your bookshelf.



**The Immortals
of Tehran**
Ali Araghi
Melville House
April 2020



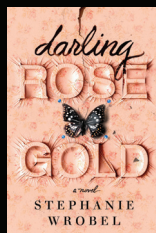
The Holdout:
A Novel
Graham Moore
Random House
February 2020



Weather:
A Novel
Jenny Offill
Knopf
February 2020



**The
Authenticity
Project:**
A Novel
Clare Pooley
Pamela
Dorman Books
February 2020



**Darling
Rose Gold**
Stephanie Wrobel
Berkley
March 2020

Re@

BORROW. READ. REPEAT.

For more great suggestions from the stacks, visit:

BorrowReadRepeat.com.

To sign up for our eNewsletter, visit:

TinyUrl.com/BorrowReadRepeat.

**FREE
COPY**

Penguin
Random
House