



BOOK CLUB BOOKS

*Chosen to represent a range of interests, it is hoped these books will stimulate thought and discussion among our diverse group of readers.
As always, your comments and suggestions are welcome.*

SPRING, 2017

American Heiress: The Wild Saga of the Kidnapping, Crimes and Trial of Patty Hearst

by Jeffrey Toobin

The incredible story of the kidnapping and trial that defined an unruly era in American history. In 1973, Patty Hearst, a college student who was heir to the Hearst family fortune, was kidnapped by a ragtag group of self-styled revolutionaries calling itself the Symbionese Liberation Army. The already sensational story became even crazier when Hearst released a tape saying she had joined the SLA and had adopted the name "Tania." Based on hundreds of interviews and previously secret documents, Toobin portrays the lunacy of these half-baked radicals and the toxic mix of sex, politics, and violence that swept up Hearst and so many others in the 1970s. (nonfiction)

The Association of Small Bombs by Karan Mahajan

When young brothers Tushar and Nakul Khurana pick up their family's television set at a repair shop, disaster strikes without warning. A bomb—one of the many "small" bombs that go off seemingly unheralded across the world—detonates in the Delhi marketplace, instantly claiming their lives and devastating their parents. Their friend Mansoor survives, but the trauma he suffers changes the direction of his life in unpredictable ways. Mahajan writes brilliantly about the effects of terrorism on victims and perpetrators, proving himself to be one of the most provocative and imaginative novelists of his generation. A National Book Award finalist. (fiction)

The Firebrand and the First Lady by Patricia Bell-Scott

A groundbreaking book that tells the story of the unlikely but important twenty-eight-year bond forged between Pauli Murray (granddaughter of a mulatto slave, who, against all odds, as a lesbian black woman, became a lawyer, civil rights pioneer, Episcopal priest, poet, and activist) and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Their friendship critically shaped Eleanor Roosevelt's, and therefore FDR's, view of race and racism in America. A riveting portrait that shows how their friendship deepened and endured in the face of enormous social barriers and why they are both enormously inspiring, towering figures of strength. (nonfiction)

Heat and Light by Jennifer Haigh

The mining town of Bakerton, PA has been in decline for years. Can a renaissance come when the massive deposits of natural gas in the region are opened to fracking? Haigh takes a panoramic view in this nuanced story, moving from a corporate shareholders' meeting in Houston to a farmhouse where a couple argue over the sale of their drilling rights; from a small-town bar where out-of-state gas crews drink to a community meeting where an activist geologist answers questions asked by terrified landowners. A novel that tackles more than just what has happened in our rural communities. It taps into the profound changes in America in the 21st century. (fiction)

Lab Girl by Hope Jahren

An illuminating memoir by a geobiologist who has spent her life studying the natural world. Her stunningly fresh look at plants will forever change how you see and think about them. But she also has an inspiring story to tell of how she became the scientist she is; her childhood, the hours of unfettered play in her father's laboratory, and how she found a sanctuary in science. Jahren bravely explores one of life's most important challenges: discovering who you are. Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for autobiography. (nonfiction)

The Last Painting of Sara de Vos by Dominic Smith

A single painting connects the story of two women artists from different centuries who struggle to make a place in a male dominated profession. When Ellie Shipley, living in New York City in the 1950s, agrees to copy a beautiful Dutch painting from the seventeenth century, her life becomes entwined with that of the original artist, Sara de Vos. Weaving together past and present, love affairs, artistic struggles, and the ways in which fate can forever change the course of a life, Smith has crafted a novel that is as luminous as the painting itself. (fiction)

The Nest by Cynthia D'Aprix Sweeney

Every family has its problems but the Plumb family stands out as spectacularly dysfunctional. Years of simmering tensions finally reach a breaking point when siblings Melody, Beatrice, and Jack Plumb gather to confront their charismatic and reckless older brother, Leo, freshly released from rehab and guilty of endangering the Plumbs' joint trust fund, "The Nest." Warm, funny, and deftly written, Sweeney brings a remarkable cast of characters to life to illuminate what money does to relationships, what happens to our ambitions over the course of time, and the ways in which we depend on one another and yet aren't always there for the ones we love. (fiction)

Still Here by Lara Vapnyar

Vapnyar follows the intertwined lives of four immigrants in New York City as they grapple with love and identity, the challenges of a new home, and the absurdities of the digital age. One of the friends, Sergey, cycles through jobs as an analyst, hoping his idea for an app will finally bring him success. He calls the app "Virtual Grave," since it is meant to preserve a person's online presence after death. The friends question how our online personas define us in our daily lives, and what they will say about us when we're gone, in this keenly observed and often sharply funny novel. The writer Louis Menand called the author "Jane Austen with a Russian soul." (fiction)