Brown Bag Book Review  
Wednesday, March 8, 2023  
12:00 PM-1:00 PM

Reviewers: Abby, Mary, Sarah BV, Lee, Caitlin, Carly, Lauren, Sarah H, Jackie

If We Were Villains by M.L. Rio [Abby]
This Time Tomorrow by Emma Straub [Abby]
Haven by Emma Donoghue [Mary]
We Have Always Lived in the Castle by Shirley Jackson [Sarah BV]
A Lady for a Duke by Alexis Hall [Lee]
Find Me by Andre Aciman [Lee]
The Chosen and the Beautiful by Nghi Vo [Lee]
The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo by Taylor Jenkins Reid [Caitlin]
Elsewhere by Gabrielle Zevin [Carly]
I Must Betray You by Ruta Sepetys [Carly]
Just You and Me: Remarkable Relationships in the Wild by Jennifer Ward [Lauren]
Tree Hole Homes: Daytime Dens and Nighttime Nooks by Melissa Stewart [Lauren]
Play This Book by Jessica Young [Lauren]
Nora Goes Off Script by Annabel Monaghan [Sarah H]
Dinners with Ruth by Nina Totenberg [Sarah H]
Alone and Content by Gwenn Voelckers [Jackie]

-SAVE THE DATE-
Brown Bag Book Review  
Wednesday, June 14, 2023  
12:00 PM-1:00 PM
Brown Bag Book Review
Wednesday, March 8, 2023
12:00 PM-1:00 PM
*All annotations are borrowed from Goodreads.com

Reviewers: Abby, Mary, Sarah BV, Lee, Lauren S., Caitlin, Sarah H, Carly, Jackie

If We Were Villains by M.L. Rio

Oliver Marks has just served ten years in jail - for a murder he may or may not have committed. On the day he's released, he's greeted by the man who put him in prison. Detective Colborne is retiring, but before he does, he wants to know what really happened a decade ago.

As one of seven young actors studying Shakespeare at an elite arts college, Oliver and his friends play the same roles onstage and off: hero, villain, tyrant, temptress, ingenue, extra. But when the casting changes, and the secondary characters usurp the stars, the plays spill dangerously over into life, and one of them is found dead. The rest face their greatest acting challenge yet: convincing the police, and themselves, that they are blameless.

[Abby]

This Time Tomorrow by Emma Straub

What if you could take a vacation to your past?

On the eve of her 40th birthday, Alice's life isn't terrible. She likes her job, even if it isn't exactly the one she expected. She's happy with her apartment, her romantic status, her independence, and she adores her lifelong best friend. But her father is ailing, and it feels to her as if something is missing. When she wakes up the next morning she finds herself back in 1996, reliving her 16th birthday. But it isn't just her adolescent body that shocks her, or seeing her high school crush, it's her dad: the vital, charming, 40-something version of her father with whom she is reunited. Now armed with a new perspective on her own life and his, some past events take on new meaning. Is there anything that she would change if she could?

[Abby]

Haven by Emma Donoghue

In seventh-century Ireland, a scholar and priest called Artt has a dream telling him to leave the sinful world behind. Taking two monks—young Trian and old Cormac—he rows down the river Shannon in search of an isolated spot on which to found a monastery. Drifting out into the Atlantic, the three men find an impossibly steep, bare island inhabited by tens of thousands of birds, and claim it for God. In such a place, what will survival mean?
Three men vow to leave the world behind them. They set out in a small boat for an island their leader has seen in a dream, with only faith to guide them. What they find is the extraordinary island now known as Skellig Michael. Haven has Emma Donoghue’s trademark world-building and psychological intensity—but this story is like nothing she has ever written before.

[Mary]

We Have Always Lived in the Castle by Shirley Jackson

Shirley Jackson’s beloved gothic tale of a peculiar girl named Merricat and her family’s dark secret.

Taking readers deep into a labyrinth of dark neurosis, We Have Always Lived in the Castle is a deliciously unsettling novel about a perverse, isolated, and possibly murderous family and the struggle that ensues when a cousin arrives at their estate. This edition features a new introduction by Jonathan Lethem.

[Sarah BV]

A Lady for a Duke by Alexis Hall

When Viola Carroll was presumed dead at Waterloo she took the opportunity to live, at last, as herself. But freedom does not come without a price, and Viola paid for hers with the loss of her wealth, her title, and her closest companion, Justin de Vere, the Duke of Gracewood.

Only when their families reconnect, years after the war, does Viola learn how deep that loss truly was. Shattered without her, Gracewood has retreated so far into grief that Viola barely recognizes her old friend in the lonely, brooding man he has become. As Viola strives to bring Gracewood back to himself, fresh desires give new names to old feelings. Feelings that would have been impossible once and may be impossible still, but which Viola cannot deny. Even if they cost her everything, all over again.

[Lee]

Find Me by Andre Aciman

In this spellbinding exploration of the varieties of love, the author of the worldwide bestseller Call Me by Your Name revisits its complex and beguiling characters decades after their first meeting.

In Find Me, Aciman shows us Elio’s father, Samuel, on a trip from Florence to Rome to visit Elio, who has become a gifted classical pianist. A chance encounter on the train with a beautiful young woman upends Sami’s plans and changes his life forever. Elio soon moves to Paris, where he, too, has a consequential affair, while Oliver, now a New England college professor with a family, suddenly finds himself contemplating a return trip across the Atlantic.

Aciman is a master of sensibility, of the intimate details and the emotional nuances that are the substance of passion. Find Me brings us back inside the magic circle of one of our greatest contemporary romances to ask if, in fact, true love ever dies.

[Lee]
The Chosen and the Beautiful by Nghi Vo

Immigrant. Socialite. Magician. Jordan Baker grows up in the most rarefied circles of 1920s American society—she has money, education, a killer golf handicap, and invitations to some of the most exclusive parties of the Jazz Age. She’s also queer, Asian, adopted, and treated as an exotic attraction by her peers, while the most important doors remain closed to her.

But the world is full of wonders: infernal pacts and dazzling illusions, lost ghosts and elemental mysteries. In all paper is fire, and Jordan can burn the cut paper heart out of a man. She just has to learn how.

Nghi Vo’s debut novel The Chosen and the Beautiful reinvents this classic of the American canon as a coming-of-age story full of magic, mystery, and glittering excess, and introduces a major new literary voice.

[Lee]

The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo by Taylor Jenkins Reid

Aging and reclusive Hollywood movie icon Evelyn Hugo is finally ready to tell the truth about her glamorous and scandalous life. But when she chooses unknown magazine reporter Monique Grant for the job, no one is more astounded than Monique herself. Why her? Why now?

Monique is not exactly on top of the world. Her husband has left her, and her professional life is going nowhere. Regardless of why Evelyn has selected her to write her biography, Monique is determined to use this opportunity to jumpstart her career.

Summoned to Evelyn’s luxurious apartment, Monique listens in fascination as the actress tells her story. From making her way to Los Angeles in the 1950s to her decision to leave show business in the ’80s, and, of course, the seven husbands along the way, Evelyn unspools a tale of ruthless ambition, unexpected friendship, and a great forbidden love. Monique begins to feel a very real connection to the legendary star, but as Evelyn’s story near its conclusion, it becomes clear that her life intersects with Monique’s own in tragic and irreversible ways.

[Caitlin]

Elsewhere by Gabrielle Zevin

Welcome to Elsewhere. It is warm, with a breeze, and the beaches are marvelous. It’s quiet and peaceful. You can’t get sick or any older. Curious to see new paintings by Picasso? Swing by one of Elsewhere’s museums. Need to talk to someone about your problems? Stop by Marilyn Monroe’s psychiatric practice.

Elsewhere is where fifteen-year-old Liz Hall ends up, after she has died. It is a place so like Earth, yet completely different. Here Liz will age backward from the day of her death until she becomes a baby again and returns to Earth. But Liz wants to turn sixteen, not fourteen again. She wants to get her driver’s license. She wants to graduate from high school and go to college. And now that she’s dead, Liz is being forced to live a life she doesn’t want with a grandmother she has only just met. And it is not
going well. How can Liz let go of the only life she has ever known and embrace a new one? Is it possible that a life lived in reverse is no different from a life lived forward?

[Carly]

I Must Betray You by Ruta Sepetys

Romania, 1989. Communist regimes are crumbling across Europe. Seventeen-year-old Cristian Florescu dreams of becoming a writer, but Romanians aren’t free to dream; they are bound by rules and force. Amidst the tyrannical dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu in a country governed by isolation and fear, Cristian is blackmailed by the secret police to become an informer. He’s left with only two choices: betray everyone and everything he loves—or use his position to creatively undermine the most notoriously evil dictator in Eastern Europe.

Cristian risks everything to unmask the truth behind the regime, give voice to fellow Romanians, and expose to the world what is happening in his country. He eagerly joins the revolution to fight for change when the time arrives. But what is the cost of freedom?

[Carly]

Just You and Me: Remarkable Relationships in the Wild by Jennifer Ward

All over the world, unlikely pairs of plants and animals work together. Under the sea, the stinging anemone protects the boxer crab in exchange for food. In the desert, the woodpecker shelters inside a tall saguaro cactus and then distributes its seeds so more will grow. Near the water, the mighty hippopotamus stays pest-free because of the hungry egret that rides comfortably on its back. Even humans have to do our part—we depend on Earth for our survival, so we must do our best to protect our amazing planet.

[Lauren]

Tree Hole Homes: Daytime Dens and Nighttime Nooks by Melissa Stewart

Many animals live in tree holes, from raccoons to frogs to birds. Large and small, they all seek shelter from the environment or predators. Some need small holes while others need larger ones. Some sleep during the day while others seek refuge at night. The holes in the trees can be created from different things, like lightning, branches breaking, or woodpeckers. Either way, all can be a home for another animal.

Author Melissa Stewart and illustrator Amy Hevron showcase the different animals that live in tree hole homes and detail the different ways that tree holes form.

[Lauren]

Play This Book by Jessica Young

There are lots of ways little hands can make music. Each page of this interactive book invites readers to strum the guitar, slide the trombone, crash the cymbals, and more--no instruments required! With a delightful rhyming text and engaging illustrations, this book is full of instruments waiting to share their sounds. The only thing this band needs is YOU! Just use your imagination, turn the pages, and Play This Book!

[Lauren]
Nora Goes Off Script by Annabel Monaghan

Nora Hamilton knows the formula for love better than anyone. As a romance channel screenwriter, it's her job. But when her too-good-to-work husband leaves her and their two kids, Nora turns her marriage's collapse into cash and writes the best script of her life. No one is more surprised than her when it's picked up for the big screen and set to film on location at her 100-year-old-home. When former Sexiest Man Alive, Leo Vance, is cast as her ne'er do well husband Nora's life will never be the same.

The morning after shooting wraps and the crew leaves, Nora finds Leo on her porch with a half-empty bottle of tequila and a proposition. He'll pay a thousand dollars a day to stay for a week. The extra seven grand would give Nora breathing room, but it's the need in his eyes that makes her say yes. Seven days: it's the blink of an eye or an eternity depending on how you look at it. Enough time to fall in love. Enough time to break your heart.

[Dinners with Ruth by Nina Totenberg

Celebrated NPR correspondent Nina Totenberg delivers an extraordinary memoir of her personal successes, struggles, and life-affirming relationships, including her beautiful friendship of nearly fifty years with Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Four years before Nina Totenberg was hired at NPR, where she cemented her legacy as a prizewinning reporter, and nearly twenty-two years before Ruth Bader Ginsburg was appointed to the Supreme Court, Nina called Ruth. A reporter for The National Observer, Nina was curious about Ruth's legal brief, asking the Supreme Court to do something revolutionary: declare a law that discriminated “on the basis of sex” to be unconstitutional. In a time when women were fired for becoming pregnant, often could not apply for credit cards or get a mortgage in their own names, Ruth patiently explained her argument. That call launched a remarkable, nearly fifty-year friendship.

[Alone and Content by Gwenn Voelckers

Will I ever be happy again? Survive a lonely weekend? Or manage life on my own? Whether you've lost a spouse or partner through divorce, death or other life circumstance, you may be struggling to regain your confidence, courage, and zest for living. You're not alone.

Alone and Content promises to awaken readers to new ways of thinking about living alone and to the joy, power, and freedom that comes with independence. With Voelckers' gentle guidance, life's possibilities open up. Inside this wise and enlightening book, you'll discover how to rebuild your life and feel whole and complete on your own. Find long-lasting contentment, renewed confidence, and peace with Alone and Content.

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