

Nancy Mosher

Bridge of Sighs by Olen Steinhauer

The story takes place in 1948 in a small unnamed Eastern European country occupied during the war by the Nazis and later liberated by the Russians. Emil Brod is 22 and a recently hired member of the militia. He's assigned to work in the capital city. He spent the war years with relatives in Switzerland. His fellow police officers do not trust him; they suspect he may be a spy. He is assigned to investigate two murders which are seemingly unconnected. Since no one trusts anyone in his country, solving the crimes is a challenge. His investigations lead him to a suspect, but he does not understand what the person's motive could be. The fascinating part of the novel is how he figures out who the murderer is and why they are committing the crimes, and the insight into what it might have been like living in a small European country under a series of foreign occupiers. The spying and counter-spying in the novel is probably an accurate description of what postwar life in Eastern Europe was like. Steinhauer lives in Budapest.

Clare McAssey

Devil in the White City
by Erik Larson

My sister-in-law gave me this book, which is a true story that reads like a mystery. The design and construction of the 1893

World Columbian Exposition by Daniel Burnham, the well-known architect of the Flatiron Building, provides the background. Chicago is becoming a world-class city and trying to put on a better show than the Paris World's Fair of 1889. The Exposition's site, situated on a lake, was plagued with transportation problems and cholera and small-pox outbreaks due to contaminated water. The city's engineers and architects fought among themselves, and newspaper editors were hostile to the plan. All this took place in a bleak period when the country was experiencing bank failures and financially-ruined people were committing suicide. Among the attractions were the first ferris wheel and Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show. The other story the book tells is about H.H. Holmes, a serial killer who lured women to his hotel and killed them and their children.

George Martin

The City of Your Final Destination
by Peter Cameron

I urge you to read this novel, published in 2002, before you see the "major motion picture" adaptation. Deceptively simple, the book is told in the third person but is composed chiefly of dialogue. *The City of Your Final Destination* is not an action novel; there is no violence nor passionate love scenes. This is an old-fashioned book, as comfortable as an old shoe. There are only six characters – and they are true characters! Omar is a grad student at the University of

Kansas who wants to write a biography of Jules Gund, a well-known author who committed suicide at his home in Uruguay. Omar's bossy lover has convinced him to go to Uruguay and persuade the executors of Jules's estate to let him write the biography. In Uruguay Omar meets Caroline, the cool, reserved widow, and Adam, Jules's brother. Peter, Adam's Asian lover and Arden, Jules's mistress, complete the group living at Ochos Rios. The isolation of the run-down compound in the tropics provides a magical atmosphere. This is a book about "how we fall in love, how we find a home, and how we come to know or change ourselves." Peter Cameron has been described as "a brilliant conjurer of the nuances of shifting human relations."

Bethany Wieczorek

Italian Shoes by Henning Mankell

Mankell is best known for his crime novels, but this is not one of them. They say that no man is an island, but 66-year-old Frederick Welin is doing his best to prove them wrong. For the past twelve years he has lived on a tiny island off the Swedish coast. His sole companions are an aged dog and cat; his only contact with the outside world an occasional visit from the local postman. Welin was once a surgeon, but cut all ties to his previous life in the aftermath of a personal tragedy he refers to as "the catastrophe." Plagued by memories, he lives in a state of loneliness and inertia, paralyzed by indecision and afraid to move forward.

The book begins on the winter's solstice. It has been hard winter, and Frederick has to chop a hole in the ice to take his daily ritual bath. He is in a quandary about his future. Frederick's past comes to him in the form of a former lover named Harriet, whom he had abandoned some 40 years previously. Harriet appears out of nowhere. How did she get there? What does she want? Harriet is dying and wants Frederick to make good on a promise he made years ago to take her to a pool in the forest.

The journey they make takes them to the pool and beyond. Their journey reveals secrets and introduces individuals that change the course of their lives. Frederick begins a journey back to himself.

The mark of a good book is that finishing it makes you a little bit sad. For a while you've been privileged to be a part of a whole new world, an individual's life and then, with the turn of the final page, that world is gone. *Italian Shoes* is that kind of book.

Lois Griffin

Too Much Happiness
by Alice Munro

I'm not usually a short story reader, but I was drawn to this collection of ten stories. In "Fiction," we meet Joyce, whose first husband left her for Edie, a woman with a child. Joyce, now remarried, meets Edie's daughter, who has become an author, buys her book and has her sign it. In "Child's Play" a woman tells about a disabled girl

continued over



who wanted to be her friend and about the summer something terrible happened. The main character of the collection's title story is based on a real person. The story begins in 1891 and is about her life before and after that year. Many of the stories are set in contemporary Canada, and in them people confront harsh realities and events, such as death, divorce and even murder, and must make the best of them. The stories have depth of character and plots that reflect on the vicissitudes of life. "Too much happiness" seems like a misnomer, because the characters are not aware of having "too much happiness."

Carol Dziamba

Great Food Fast by Martha Stewart

This book attracted me because it is visually beautiful. The recipes are organized according to seasons, beginning with spring (green) and followed by summer (red). The recipes use many spices I have at home but don't use, such as coriander, cumin and mint. The recipes are simple and side dishes are coordinated with each main course. I urge you to try a recipe or two, because this is a different and exciting kind of cookbook.



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51 School Road
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Suzanne Fisher

Bliss by O.Z. Livaneli

Three tormented souls search for bliss in this novel. Cemal is the son of a religious leader in a village in eastern Turkey. He was raised with a strict set of religious and cultural rules, but after his military service fighting Kurdish separatists he's morally and emotionally disoriented. He's haunted by the deaths of his comrades and by the terrible deeds he carried out. He's become hardened.

Meryem and Cemal were cousins who grew up and played together, but when Meryem reached puberty she had to cover her head with a scarf and her body with heavy clothes. She had to serve others and could no longer play with Cemal. When she is raped, her uncle orders her locked in the barn because she has "thrown the family honor into the dust." She can restore that honor by hanging herself, but she refuses. Cemal is ordered to take her to Istanbul and kill her.

The emotionally-distraught Cemal is unable to complete his mission. They can't return to the village, so they work for a while on a fish farm. There they meet Irfan, a highly regarded professor and TV personality, who's sailing around the Aegean. He's left his career because his life has become hollow.

The three of them form a strange company of searchers. The story revolves around how they will transform their lives.

Additional reading suggestions from book discussion members:

The Man from Beijing
by Henning Mankell

Mistress of the Art of Death
by Ariana Franklin

The Museum of Innocence
by Orhan Pamuk

Short Girls
by Bich Minh Nguyen

The Drowning Tree
by Carol Goodman

The Help
by Kathryn Stockett

The Signal
by Ron Carlson

The Painted House
by John Grisham

Mysteries by
Bruce Alexander
Marjorie Eccles
Peter Bowen

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