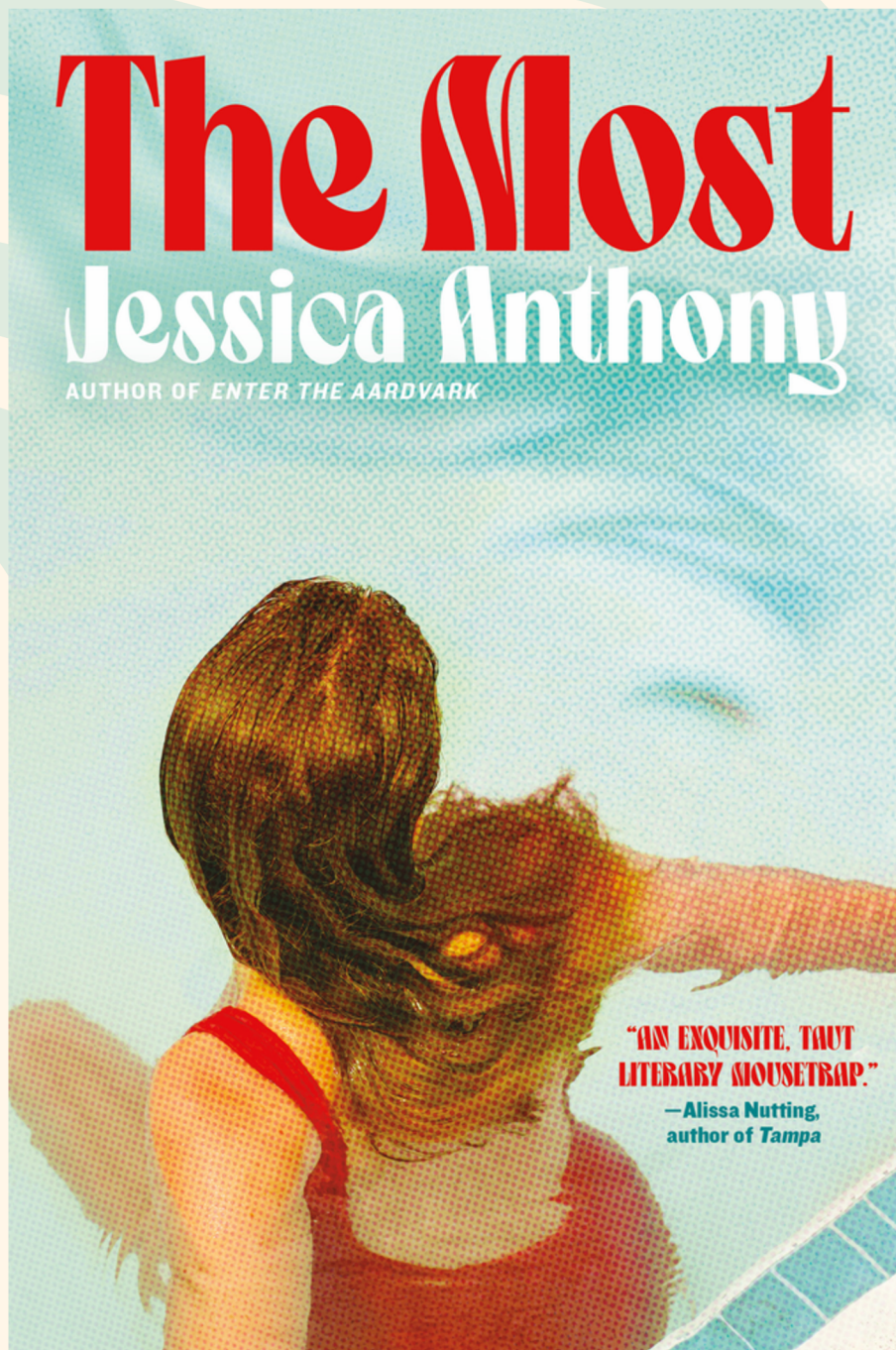


BOOK CLUB GUIDE



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1** What is “The Most”? As a strategy, what does it teach Kathleen about how to navigate situations?
- 2** In what way is Kathleen, a white American housewife in the 1950s, a woman of her time?
- 3** How does the launch of Sputnik 2, and the dog Laika’s role in the mission, reflect on the trajectory of Kathleen and Virgil’s marriage?
- 4** What does it mean that so much emphasis is placed on Kathleen’s body, both when she was younger as a tennis player and now, as a pregnant mother of two?
- 5** What is the significance of Kathleen constantly referring to Virgil as a “faker”?
- 6** Are Virgil and Kathleen a good match for each other? What do they remember differently about their past together?
- 7** What is the significance of bridges in the novel?
- 8** Why didn’t Virgil tell anyone that he found Mr. Frazier?
- 9** How would Kathleen’s life be different if she hadn’t married Virgil? How would his be different?
- 10** How did Virgil and Kathleen’s childhoods, and their parents, lead them into this marriage?
- 11** Is the marriage over?

CHERRY WHISKEY SOUR



INGREDIENTS

- 2 1/4 ounces whiskey or bourbon
- 3/4 ounce lemon juice, fresh
- 1/2 ounce simple syrup (1:1 sugar to water)
- 1 teaspoon cherry juice or jam
- 1 egg white

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Combine bourbon, lemon juice, simple syrup, and cherry juice in a cocktail shaker with 5-6 cubes of ice.
- 2 Shake well for 30 seconds.
- 3 Strain out the ice and return the liquid to the cocktail shaker without ice.
- 4 Add egg white and shake as vigorously as possible for an entire minute to build foam.
- 5 Pour into coupe glass to serve.

THE BRIDGE

In the summer of 2017 I was awarded a fellowship in Slovakia and Hungary to guard a bridge for three months, and write. The word “bridge” in Czech and Slovak is “most.” The bridge was the Maria Valeria Bridge, a 500-meter steel tied-arch bridge which connects the settlements of Štúrovo, Slovakia and Esztergom, Hungary, over the Danube River. The first arch of the bridge was destroyed at the end of World War I, and then rebuilt. When the Nazis bombed the bridge again in 1944, three of its five arches were destroyed, and the bridge was left that way, obliterated, separating the two towns, the two countries, for over sixty years. When the bridge was finally rebuilt in October of 2001, the people of Štúrovo established the Bridge Guard program. Every three months, a new artist arrives from around the globe to guard the bridge against further violence through the act of creation. “The mental act of guarding,” the organization says, “is more important than the physical.”

I arrived eager to finish my novel only to discover that the apartment where I would be living had no bed, and was infested with black mold. Huge swarms of flying ants teemed out of the walls, determined to colonize. And so began my routine: sleeping on an ottoman, working on my novel while armed with aerosol cans of Raid, scrubbing tile with a bleaching product called “Mr. Proper,” crossing the bridge once a day, and entering notes into the Bridge Log which were largely imaginative leaps to fight boredom. For example: “July 10. A big day! Two Chinese tourists taking selfies climbed onto the railing and became unsteady and almost fell into the Danube! No, that didn’t happen. They walked by you and laughed at your broken bicycle.”

Across the river, while speaking with a classroom of Hungarian teenagers, I learned that the mood in Esztergom was decidedly different from the mood in Štúrovo. This was largely due to fear over the rise of Orbán’s anti-immigrant nativism. In 2015, Orbán ordered “barriers” built on the border of Serbia and Croatia. The teenagers wanted to know what other countries I had been to, and were eager to talk about, and imagine, open borders. I had been teaching a course on Women Writers of the 1950s, and wondered if I could try my hand at writing a historical fiction which felt as though there was no border between the Fifties and the present. I was thinking about the boundaries which comprise our relationships, our marriages, and began to wonder how those borders happen: how do we come to be the people who we are in a marriage? What could a woman in the 50s reasonably expect from such an institution, especially when there was no simple exit? American women living in the Fifties were as fully complex, human and realized as a woman today—I started to wonder how such a woman might act freely, with total agency...

NOTES FROM JESSICA ANTHONY