

Book Club Kit

“A highly recommended read by one of
Canada’s emerging literary talents.”

—Eliza Reid, bestselling author of *Secrets of the Sprakkar*

ALL THAT’S LEFT

A NOVEL

LISA GUENTHER

First of all, thank you for not only reading “All That’s Left,” but choosing it for your book club.

One of the odd things about writing fiction is, because you’re working with your subconscious, you’re not always aware of everything you’ve written into the story until much later. I try to pick up some of those threads during revisions, but readers bring their own insight to the story. I hope that this book sparks many rich discussions at your own meeting.

This novel is far from autobiographical, but I certainly wrote about some of the things that I fear greatly, and that trigger deep sorrow within me. Juxtaposed against the violence and abuse Darby and her friends and family experience are the things that bring light to her life — music, art, nature and deep friendships. I see these things almost in opposition to each other.

Alex Colville’s “Horse and Train” is one of the paintings that I wove into the themes of “Friendly Fire” (the earlier “Darby” novel) and “All That’s Left.” Darby begins dreaming about the painting shortly after finding her Aunt Bea’s body, and in the first book, the painting unlocks important childhood memories key to the plot. Darby remains haunted by this painting, in a sense, as her recurring dream foreshadows the tragic ending of “All That’s Left.”

Colville’s painting portrays a horse running down the railway tracks, straight towards an oncoming train. It seems like a strange thing, and I don’t think a riderless horse would do that, but horses have been used in warfare for centuries. They will run straight into cannon fire at the urging of their riders, especially if the rest of the herd is heading in that direction. Colville did see horses being used in World War I, and perhaps that inspired this painting in some way.

But the main inspiration of this painting was the poem “Dedication to Mary Campbell,” by South African writer Roy Campbell. Here is an excerpt:

I scorn the goose-step of their massed attack

And fight with my guitar slung on my back,

Against a regiment I oppose a brain

And a dark horse against an armoured train.

In those lines, we can see art and music in opposition to tyranny, violence and oppression. My characters aren’t facing a tyrannical government, or an army, but they are fighting their own kinds of wars. And art is one of the few ways they have of truly plugging in and healing.

I have more to say on this, but I don’t want to spoil the ending for you. Once you’ve finished “All That’s Left,” scan this QR code for a video delving into how I see “Horse and Train” in relation to the themes of both novels.

Many thanks,

Lisa

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think the author is trying to say with this book?
2. What role does art play in the life of the characters? How does it contrast the darker elements of the story?
3. What were your thoughts the various relationships in this book -- particularly within Darby's friend-groups, and between Darby and Trevor, and Brynny and Ruby?
4. How do those various relationships contrast the relationship Rex believes he's entitled to with Brynny?
5. Both "All That's Left" and "Friendly Fire" include references to Alex Colville's painting "Horse and Train." Is it a painting you're familiar with, and if so, how do you think it influences the themes of these books?
6. Many of the characters are faced with hard choices, especially when it comes to dealing with Rex, and there are costs to all those choices (doing nothing, taking a stand, trying to appease people, etc). What do you think of the choices they make?
7. While most of this story takes place in urban settings, Darby is able to reconnect to animals, and the land, at different points, and finds some comfort in the idea that the land will remain constant as the novel concludes. Did those moments resonate with you as a reader?
8. Did the ending make you want to break something, crawl into a cave and hide from the world, write a nasty review, or something else?

Drink Recipes

Moscow Mule

Ingredients

45 ml (1 1/2 oz.) vodka

8 ml (1/4 oz.) lime juice

1 or 2 drops Angostura bitters (optional)

120 ml (4 oz.) ginger beer

Ice cubes

Lime and lemon slices

Preparation

Combine vodka, lime juice, and Angostura bitters in a highball glass containing a few ice cubes. Top up with ginger beer. Stir using a mixing spoon eight to 10 seconds. Garnish with lime and lemon slices.

Rusty Nail

Ingredients

30 ml (1 oz.) Scotch

30 ml (1 oz.) herb liqueur (like Drambuie)

1 slice of lemon

5 or 6 ice cubes

Preparation

In a glass filled with ice, combine Scotch and herb liqueur (like Drambuie). Stir with mixing spoon. Garnish with slice of lemon.

Designated Mule

Ingredients

1 1/2 cups crushed ice

1 cup ginger beer

juice of 2 medium limes (about 4 tablespoons)

1/3 cup club soda or sparkling water

fresh mint, for garnish

2 lime wedges, for garnish

Preparation

Fill two glasses two-thirds full with ice. Top with ginger beer, lime juice, and club soda. Stir to combine. Garnish with mint and lime wedges and enjoy.

Suggested Playlist

Deep Red Bells by Neko Case

Put the Blame on Me by Handsome Ned

The Ballad of Handsome Ned by Petunia and the Vipers

River by Joni Mitchell

Cowgirl by Nice Horse

Shiva by The Cracker Cats

Bleeding All Over You by Martha Wainwright

Try by Blue Rodeo

Maybe Tomorrow by F&M

Church of the Long Grass by John Wort Hannam

Remember Wild Horses by Birds of Chicago

Helpless by Neil Young

Can the Circle be Unbroken by The Carter Family



Photos taken while researching the music scene in Toronto in 2016. L to R: Custom pedal boards and assorted gear, the Horseshoe Tavern, the Cameron House. Photos: Lisa Guenther

The End

Don't watch these videos until you've read the entire book!



Lisa discusses the end of "All That's Left."



Lisa's next recommended read.