

Members' Manual 2023

Welcome!



Thank you to all my readers for their wonderful support of my books—I have many more stories to tell, and I hope they bring you enjoyment in the coming years! The LJ Ross Book Club was first set up to bring people together through a shared love of the characters in the DCI Ryan, Dr Gregory and Summer Suspense series', but it has grown to include monthly book recommendations from me, online giveaways, competitions and friendly discussion in person and online. Through real-life and online interaction, I hope my readers can make and enjoy new friendships! LJ x

www.ljrossauthor.com

How does the Book Club work?

Each month, I recommend a book I have genuinely read and enjoyed, which could be from any genre. This will hopefully mean there is something for everyone and, occasionally, might involve trying something you wouldn't think of, normally! Our team has created a selection of questions to prompt discussion, which we hope will provide some good talking points.

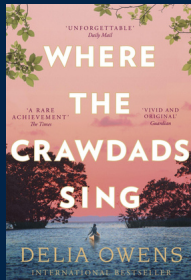
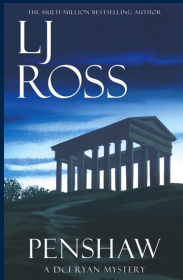
Additionally, each month we pick one of my own books to cover 'in focus'.

Unlike other book clubs, none of my recommendations are influenced by publishing houses and I accept no payment or persuasion in making these selections. You can therefore be sure that these books have been read, enjoyed and selected on the basis of their own merit.

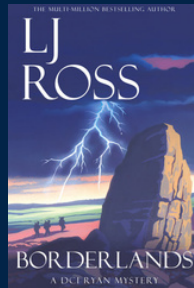
The yearly selections are set out in this booklet, but we will also be following and discussing them on our Facebook and Instagram pages.

Monthly Selections

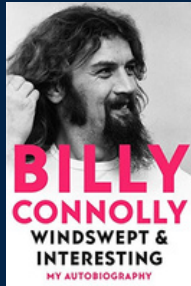
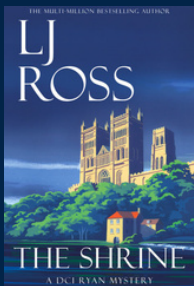
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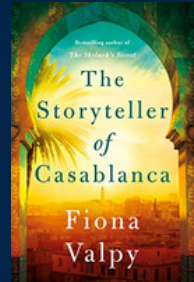
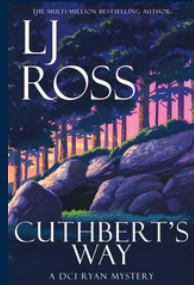
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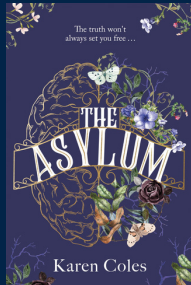
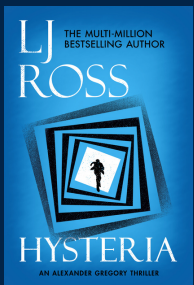
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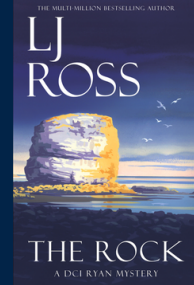
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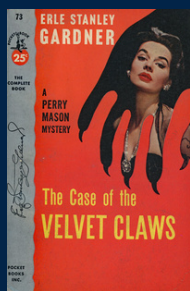
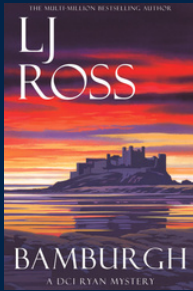
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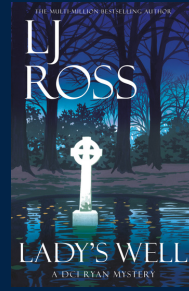
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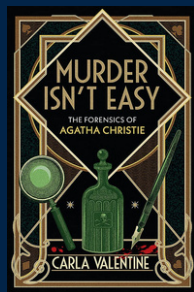
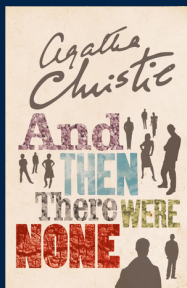
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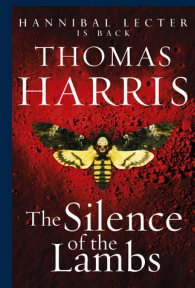
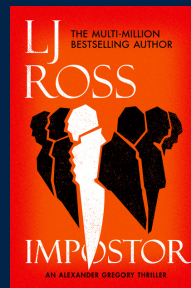
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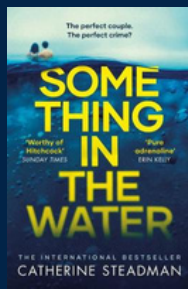
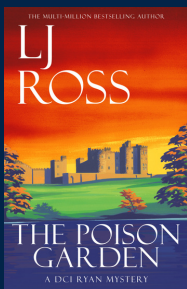
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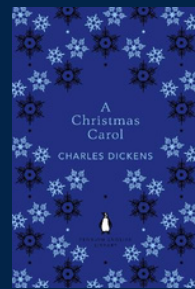
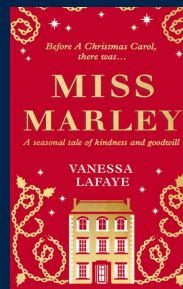
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November

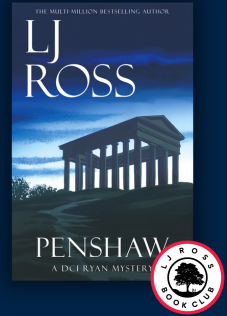


December



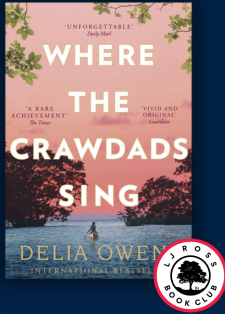
January

“Whether they admitted it or not, every person in the room wanted to be a part of something that was bigger and more important than themselves.”



Questions

1. Jack Lowerson finds himself in a sticky situation during *Penshaw* – what do you think his actions are driven by?
2. Do you feel that the atmosphere in *Penshaw* differs from the previous DCI Ryan instalment, *The Moor*? If so, how?
3. *Penshaw* has two storylines running throughout – do you feel they reflect one another at all? Why/why not?
4. If you were working in the Northumbria Police, which character would you choose to be your partner, and why?
5. Melanie Yates is under a larger spotlight during *Penshaw* – what do you think she brings to the team, and how do you feel her role will develop?
6. What do you think Penshaw Monument represents in this story, if anything?



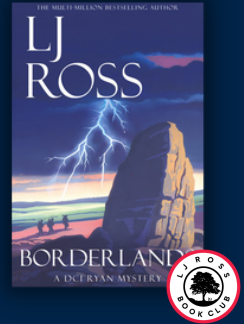
“Nature had nurtured, tutored, and protected her when no one else would.”

Questions

1. The North Carolina marsh where Kya lives is a place of isolation where she feels connected to nature. How does this setting shape the novel? How does growing up in this isolation affect Kya?
2. Why do you think Kya's mother leaves in the beginning? Do you agree with her decision?
3. How is womanhood explored throughout the novel? What does being a woman mean to Kya? How does she relate to the other women in Barkley Cove?
4. Discuss Kya's relationship with Tate. How does Tate's understanding of Kya change over time? Is Tate a good partner for Kya?
5. In this book, do you think it shows that human society follows the same rules as the natural world, or not? Why?
6. How is Chase a different kind of man to Tate? Do you think that their differences are biological or learned? How does Kya see each man, and what do they provide her with?
7. Were you surprised by the verdict in Chase's murder trial? What about by the ending of the novel? Do you agree with Tate's final decision? Why or why not?

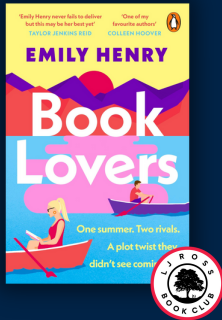
February

"Northumberland National Park, which was an area of outstanding natural beauty in the northernmost uplands where England met the border with Scotland. It was 'Reiver' territory."



Questions

1. Looking at the above quote, do you think there is significance to the book title? What do you think it is?
2. *"When the gods made man, they made a weapon..."* – what do you think this tagline means?
3. What do you think motivates the actions of each character in *Borderlands*?
4. If you have read the previous DCI Ryan installment, *Penshaw*, how are past events affecting the characters in this book?
5. What overall message do you think LJ Ross was trying to convey through *Borderlands*?
6. How did you feel about the ending?



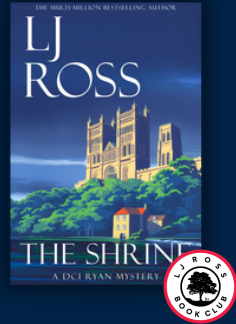
"Sometimes, even when you start with the last page and you think you know everything, a book finds a way to surprise you."

Questions

1. What was your first impression of Nora and Charlie and how did this change throughout reading the book? How are they similar and different to each other?
2. We meet Nora just as she's being broken up with – her boyfriend is leaving her for a small-town romance. *Book Lovers* follows her as the 'ex' of the traditional romance. Libby then convinces her to take a vacation to a similar small town, but she ends up falling for the city guy instead. How do you think *Book Lovers* is similar and different to the traditional Hallmark romance stories?
3. Charlie struggles with his relationship with his hometown. How did you feel Nora helped to change the way he sees it?
4. Nora has romanticised memories of her mother and living in the city with her. But it becomes apparent that reality was different, which Libby remembers. What was your take on the differing memories of their mother?
5. What are your thoughts about the ending? What happens next for Nora and Charlie?
6. If they turn the novel into a film or TV adaptation, who would you like to see play the main parts?

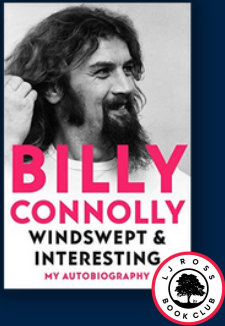
March

“It was a fairy-tale skyline, bringing to mind images of elven cities in fantasy novels, too beautiful to be real.”



Questions

1. Do you think the characters' life developments will change them going forwards? If so, how?
2. DCI Ryan is motivated to solve crimes by justice. During *The Shrine* what else do you think motivates him to uncover the assailants?
3. If you could visit one place mentioned in *The Shrine*, where would it be and why?
4. We see Samantha become a more permanent character in Denise and Frank's life – what affect has she had on their lives, both as a unit and as individuals?
5. What would your predictions be for the team in the next book, *Cuthbert's Way*?



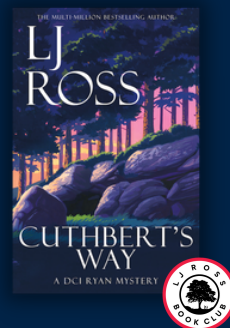
"I didn't know I was Windswept and Interesting until somebody told me."

Questions

1. What was your knowledge level of Billy Connolly prior to reading the book, and how does your opinion differ now?
2. What did you think of the stream-of-consciousness writing style? Do you think Billy is a good storyteller? How does it compare to other autobiographies you may have read?
3. Billy mentions that his shows were unscripted – what did you think of this? Do you think you could do something like that, unscripted? What does this say about Billy as a comedian, and as a person?
4. What kind of influence does music have on Billy? Explain your answer.
5. Billy speaks about the unfortunate abuse he suffered growing up. What affect does this have on Billy, and how does it shape him as a person?
6. Do you have any particular favourite stories of Billy's?
7. What does 'windswept and interesting' mean to you?

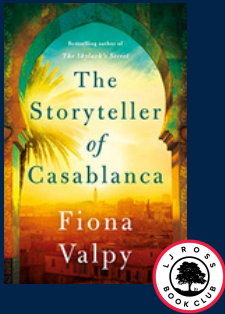
April

“Life changed you, for better or for worse, and it was a question of rolling with the punches, where you could.”



Questions

1. *Cuthbert's Way* takes place nine months after *The Shrine*, with the team continuing to investigate Operation Bertie. What do you think happened in the time that passed?
2. The history of St Cuthbert is crucial to this story. What did you think about this theme? Did you know much about St Cuthbert before?
3. The assailants attack Ryan in the worst way possible – by taking Anna. What affect do you think this has on Ryan? Were you worried for Anna?
4. Anna's captor leads Ryan to Holy Island. What is the significance of this to the storyline and the other DCI Ryan books?
5. What are your predictions for the next DCI Ryan installment?



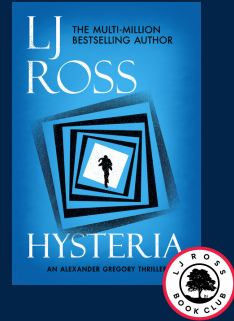
"The secret is to open your heart, even as it breaks. Because that's when you discover that you have the capacity to contain it all – the pain and the love, the dark and the light. Just like the ocean."

Questions

1. What did you feel were the main themes included in *The Storyteller of Casablanca*?
2. Did you learn anything from reading *The Storyteller of Casablanca*? If so, what was it?
3. There are many different stories in the book, told in different ways. How important is it that cultures – or individuals – pass their stories on down the generations?
4. *The Storyteller of Casablanca* is written with a dual narrative. What do you feel are the similarities in both timelines, if any?
5. How did you feel about the characters? Did you have a favourite?
6. Grief is a powerful thread running through the book. Did the characters' responses to grief seem authentic? Which characters experienced growth and change, and which did not?
7. Were you surprised by any of the revelations at the end of the book?

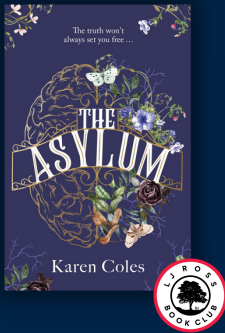
May

“She tried to imagine what it would be like, never having to worry about money or the lack thereof; to dine at the finest restaurants and sleep soundly every night, without fear.”



Questions

1. Do you think, in *Hysteria*, that LJ Ross has crafted the characters in a different light? Why do you think she does this?
2. What themes do you think echo through *Hysteria*?
3. *Hysteria* is set in Paris, during Fashion Week. Do you think there was a reasoning behind this setting?
4. LJ Ross focuses on various mental health issues in *Hysteria*, such as selective mutism and dissociative identity disorder. Do you think highlighting these issues is important?
5. If *Hysteria* was to be televised, who do you think would fill the spot of Dr Alexander Gregory?
6. We see Dr Gregory still experiencing night terrors. Why do you think he is haunted by these thoughts at night?
7. What were your predictions? Were they correct?



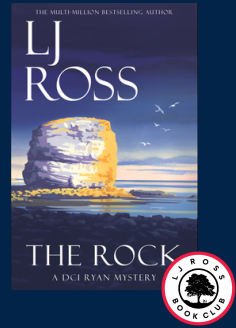
"After a frightening or upsetting event[...] our minds choose to forget. They hide whatever it is away. It's how we protect ourselves— a survival strategy. After all, no one wants to be frightened all the time, do they?"

Questions

1. What did you know about 19th century asylums before reading this book? Did it change your perception at all?
2. What did you think of Maud as a character? Did you sympathise with her? Was she a reliable or unreliable narrator?
3. The silencing of women is a running theme in this book. Were there any scenes in particular that you feel displayed or subverted this theme?
4. What did you think of the writing overall? How did it make you feel when reading?
5. Did you notice any overlapping themes between *The Asylum* and *Hysteria*? If so, what were they?

June

“As they approached the top of the stairwell leading down to the beach, they caught sight of Marsden Rock, standing tall and proud against the bold blue sky.”



Questions

1. Have you ever been to Marsden Rock before? Did you know what it was?
2. *The Rock* tackles some difficult subject matter, and LJ Ross touches upon this in the author's note. How did reading the book make you feel? Do you feel the subject matter is important to shine a light on?
3. Did you guess who 'The Dragon' was correctly?
4. Were there any scenes you found particularly tense to read?
5. LJ Ross' books have a balance of light and darkness in them. Do you think this is important in a crime book? Do you enjoy the lighter parts?



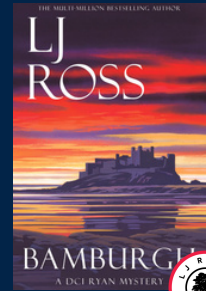
“She thinks maybe people talk to her because she believes in their stories.”

Questions

1. How would you describe *The Keeper of Stories* in three words?
2. Is this the kind of book you'd usually pick up? Are you glad you did?
3. This is a very character-driven story. What did you think of Janice as a character? Who was your favourite character overall?
4. Whose story was your favourite in *The Keeper of Stories*?
5. What do you think happens to the characters after the book's ending?
6. In the author's note, Sally Page says that these stories are based on true stories – what do you think of this? Could you tell?
7. How would Janice tell your story, if you were in the book? What would the main themes be?

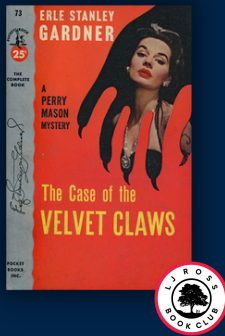
July

"The castle came suddenly into view, a mighty, golden edifice that must have struck fear and awe into the hearts of any would-be invaders."



Questions

1. Have you ever visited Bamburgh Castle? What did you think of it as the major location in this book?
2. Bamburgh Castle is steeped in history and folklore. What role does myth and legend play in *Bamburgh* the book?
3. This book heavily follows the story of Melanie Yates' sister's unfortunate disappearance, and the affect on Mel years later. What do you think of the use of dual timelines in this book? Do you think their sibling portrayal was accurate? Were you worried about Mel, and what she might do to seek justice for her sister?
4. Did you know about the Tuxedo Princess boat before reading *Bamburgh*?
5. LJ Ross subverts the traditional 'whodunnit' by revealing early on into the book who our assailant is, meaning we have to watch the characters interact with this person without them knowing who they truly are. What did you think of this choice? Were there any moments that you found nail-biting? Did you think they'd figure it out?
6. What are your predictions for the next DCI Ryan book?



“I told you just what she was—all velvet and claws!”

Questions

1. What did you think of *The Case of the Velvet Claws*?
2. Have you read any Erle Stanley Gardner before?
3. The book *doesn't* end in a dramatic court trial, which might have been expected after Eva's behaviour throughout the book. What did you think about this choice?
4. What were your opinions on Perry Mason as a character? How would you describe him in three words?
5. What did you think of the twist at the end? Were you expecting it?
6. How do you think Perry Mason compares to DCI Ryan as the protagonist of their stories?

August



Questions



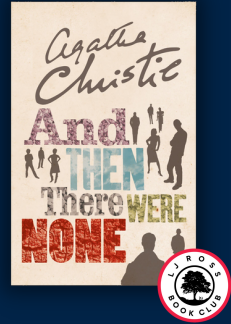
“There is more to life than just continuing to do what we know. What got you here won’t get you there.”

Questions

1. Have you ever been to Positano and the Amalfi Coast? Or would you want to visit one day?
2. The story starts after Katy's mother has died. What are your thoughts about the line *'if your mother is the love of your life, what does that make your husband?'*?
3. What did you think when Katy first ran into Carol as a 30-year-old woman? How would you have reacted if you were in Katy's position? Were you expecting the time-travel twist towards the end?
4. After learning about Carol leaving Katy as an infant for this summer in Italy, how do you think the revelation affects Katy?
5. Katy eventually reveals who she is to Carol. Do you think Carol deep down knew the truth about Katy?
6. What did you think about her reconciling with Eric? Did that make sense to you after her attitude toward him and the fling with Adam? How will their relationship be different moving forward?

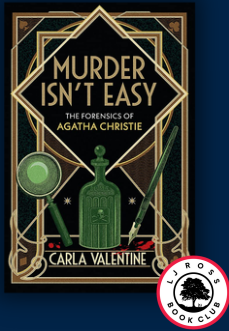
September

*“From now on, it is our task to suspect
each and everyone amongst us.
Forewarned is forearmed. Take no risks
and be alert to danger. That is all.”*



Questions

1. Why was the killer so intent on making sure that everyone was killed in a certain order?
2. What were your overall thoughts of *And Then There Were None*?
3. What clues reveal that the killer was the killer all along? Are there any that the other characters missed?
4. Who did you feel was the bigger criminal in this situation? The criminal victim, or the person who decided it was their responsibility to get justice?
5. If any of the ten had been able to survive, who would you have picked?
6. If you were casting a film adaptation today, who would you choose to play the major roles?



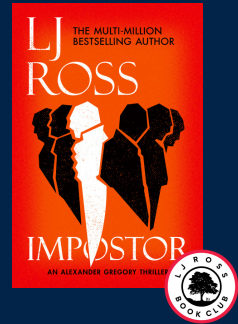
"Whether within fact or fiction, it can be thrilling and satisfying to the audience to learn about an offence which would have gone unsolved if not for an unusually astute investigator happening upon a hair from an exotic animal, or a specific brand of cigarette, or a tiny piece of sand from a particular beach."

Questions

1. Have you read any Agatha Christie books? If so, which one(s)?
2. What did you think about this book overall? Is it something you would have picked up? Were you glad you did?
3. Did you find any chapters particularly interesting? Did you learn anything surprising that stuck with you?
4. Agatha Christie's research and attention to detail makes her work believable. However, she occasionally bent the rules. Do you think, as a reader, it is important for writers to be able to bend the rules to fit the storyline, or that they should always stick to real life?
5. Has this book made you view Christie's writing, or any crime writers, differently? How so?

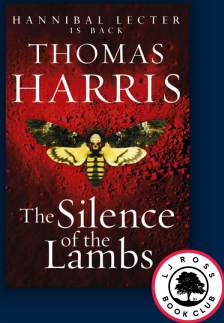
October

“The town moved together, united in its outpouring of grief. And yet, a predator roamed freely amongst them, undetected and unstoppable, at least in their own mind – which was the most dangerous place of all.”



Questions

1. How did you feel after reading the prologue? Do you feel this sets the direction for *Impostor's* storyline well?
2. In the prologue, we meet Cathy Jones. How do you think she relates to the death of Claire Kelly, thirty years later? What ties the two women together?
3. What were your initial thoughts regarding Dr Alexander Gregory? Did your opinion of him change throughout?
4. Do you think *Impostor* is plot , character-driven ,or both? Explain why.
5. Do you think offender profiling is a useful tool in murder investigations? Why?
6. How do the murders of Claire Kelly and Aideen McArdle differ? What do you think this says about the mental wellbeing of the assailant?
7. How did you feel about the ending of *Impostor*?

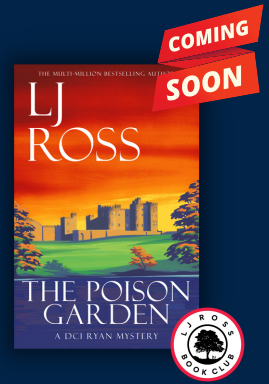


“Nothing makes us more vulnerable than loneliness except greed.”

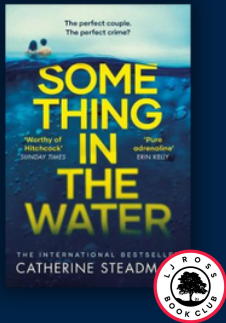
Questions

1. Why does Hannibal Lecter capture our interest so strongly? What qualities of his character are so intriguing, or most frightening?
2. What do you think that Hannibal saw in Clarice Starling to make him trust her? Do you think they shared traits?
3. What do you feel is the underlying message of the book *The Silence of the Lambs*?
4. Compare Jame Gumb, Hannibal Lecter, and the other inmates of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. How does Harris highlight the similarities and differences between the criminals? Why is Lecter afforded a heightened level of respect and civility compared to the others?
5. What stance does this book take on the polarisation of 'good' and 'evil'?
6. What are the main themes of the book? Did you feel that there were themes found in *The Silence of the Lambs* that were also echoed in LJ Ross' *Impostor*?

November



Questions



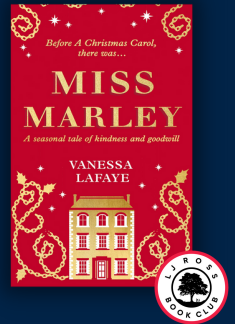
“Scary, in a way. How quickly what is good can become not good enough through comparison.”

Questions

1. The novel begins with Erin digging a grave, then flashes back in time to describe the events leading up to it. Is this an effective way to enter the story? Did the opening pages hook you?
2. What were your first impressions of Erin and Mark? Did you root for them, or not?
3. If you found the bag, what would you do?
4. The idea of people being good or bad seems to be a theme throughout the book. Are any of the characters purely good? Or purely bad?
5. Erin is often very empathetic, and she doesn't blame Mark for the consequences of their actions until she has no other choice. Does this reflect a broader tendency for partners to excuse their spouses' behaviours or put them on a pedestal?
6. What do you think Erin will do next? Will she be satisfied with the simple life?

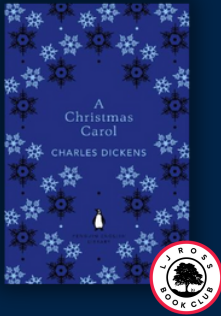
December

*“but with great attachment comes
the pain of great loss”*



Questions

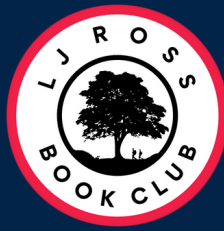
1. Miss Marley is an imagined prequel to Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. Have you read Dickens' novel? If so, what did this book reveal that differed?
2. Why do you think the author chose to focus on Jacob Marley's sister, Clara Belle Marley, in the story? What did you think of her as a character?
3. The story has a balance of melancholy and upbeat moments. Did you find this balance interesting to the story? Would you have liked more of one?
4. Unfortunately, the author passed away while writing this book, so her friend Rebecca Mascull finished it for her, and she details how she did this in the afterword. From your perspective, can you tell that two different writers wrote this book? Do you think the book would have taken the same path without this?



*"Bah," said Scrooge,
"Humbug."*

Questions

1. Have you read *A Christmas Carol* before?
2. What was your opinion of Scrooge and how did it change throughout the book? What led Scrooge to change from the beginning of the book to the end?
3. Consider the three spirits. What is significant about each ghost and the memories they share with Scrooge? Why were all three necessary for Scrooge's transformation?
4. *A Christmas Carol* was one of the first Christmas stories to leave a country setting to take place in an urban setting. Do you think that the story would have worked as well if it took place in the country instead of London? Why or why not?
5. If Dickens were to write this story today, in what ways might the story be different?
6. This classic story has remained popular through the years. Do you feel it is still relevant in today's society? Why or why not?



LJ Ross is an international bestselling author, whose books have sold over 7 million copies worldwide. Her debut, *Holy Island*, was released in 2015 and became an instant, international bestseller. Since then, more than twenty of her novels have gone on to take the coveted #1 spot, some even before general release and whilst only available to 'pre-order'. *The Bookseller* magazine has reported on Louise having topped the 'Most Read' and 'Most Sold' fiction charts, and she has garnered an army of loyal fans who love her atmospheric and addictive storytelling.

Her eleventh novel, *The Infirmary*, is a prequel story to the DCI Ryan series and is available as a major Audible Originals audio-drama starring Tom Bateman, Kevin Whately, Bertie Carvel, Hermione Norris and Alun Armstrong.

The first novel in her Alexander Gregory Thrillers series, *Impostor*, was shortlisted in the British Book Awards 2020: Crime & Thriller Book of the Year. The audiobook of *Impostor*, narrated by Hugh Dancy, was also selected as a finalist in the New York Festivals Radio Awards' Best Fiction Audiobook of the Year Category.

In May 2021, Louise was shortlisted for the prestigious Crime Writers' Association 'Dagger in the Library' award, which recognises an author's entire body of work having been consistently enjoyed by library borrowers around the United Kingdom, and an author's longstanding support of libraries.

Louise was born in Northumberland, England. She studied undergraduate and postgraduate Law at King's College, University of London and then abroad in Paris and Florence. She spent much of her working life in London, where she was a lawyer for a number of years until taking the decision to change career and pursue her dream to write. Now, she writes full time and lives with family in Northumberland. She enjoys reading all manner of books, painting, travelling and spending time with family and friends.

