

Best Book Club with Shanna and Jen Podcast
Season 1, Episode 12 - March 17, 2021

The Women's Prize for Fiction Long List

Hello Everyone and welcome to the Best Book Club Podcast.

Shanna: Today, in continuing the celebration of Women's History Month, we are talking about The Women's Prize for Fiction! The long list was just announced last week so we are going to share that list with you today!

Jen: Here is some background on what the Women's Prize is and where it came from. It has an interesting origin story, I think. Apparently in 1991, after the shortlist for the Booker Prize was announced, it was realized that it contained no female authors despite the fact that 60% of the books published that year were written by women.

Shanna: Side Note, for those of you who don't know, The Booker is a literary prize that is awarded to the best novel that is written in English and published in the UK or Ireland. There is also the International Booker but this isn't an episode about the Booker so we won't get into it too much. I will mention that this prize was at one time or is sometimes called the Man Booker but it should be noted that this is completely coincidental and kind of unfortunate given the context of this particular story but yeah it was called the Man Booker because a company called "Man Group" was their sponsor and they were called Man Group because the founder's last name was Man.

Jen: I'm not sure if they are still the sponsor of the prize though, I think that may have ended in 2019 but I'm not clear about those details. If anyone else knows, tell me! I like to know stuff. Anyways, after the lack of female representation on the shortlist was discovered, a group of bookish type people - journalists, reviewers, agents, publishers, librarians, and booksellers - got together to discuss whether or not this mattered and why or why not. After a lot of discussion and wine apparently, they came up with the idea of a literary prize that specifically celebrated women's creativity and was also completely international. The committee that then formed around this group of individuals obtained prize money from a private donor and so along with a quite substantial cash prize, a bronze figurine known as "the Bessie" is presented to the winner to recognize the generosity of the original donor. The Prize was originally called The Orange Prize for Fiction and if anyone is wondering, as I was, why that is, it's because Orange, a telecommunications company was their first sponsor and continued to be their sponsor for seventeen years. The first orange prize was awarded to Helen Dunmore for *A Spell of Winter* in 1996.

Shanna: Why ... why Bessie? Am I the only one who associates the name Bessie with cows?

Jen: I'm assuming that maybe that was the donor's name? But yeah, cows for sure haha

Shanna: We have spoken about two of the past winners on this show - The Song of Achilles by Madeline Miller was the winner in 2012 and An American Marriage by Tayari Jones was the winner in 2019.

Jen: As you all know, one of my reading goals for the year is to read all the books on the short list for this prize. I also want to chip away at the long list if possible, though after compiling this list I realize that it may be just a bit ambitious but I'm gonna try. So I'm excited to see what books I've got to look forward to - luckily I've already read one of them and so have you Shanna, so we've got a head start

Shanna: Yes! I was excited to see Piranesi on the list since I really liked that one!

Jen: This is just such a great way to support female authors, help them get their work known and out there for everyone to enjoy and also, a great way to help diversify our reading especially since being published in a certain country isn't a criteria. Although I would love to know what goes into choosing and judging these books.

Jen: The long list which was announced on March 10th consists of 16 novels. We are going to go through each one, read the synopsis and see if they are books we want to read!

Shanna: Number one of the list is **Because of You by Dawn French** - In the same hospital, two very different women give birth to two very similar daughters. Hope leaves with a beautiful baby girl. Anna leaves with empty arms. Seventeen years later, the gods who keep watch over broken-hearted mothers wreak mighty revenge, and the truth starts rolling, terrible and deep, toward them all. The power of mother-love will be tested to its limits. Perhaps beyond . . .

Jen: This sounds so good. I read that Dawn French, in addition to being a writer, is also an actress and comedian so I am really interested to see where this story goes and if her comedic side comes out in what sounds like a pretty serious topic. It's just a coincidence that it's the first one on this list and then I think that I'm also bumping it up to the top of my TBR. Maybe that will change as we hear about the other books, but I'm excited.

Shanna: And obviously I feel like Nope, no thanks. Next. It does sound interesting, and once you have tested the waters on this one I might consider it, but yeah, until this baby is out of me (probably for a few years) I really just can't with any sad baby and kid stuff. I can totally see why this one would be so compelling to readers tho! I haven't actually tried anything like this since my kids were born, so maybe I am psyching myself up for it to be worse than it actually would

be? I know I was pretty upset when I was blindsided by the infant death in *Ragged Company*, so maybe not.

Jen: Yeah, maybe not. That was exceptionally upsetting though. Great book, but Holy. The cover of this book shows an animated type drawing of a woman from behind with her arms thrown up in the air. That, along with the font that they chose for it doesn't feel heavy. I wouldn't expect a book with this cover to be very upsetting? We will see.

Jen: *Second we have, Burnt Sugar by Avni Doshi* - "I would be lying if I say my mother's misery has never given me pleasure," says Antara, Tara's now-adult daughter. In her youth, Tara was wild. She abandoned her marriage to join an ashram, and while Tara is busy as a partner to the ashram's spiritual leader, Baba, little Antara is cared for by an older devotee, Kali Mata, an American who came to the ashram after a devastating loss. Tara also embarks on a stint as a beggar (mostly to spite her affluent parents) and spends years chasing a disheveled, homeless artist, all with young Antara in tow. But now Tara is forgetting things, and Antara is an adult—an artist and married—and must search for a way to make peace with a past that haunts her as she confronts the task of caring for a woman who never cared for her. Sharp as a blade and laced with caustic wit, *Burnt Sugar* unpicks the slippery, choking cord of memory and myth that binds mother and daughter. Is Tara's memory loss real? Are Antara's memories fair?

Jen: This book was also shortlisted for The Booker Prize in 2020 so that's cool and it also sounds good. This was her DEBUT NOVEL. I think it is so cool that her first book has been nominated for such huge literary prizes. I read that it was originally published in India under the title *Girl in White Cotton* which is just one of those little fun facts that I love. I'm super excited for this one too. It's gonna be real hard to choose which one to read first. I can already see it. I guess it's partly going to come down to which books are available from the library first because unfortunately I cannot afford to buy all sixteen. OOOO maybe I can use the money from my reading money jar to go towards next year's list...

Shanna: That is GENIUS. This one doesn't really call out to me. I am not entirely sure why. I guess it just kind of sounds like a bummer, and like A LOT. I am sure it's probably excellent, but yeah, I don't know. That's probably not fair. It does sound interesting though.

Jen: I am interested most in the mother daughter relationship I guess. That's the part of the synopsis that gripped me. I'm not too interested in settings like Ashrams - not totally sure why-, but I will totally read this one.

Shanna: *Consent by Annabel Lyon* - Saskia and Jenny are twins who are alike only in appearance. Saskia is a hard-working grad student whose interests are solely academic, while Jenny, an interior designer, is glamorous, thrill-seeking, capricious and narcissistic. Still, when Jenny is severely injured in an accident, Saskia puts her life on hold to be with her sister. Sara and Mattie are sisters with a difficult relationship. Mattie, the younger sister, is affectionate,

curious and intellectually disabled. As soon as Sara is able, she leaves home, in pursuit of a life of the mind and the body: she loves nothing more than fine wines, sensual perfumes, and expensive clothing. But when their mother dies, Sara inherits the duty of caring for her sister. Arriving at the house one day, she finds out that Mattie has married Robert, her wealthy mother's handyman. Though Mattie seems happy, Sara cannot let this go, forcing the annulment of the marriage and the banishment of Robert. With him out of the picture, though, she has no choice but to become her sister's keeper, sacrificing her own happiness and Mattie's too. When Robert turns up again, another tragedy happens. The waves from these events eventually engulf Sara and Saskia, sisters in mourning, in a quest for revenge.

Jen: Apparently she is Canadian! Not apparently, she IS Canadian and she actually lives in BC in New Westminster! So, that's cool. I have a thing about twins so I'm loving that in this book and based on it's title "Consent" I'm interested in how that's going to play into these sister's lives. Obviously when we hear the word "consent" our first thoughts I think naturally go to sexual consent because that is so prevalent in our culture and news especially in the last few years but consent can mean so many different things and in this case, talking about people with varying disabilities...I'm intrigued.

Shanna: Yes totally. This one is a lot more compelling to me personally. I felt a little bit of whiplash reading the synopsis because suddenly we were talking about totally different sisters with different issues, and I thought, ok, what about those twins? And then suddenly at the end BAM, twins are back. I looove when a story can successfully weave a bunch of characters' story lines together, and if this one is up for an award I am assuming it is done well, so I would definitely check this one out.

Jen: *Detransition, Baby* by Torrey Peters - Reese almost had it all: a loving relationship with Amy, an apartment in New York City, a job she didn't hate. She had scraped together what previous generations of trans women could only dream of: a life of mundane, bourgeois comforts. The only thing missing was a child. But then her girlfriend, Amy, detransitioned and became Ames, and everything fell apart. Now Reese is caught in a self-destructive pattern: avoiding her loneliness by sleeping with married men. Ames isn't happy either. He thought detransitioning to live as a man would make life easier, but that decision cost him his relationship with Reese—and losing her meant losing his only family. Even though their romance is over, he longs to find a way back to her. When Ames's boss and lover, Katrina, reveals that she's pregnant with his baby—and that she's not sure whether she wants to keep it—Ames wonders if this is the chance he's been waiting for. Could the three of them form some kind of unconventional family—and raise the baby together?

Jen: This was also a debut novel! Like...#goals. That's so amazing. I can't wait to read this one. I love it. Also, she is the first transgender author to make the long list - so that's huge! Personally, LGBTQ authors and stories are a big part of my wheelhouse, especially the T and I'm really stoked to read a book specifically by a trans author about trans people. I've read quite

a few where we have trans characters, but we aren't going to get quite the same story from authors who haven't had to experience it for themselves.

Shanna: Yes totally! This feels like a pretty unique opportunity to experience an own voice novel. At least I personally haven't come across anything like this, though I am guilty of not seeking it out either. I think going into this one knowing that the author is speaking from a place of lived experience, I mean, maybe not the actual situation in the novel, but you know what I mean, bumps it up the list for me. I actually probably wouldn't have really considered this one looking at it. It has that ... abstract ... colour style that has been really popular lately. Think the Vanishing Half, Normal people, Untamed, The Mothers. Those aren't all the same lol but they have a similar vibe. I am not super into it so I don't know that I would have stopped to pick it up and read the synopsis if I saw it on a table. The title also sounded a little Austin Powers lol. Now that I KNOW its about an actual baby and someone detransitioning and a whole story around that, it reads differently. At first though it came off as "DETRANSITION BABY!" Like, yeah, hang loose, let's all detransition ... party!

Jen: Have you seen Austin Powers.

Shanna: It's been about 20 years.

Jen: I was expecting a much different Austin Powers impersonation than that!

Shanna: What, you don't have California beach Austin Powers?

Jen: No! But yeah, I can totally see what you're saying about the cover art. It's not a book that I would have just picked up without already knowing what it was about.

Shanna: *Exciting Times by Naoise Dolan* - Ava, newly arrived in Hong Kong from Dublin, spends her days teaching English to rich children. Julian is a banker. A banker who likes to spend money on Ava, to have sex and discuss fluctuating currencies with her. But when she asks whether he loves her, he cannot say more than "I like you a great deal. Enter Edith. A Hong Kong-born lawyer, striking and ambitious, Edith takes Ava to the theater and leaves her tulips in the hallway. Ava wants to be her—and wants her. And then Julian writes to tell Ava he is coming back to Hong Kong... Should Ava return to the easy compatibility of her life with Julian or take a leap into the unknown with Edith?

Jen: Well I think we all know what Ava should do because Julian sounds like a Jerk but obviously relationships aren't quite that simple. As far as I can see...this may also be a debut novel. I'm sensing a trend here..

Shanna: Ok, so my original thoughts on this one were that I was going to go ahead and call it a solid maybe. It didn't sound very interesting to me. I also don't love books that are based solely around relationships, especially toxic ones, or cheating, which sounds like that path this one could potentially take? I think maybe I will check out some reviews first to see if it would be for

me. On first read through of the synopsis however it doesn't really feel like my kind of thing. THEN I went to the library and it was the only one they had, so I grabbed it. I am about 50 pages in and I really like it. So, that'll show me. I am pleasantly surprised so far, so hopefully that continues. It has been funny and cold and kind of calculating. Which, I love. I don't know, I really like it so far.

Jen: Yeah it's not particularly standing out to me TBH but like I said, I love LGBTQ stories so I guess it depends on how that side of the book is handled. I love a story about exploring sexuality if it's done well.

Jen: **How the One Armed Sister Sweeps Her House by Cherie Jones** - In Baxter Beach, Barbados, moneyed ex-pats clash with the locals who often end up serving them: braiding their hair, minding their children, and selling them drugs. Lala lives on the beach with her husband, Adan, a petty criminal with endless charisma whose thwarted burglary of one of the Baxter Beach mansions sets off a chain of events with terrible consequences. A gunshot no one was meant to witness. A new mother whose baby is found lifeless on the beach. A woman torn between two worlds and incapacitated by grief. And two men driven by desperation and greed who attempt a crime that will risk their freedom -- and their lives.

Shanna: Nope. No thanks. Sorry. Hard pass. I know, I know, what the hell kind of book reviewer am I?

Jen: One that doesn't like to read about babies dying. And that's okay. Honestly, having a baby in my house has made these kinds of books way harder for me to stomach as well. Omg Google Books describes this as "a debut novel, set in Barbados, about four people confronting violence and love in a beachfront "paradise" Okay, obviously debut novels getting such huge recognition is a totally normal thing. So, if these women can write such amazing books on the first go, I can't wait to see what else they come up with. I guess I shouldn't be too surprised...Madeline Miller did the same thing with The Song of Achilles.

Shanna: My girl Maddy Mills! I better never meet her, that would be too embarrassing after how often I talk about her like she's my author BFF.

Shanna: **Luster by Raven Leilani** - Edie is stumbling her way through her twenties--sharing a subpar apartment in Bushwick, clocking in and out of her admin job, making a series of inappropriate sexual choices. She's also, secretly, haltingly, figuring her way into life as an artist. And then she meets Eric, a digital archivist with a family in New Jersey, including an autopsist wife who has agreed to an open marriage--with rules. As if navigating the constantly shifting landscapes of contemporary sexual manners and racial politics weren't hard enough, Edie finds herself unemployed and falling into Eric's family life, his home. She becomes a hesitant friend to his wife and a de facto role model to his adopted daughter. Edie is the only black woman who young Akila knows.

Jen: Debut Novel. That's all I have to say. Also she is younger than me. Not sure why that matters but...as I get older, it matters to me. The relationship dynamics of this story sounds so interesting.

Shanna: yes. Definitely different, and interesting.

Jen: I'm wondering a little about this synopsis...I'm wondering what "Inappropriate sexual choices" means and it also sounds a lot like "girls life changes because of a boy" which is a trope that we talked about last week. I'm assuming that Akila is his adopted daughter? And that she is also black? I feel like we are missing a little information. I'm interested just because I'm interested to see this done well, which I am hoping that it would be for the book to make it onto this list.

Shanna: *No one is Talking About This* by Patricia Lockwood - As this urgent, genre-defying book opens, a woman who has recently been elevated to prominence for her social media posts travels around the world to meet her adoring fans. She is overwhelmed by navigating the new language and etiquette of what she terms "the portal," where she grapples with an unshakable conviction that a vast chorus of voices is now dictating her thoughts. When existential threats--from climate change and economic precariousness to the rise of an unnamed dictator and an epidemic of loneliness--begin to loom, she posts her way deeper into the portal's void. An avalanche of images, details, and references accumulate to form a landscape that is post-sense, post-irony, post-everything. "Are we in hell?" the people of the portal ask themselves. "Are we all just going to keep doing this until we die?" Suddenly, two texts from her mother pierce the fray: "Something has gone wrong," and "How soon can you get here?" As real life and its stakes collide with the increasingly absurd antics of the portal, the woman confronts a world that seems to contain both an abundance of proof that there is goodness, empathy, and justice in the universe, and a deluge of evidence to the contrary.

Jen: So, Shanna, you just read *Priestdaddy* which was her memoir. What did you think of it?

Shanna: I did! And I enjoyed it! I liked the first half a lot more than the second. You know this about me, but I tend not to connect with poetry, or what I consider flowery writing styles. Patricia Lockwood is a poet, and the second half of the book really started showing that side of her writing. It was lovely, but I drift a lot with that style of writing. The first half had me laughing out loud and was a lot more blunt in its presentation.

Jen: I've heard this book be highly recommended and it sounds quite intense. No surprise here, apparently this was her debut novel. Although, personally I think that a memoir counts as a novel too, but perhaps I'm wrong?

Shanna: I think this one sounds excellent and I am totally going to read it. It sounds weird, which I like. Also, I read that whole synopsis and didn't even hear babies mentioned, alive or otherwise!

Jen: Wow, you're right! That hardly ever happens.

Jen: *Nothing But Blue Sky* by Kathleen MacMahon - Is there such a thing as a perfect marriage? David thought so. But when his wife Mary Rose dies suddenly he has to think again. In reliving their twenty years together David sees that the ground beneath them had shifted and he simply hadn't noticed. Or had chosen not to. Figuring out who Mary Rose really was and the secrets that she kept - some of these hidden in plain sight - makes David wonder if he really knew her. Did he even know himself? OOO that sounds sad.

Shanna: Yeah, is this one gonna be suicide? It sounds like its gonna be suicide.

Jen: Huh, yah I didn't see that, but now that you mention it, that makes total sense. I stand by my original comment of "that sounds sad". I'm not opposed to sad books though, so I'll find out and report back.

Jen: This one feels like one I would start, but giving myself permission ahead of time to DNF depending on how it goes.

Shanna: *Piranesi* by Susanna Clarke - Piranesi's house is no ordinary building: its rooms are infinite, its corridors endless, its walls are lined with thousands upon thousands of statues, each one different from all the others. Within the labyrinth of halls an ocean is imprisoned; waves thunder up staircases, rooms are flooded in an instant. But Piranesi is not afraid; he understands the tides as he understands the pattern of the labyrinth itself. He lives to explore the house. There is one other person in the house—a man called The Other, who visits Piranesi twice a week and asks for help with research into A Great and Secret Knowledge. But as Piranesi explores, evidence emerges of another person, and a terrible truth begins to unravel, revealing a world beyond the one Piranesi has always known.

Jen: You've read this one! And it was already very much on my immediate TBR so it's perfect.

Shanna: It's really great. I can't wait until you've read it so I can talk to someone about all the spoilery stuff. I have these ideas in my head about what it all means, but, nobody else around me has read it, so I just ... am living with it in my head and in my heart.

Jen: Yeah I can't wait, it sounds like it's totally up my alley. It sounds just weird enough for me! OKay, one thing, I totally misgendered Piranesi - Honestly, I had no idea what this story was about until I just read this synopsis - I'm just going off of literally nothing haha but Piranesi sounds like a woman to me. So, sorry Piranesi.

Shanna: I misspecied Piranesi. I was surprised when he wasn't a fawn. I know, looking back on it it feels silly, but like, I was honestly surprised. I've said it a few times in other places, but this book is really one that I feel is best read with no information going in. And, even having read this synopsis, this doesn't tell you anything about what the book is actually about. Just the very broadest strokes. I am always tempted to recommend it, but I don't want to give anything away

about it, since that's all part of the experience reading it. "It is really good" doesn't do it justice, but anything more and I feel like I am taking something away from another reader, which isn't cool.

Jen: Yes and as you know, I LOVE going into a book literally knowing nothing about it. I do it all the time, so I appreciate that and honestly...I kind of wish that I didn't have the idea to read all these synopsis-es? Synopsi? Synopses? whatever. You get it. I give myself permission to immediately forget what all of these books are about!

Jen: *Small Pleasures by Clare Chambers* - 1957, south-east suburbs of London. Jean Swinney is a feature writer on a local paper, disappointed in love and — on the brink of forty — living a limited existence with her truculent mother: a small life from which there is no likelihood of escape. When a young Swiss woman, Gretchen Tilbury, contacts the paper to claim that her daughter is the result of a virgin birth, it is down to Jean to discover whether she is a miracle or a fraud. But the more Jean investigates, the more her life becomes strangely (and not unpleasantly) intertwined with that of the Tilburys: Gretchen is now a friend, and her quirky and charming daughter Margaret a sort of surrogate child. And Jean doesn't mean to fall in love with Gretchen's husband, Howard, but Howard surprises her with his dry wit, his intelligence and his kindness — and when she does fall, she falls hard. But he is married, and to her friend — who is also the subject of the story she is researching for the newspaper, a story that increasingly seems to be causing dark ripples across all their lives. And yet Jean cannot bring herself to discard the chance of finally having a taste of happiness...But there will be a price to pay, and it will be unbearable.

Jen: Sounds like we have a love triangle

Shanna: UGH! I WAS LOVING THIS SYNOPSIS UNTIL THAT! I was like yessss, yesss, yesss, NO. NO NO NO WHY?! Ugh.

Jen: Right? So this one is lower on my list as far as priorities go. Not that I don't enjoy a love triangle but...this one doesn't sound particularly alluring.

Shanna: *Summer by Ali Smith* - The fourth book in a seasonal quartet - Look up more about this Ali Smith's *Seasonal Quartet* is a series of four stand-alone novels, separate but interconnected (as the seasons are) In the present, Sacha knows the world's in trouble. Her brother Robert just *is* trouble. Their mother and father are having trouble. Meanwhile, the world's in meltdown—and the real meltdown hasn't even started yet. In the past, a lovely summer. A different brother and sister know they're living on borrowed time. This is a story about people on the brink of change. They're family, but they think they're strangers. So: Where does family begin? And what do people who think they've got nothing in common have in common? Summer.

Jen: There is something about the words "Seasonal Quartet" that is so attractive to me and I will be reading them all if not for that reason alone. I'm not usually huge on family dramas but I don't care, I'm in.

Shanna: I am also not huge on family dramas. Probably because I have a low bull shit tolerance lol, so I am always like, just ... just stop it. Stop it already. I honestly don't know how to feel about this

one, but it's not on the top of the list for me. The cover also doesn't grab me, and I know, I know, don't judge a book by its cover. But you know what, I have a stack of books here, and I am gonna judge them based on all of the information available to me, including the covers. There is nothing wrong with this one ... it's just not ... exciting. Pretty, but boring. To me.

Shanna: **The Golden Rule by Amanda Craig** - When Hannah is invited into the First-Class carriage of the London to Penzance train by Jinni, she walks into a spider's web. Now a poor young single mother, Hannah once escaped Cornwall to go to university. But once she married Jake and had his child, her dreams were crushed into bitter disillusion. Her husband has left her for Eve, rich and childless, and Hannah has been surviving by becoming a cleaner in London. Jinni is equally angry and bitter, and in the course of their journey the two women agree to murder each other's husbands.

Jen: WHOA.

Shanna: YES! I mean, no, you shouldn't murder people, but yesssss cool story. After all, they are strangers on a train — who could possibly connect them? But when Hannah goes to Jinni's husband's home the next night, she finds Stan, a huge, hairy, ugly drunk who has his own problems — not least the care of a half-ruined house and garden. He claims Jinni is a very different person to the one who has persuaded Hannah to commit a terrible crime. Who is telling the truth — and who is the real victim?

Jen: THRILLER! Very interesting.

Shanna: This one. I want this one. Top of the list.

Jen: **The Vanishing Half by Brit Bennett** - The Vignes twin sisters will always be identical. But after growing up together in a small, southern black community and running away at age sixteen, it's not just the shape of their daily lives that is different as adults, it's everything: their families, their communities, their racial identities. Many years later, one sister lives with her black daughter in the same southern town she once tried to escape. The other secretly passes for white, and her white husband knows nothing of her past. Still, even separated by so many miles and just as many lies, the fates of the twins remain intertwined. What will happen to the next generation, when their own daughters' storylines intersect? Weaving together multiple strands and generations of this family, from the Deep South to California, from the 1950s to the 1990s, Brit Bennett produces a story that is at once a riveting, emotional family story and a brilliant exploration of the American history of passing.

Shanna: I feel bad that I just haven't been interested in this one. Like, it's super popular, people love it. I just am not clicking with it. I know you just read it, would I like it if I gave it a chance?

Jen: Yes I just recently finished this one. I think you would like it - I'm not sure you would love it. There is absolutely nothing wrong with it. It's a really interesting story, it's well written, the characters are good - but it wasn't my favorite book in the world. I don't know why I didn't love it, maybe I'm just tired. Also, this synopsis, I don't think that it's very good and it's really making me think about the other ones on this list.

Shanna: It may just not be this book's time with me too. I guess maybe the story (from what I have heard and know about it, which isn't a lot beyond what this synopsis says) sounds like it will just be people fighting a lot? And I am not really wanting to spend my time and brain power feeling sad and frustrated about people fighting. Am I way off base here?

Jen: I wouldn't say there is a ton of people fighting. It's more about different types of fear and of fitting in and missing people I guess. It's sad and kind of lonely

Jen: *Transcendent Kingdom* by Yaa Gyasi - Gifty is a fifth-year candidate in neuroscience at Stanford School of Medicine studying reward-seeking behavior in mice and the neural circuits of depression and addiction. Her brother, Nana, was a gifted high school athlete who died of a heroin overdose after a knee injury left him hooked on OxyContin. Her suicidal mother is living in her bed. Gifty is determined to discover the scientific basis for the suffering she sees all around her. But even as she turns to the hard sciences to unlock the mystery of her family's loss, she finds herself hungering for her childhood faith and grappling with the evangelical church in which she was raised, whose promise of salvation remains as tantalizing as it is elusive.

Shanna: This one sounds sad, but really interesting. I think I would actually like this one. I was raised catholic, and even though I am not practicing, and wouldn't really consider myself catholic anymore, it is something that sticks with you, and I do find myself missing quite a few aspects of it, despite not really agreeing with some pretty key points. Now that I have children as well it adds this whole other dimension and like, a weird guilt? It's a very frustrating and confusing thing, and I am interested to see how they deal with it in this one. Loving the science, addiction, and mental health connections at well. Colour me intrigued.

Jen: Hmmm it may have lost me at "science" lol. I do not have a science brain but the rest of it sounds really good. Okay okay, I do like books with science but they really remind me of how not good at science I am. There are quite a few that I've enjoyed and I just kind of skip over the science part. The religious part also doesn't do it for me. But everything else - good. She's also younger than me - apparently I have feelings about turning 35 this year.

Shanna: *Unsettled Ground* by Claire Fuller - Twins Jeanie and Julius have always been different from other people. At 51 years old, they still live with their mother, Dot, in rural isolation and poverty. Their rented cottage is simultaneously their armour against the world and their sanctuary. Inside its walls they make music, in its garden they grow (and sometimes kill) everything they need for sustenance. But when Dot dies suddenly, threats to their livelihood start raining down. At risk of losing everything, Jeanie and her brother must fight to survive in an increasingly dangerous world as their mother's secrets unfold, putting everything they thought they knew about their lives at stake.

Shanna: I feel like twins have been a thing in this list hey? How many books is this now? 3? Interesting. I guess out of 16 that isn't actually that many. The little blurb from the times on the front is actually what has me going from "this could be good" to "I will probably check this out." It says, "A latter day Daphne du Maurier." and, as you know, I loved loved loved Rebecca by her. This does have a bit of a creepy, bleakish, haunted vibe. The cover is also really cool, which is not hurting. It's

dark and has a bunch of vegetables and flowers on it. Creepy and beautiful. I have a weakness for beautiful, broken, and dirty things.

Jen: Yes! So many twins! Even Hamnet and Judith from last year were twins. I'm totally into it. Yeah I think this one sounds really good! Creepy, bleakish and haunted is for me. Wow! 16 is a lot of books! What a great list - there appears to be a book for everyone, from lots of different genres and backgrounds.

Shanna: I am going to start working my way through as many of these as I can. Hopefully I will read all the ones selected for the short list. I will take my best guesses at what will make it and ... I guess hope for the best.

Jen: The short list will be announced on April 28th so we will be back next month to fill you in on which books made it to the next round and then the actual winner is going to be announced on July 7th! What do you guys think? Have you read any of the books on this list and if you have, which one do you think are going to be shortlisted? We would love to hear your opinions and we will keep you updated on ours as we (or at least I because this is my goal not Shanna's) make my way through the books. I'm so excited.

Shanna: Also, super cool, if you go and sign up for their newsletter on The Women's Prize website you will be entered for a chance to win all 16 of the long listed books so I definitely recommend doing that.

Jen: I really hope that I win!

Shanna: Yeah I am totally gonna go do that right meow. Next week we are going to be sharing some examples where men write women badly. It's going to be a lot of fun, you don't want to miss it.

Jen: Just a reminder that we are reading The Radium Girls by Kate Moore for book club so if you haven't picked it up yet, do it, because it's so good.

Shanna: Yes, you can join in on the conversation over on our Instagram or our Facebook page. You can find us everywhere at [best_bookclub](#).

Jen: Or send us an email at best_bookclub@outlook.com

Otherwise, we will see you next week!

Byeeeeee