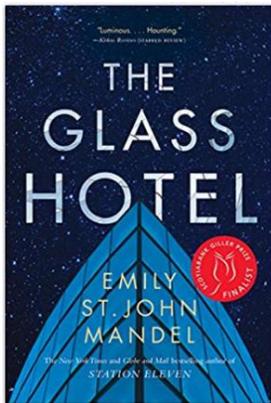


## Parkdale Book Club – My Sister the Serial Killer

February 12	<b><i>The Glass Hotel</i></b> by Emily St. John Mandel	Lindsay
March 12	<b><i>Hamnet and Judith</i></b> , by Maggie O'Farrell	Lee and Janine
April 9	<b><i>Weight of Ink</i></b> by Rachel Kadish	Roslyn
May 14	<b><i>American Dirt</i></b> by Jeanine Cummins	Beth
June 11	<b><i>Davita's Harp</i></b> by Chaim Potok	Margaret

### February Book Club



Lindsay nominated *The Glass Hotel* by **Emily St. John Mandel** for next month's Book Club, **Saturday, February 12<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 am.**

From Amazon: "From the award-winning author of *Station Eleven*, a captivating novel of money, beauty, white-collar crime, ghosts and moral compromise in which a

woman disappears from a container ship off the coast of Mauritania and a massive Ponzi scheme implodes in New York, dragging countless fortunes with it.

Vincent is a bartender at the Hotel Caiette, a five-star glass-and-cedar palace on the northernmost tip of Vancouver Island. New York financier Jonathan Alkaitis owns the hotel. When he passes Vincent his card with a tip, it's the beginning of their life together. That same day, a hooded figure scrawls a note on the windowed wall of the hotel: "Why don't you swallow broken glass." Leon Prevant, a shipping executive for a company called Neptune-Avramidis, sees the note from the hotel bar and is shaken to his core. Thirteen years later, Vincent mysteriously disappears from the deck of a Neptune-Avramidis ship.

Weaving together the lives of these characters, *The Glass Hotel* moves between the ship, the skyscrapers of Manhattan and the wilderness of remote British Columbia, painting a breathtaking picture of greed and guilt, fantasy and delusion, art and the ghosts of our pasts."

Join Zoom Book Club Meeting February 12<sup>th</sup>:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82432011683?pwd=SEgwSFFIOTRZODVtSmVuYWV1vOXNwdz09>

Meeting ID: 824 3201 1683

Passcode: 284356

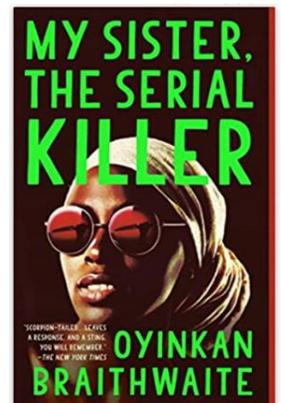
### January Book Club

Our January book, nominated by Lynn and Roz, was ***My Sister the Serial Killer*** by Oyinkan Braithwaite. It was a great book to start the year!

Here are comments from the group on our first selection for 2022 ...

I was interested in Korede's loyalty to Ayoola. I wondered at what point she would decide enough was enough and report her sister. But then, I thought she wouldn't ever be able to do that because she was an accomplice to the murders. Still, why did she help her in the first place? Their abusive childhood and the bond that was forged between them was a dysfunctional bond.

It was a bond that seemed to obligate Korede to protect Ayoola from the consequences of the murders she committed. Did she feel badly for Ayoola even though she was jealous of her? Did she learn in childhood that it was her job to look after Ayoola? Did she just feel a sisterly loyalty to Ayoola? What would



have happened had she not protected Ayoola? She wouldn't have had a secret that prevented her from forming other relationships. But she might have been overwhelmed by guilt had she not protected Ayoola and her mother would never have forgiven her. And there would have been a different kind of book.

I felt badly that Korede couldn't have a friend. Both sisters were really a mess.

I thought the book was written and did have some humour but overall, it was a rather sad story.

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A novel that at first glance appears to be a quick read is so much more. Each short chapter impels you to read more and when you put the book down it preys on your thoughts.

Korebe describes her sister as a Bratz doll and herself as a voodoo figurine. Ayoola, her sister, gets treated like a doll by all and thus gets away with poor treatment of others, even murder. Ayoola never feels any remorse, even allows Korebe to clean up her messes and to deal with all the stresses this poses. Korebe knows that protecting her sister in this way is wrong but she most likely would be blamed for her sister's crimes. She is more than angry when Ayoola goes after the man she is sweet on. Men in love can be so stupid. When Tade sends her a bouquet of orchids, Ayoola says she prefers roses; he immediately goes out and buys roses. Korebe can't have real friends thanks to all the secrets she's hiding so she confides in Mulhar, a comatose patient. I felt much sadness and also disappointment for Korebe. She is smart, very capable and a compassionate nurse but she doesn't believe enough in herself to demand more of her sister. There is so much more to beauty than a beautiful face.

I do believe Multar was interested in Korebe and, as Judy suggested, it could have been a new start for both. It wasn't to be, Ayoola was just home from the hospital already seeing her next suitor (next victim?). Korebe chose to protect her sister.

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I started the book looking for a typical murder story and ended up realizing that there was more to this writing and I read it again! The economy of the language was refreshing.

Ayoola has a huge amount of control over her sister, and others, but Korede needs that emotional attention for many reasons as outlined in the story. Actually, both girls would pass with high marks on an

Adverse Childhood Experiences score. Page 169  
 "People force us to destroy the person we really are – a kind of murder."

Did Korede have a compulsive obsessive disorder, too? Note the numerous references and details of cleaning the house, the body removals etc.

Great discussion about the ending .... What is going to happen, or not happen, with Muhtar and their relationship?

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This book had an excellent cover design.

I found the coworkers to be very entertaining.

It contained some Soap Opera tropes such as the coma patient, and dastardly antagonist, and intensely dysfunctional relationships.

The writing device of having a passive (in the extreme) listener, was very useful in expanding the reader's access to Korede's inner conflicts. Her cleaning obsession brought to mind Lady MacBeth.

Although the power of exceptional beauty is a factor in our current society, I wonder if it is even more significant when women have little agency over their own lives in other respects such as financial freedom or the right to an education.

There was more *revealing* of character than there was character *development*.

As neither 'the stabber' nor 'the cleaner', I think I'd be the sister to make an ultimatum based on family therapy!

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I really enjoyed this book. I loved how the author had each chapter so short, but with enough excitement in the chapter that you wanted to continue reading, just one more chapter. I think of the childhood story the Ugly Duckling when I think Korede and Ayoola. Korede was not as beautiful as her sister and therefore tried to compensate for that by always being there for her. It may have been a cultural thing, also, that the oldest child, in this case daughter, must be the protector of the youngest one. I loved in the book how Korede confided in Muhtar her deepest thoughts while he was in a coma. To me, this was a way for her to be able to move forward. She wasn't carrying the burden by herself, she felt she had someone to talk to. I also think her constant visits and conversations may have been the medicine required for him to come out of his

coma, since his family didn't really visit often and treated him almost as if he had died.

The #5 man led me to think it might be Muhtar, since his wife divorced him and he was wanting to pursue a relationship with Koreda. But would the beautiful sister have something to do with that? Only our imagination will know.

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The sister dynamic was lost on me – no sister or comparable person in my life.

I greatly enjoyed that *maga* means "a fool who has been taken advantage of." Nigerians must love seeing all those red MAGA hats in the US.

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I really enjoyed *My Sister the Serial Killer*. It had a great story with many components and the characters were interesting and believable. I love books that transport me to different places and cultures. The story was set in Lagos and brought the reader into the city describing the textures of life in Lagos.

Judy made interesting comments about Mutthar, but I decided the #5 person was not Mutthar. I think the author wanted them to be numbered anonymously. But, of course, it's all in everyone's imagination, including the author.

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I got hooked on this book from the first line. I liked the short little chapters – you could stop reading anywhere but it was compelling to keep reading. You don't have to commit to another 50 pages to read just one more chapter ... or two.

I was intrigued by the power Ayoola seemed to have over men – they were smitten with her and, for her, it was all a narcissistic game.

It was a light read but, at the same time, there are things about it that invite the reader to think more deeply – the dynamics of birth order; the limits a person will go to protect someone they love, even if they know the person is guilty and even if it incriminates themselves; the way the family covered for the father when he was a nasty, violent man who was willing to sell his own daughters for his profit.

Korede tried to protect Tade and warn him but it just came back to bite her. It must have been so frustrating for her as she attempted to do the right

thing in the face of other people's blindness to Ayoola's self-serving wiles.

The book ends with our introduction to the Ayoola's new boyfriend who, we are certain, will be the next in line. He has no idea what he's getting into. I wonder how many murders will have to occur before Korede decides her sister needs to be stopped. Ayoola is manipulative and beautiful enough to get away with it.

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This book is about how different two sisters can be; the power of physical beauty; casual police corruption; family obligations; loyalty; punishment.

If someone you loved, say a sister, killed someone claiming "self-defense," would you help them hide the body and the evidence? What if it happens again?... "*we are hardwired to protect and remain loyal to the people we love.*" Backstory: in the girls' childhood, Korede stood with or saved Ayoola from their father at least twice. With that as the formative narrative, it would be hard to not take a similar stance later.

If you have a sister, which one of you would be more likely to be the killer and which the cleaner? Is the enabler as guilty as the killer? Would Ayoola stop killing if Korede stopped cleaning up? "*Ayoola summons me with these words—Korede, I killed him.*" What would happen if Korede had said NO the 2<sup>nd</sup> time Ayoola called her? Blacklist TV show – the significance of having a trustworthy cleaning team if you're a killer/crime lord.

Take the point of view of the sister rather than the killer – what do we lose? But what do we gain? Korede has a notebook she bought to record one happy thing per day, but she uses it to record Ayoola's murders. Ayoola's motivation?

Ayoola took responsibility for the beheaded flowers, and denied that she baked the cake. Because she knows beauty will always bail her out?

From the discussion – did Ayoola stab herself?? Was Korede complicit in father's death?

Korede's musings on others' morality, when she is cleaning up after a serial killer. "*I know better than to take life directions from someone without a moral compass.*"

The implications of the dynamic between Korede and Ayoola: "*Ayoola and I don't really have friends in the traditional sense of the word. I think you have to*

accept someone into your confidence, and vice versa, to be able to call them a friend.” And so, Korede develops a confiding friendship with a man in a coma, Muhtar, who then recovers and recovers his memory. Significance of his holding her secret? Korede refused his offer of friendship. Is Muhtar #5?? What happened at the end? Is that the next victim, sitting in the living room downstairs? Why is Korede brought down to meet him? Is he intended for her?

The phenomenon of the golden child – in this case, literally: *“Ayoola’s skin is a color that sits comfortably between cream and caramel and I am the color of a Brazil nut, before it is peeled.”* – colorism. What is going on in the minds of parents that they can treat two children so differently, picking a golden child or picking a scapegoat?

*“It takes a whole lot longer to dispose of a body than to dispose of a soul, especially if you don’t want to leave any evidence of foul play.”*

I enjoyed the writing: *“the musical equivalent of a pack of M & Ms.”*

*“The most loving parents and relatives commit murder with smiles on their faces. They force us to destroy the person we really are: a subtle kind of murder.”*

Social satire, comment on gender dynamics: *“Two packets of pocket tissue, one 30-centiliter bottle of water, one first aid kit, one packet of wipes, one wallet, one tube of hand cream, one lip balm, one phone, one tampon, one rape whistle. Basically, the essentials for every woman.”*

*“My words are more his than mine. Educated women anger men of his ilk, and so I try to adopt broken English, but I suspect my attempt betrays my upbringing even more.”*

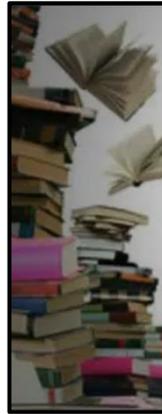
At the father’s memorial, a young woman approached Korede, saying, “Your father was a great man... he helped with my school funds ...” Korede did not tell her he had several girlfriends at various universities across Lagos. “He once told me: You had to feed the cow before you slaughtered it.” “When you have money, university girls are to men what plankton is to a whale.”

From a Goodreads review: “The story, coupled with the setting, alongside the characters, all resonate at a level only a fellow Nigerian would understand.” ❖

## Literary Kaleidoscope

*A note from Joan:*

Book Club folk might be interested to know that our April book, *The Weight of Ink*, is the March selection at Literary Kaleidoscope. It is open to all (\$10 fee) and also meeting over Zoom these days. Details at <https://literarykaleidoscope.ca/newsletter>.



More information about Literary Kaleidoscope (from their website) -- **Literary Kaleidoscope, Calgary** is a longstanding volunteer organization of and for book-lovers that supports reading, discussion and writing through monthly meetings, guest speakers, and by offering annual awards to graduate and undergraduate students who have produced the best creative and critical work at Calgary and Mount Royal universities.

Monthly meetings are held the third Wednesday of the month, from September through November, and January through May. Until further notice, meetings are presented via Zoom. Admission is an incredible bargain at \$10. Presentations begin at 9:30 am and run between 60 and 75 minutes. All are welcome.

If you wish to receive the monthly newsletters and the Zoom links for each meeting, send an email to [literary.kaleidoscope@gmail.com](mailto:literary.kaleidoscope@gmail.com).

## Nominations for Next Year

One of my favourite parts of facilitating the book club is gathering people’s ideas for books for us to read next year and setting up the horse race spread sheet to record votes in late May. Here are our great inspirations so far for the vote in the spring. (Please note that this list is fluid – you may nominate something and then later have a better idea.) See December’s newsletter for a synopsis of each book.

1. *The Art of Leaving* by Ayelet Tsabari – Roz
2. *The Bookwoman of Troublesome Creek* by -- Beth
3. *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Kimmerer – Ruth
4. *Cool Water* by Dianne Warren – Janine
5. *Migrations* by Charlotte McConaghy – Lynn
6. *The Wives* by Tarryn Fisher -- Sue
7. *The Woman Outside My Door* by Rachel Ryan -- Sue

## Possible Nominations for Next Year

- a. **Caste** by Isabel Wilkerson
- b. **Astra** by Cedar Bowers
- c. **Molly of the Mall** by Heidi Jacobs
- d. **Daughters of Kobani** by Gail Lemmon

## Burrowed in Books



“Do you identify as a bibliophile, bookworm or bookaholic? You’re in the right place.” So reads the Home Page of my granddaughter’s blog. Georgia has been an avid reader since she could hold a book. Before that, my favorite activity was reading stories to her. She just

created this blog in July 2021 where she writes reviews of some of the books she is reading, just for fun. If you’d like to read some of her reviews, you’ll find them here: <https://burrowedinbooks.wordpress.com/>

