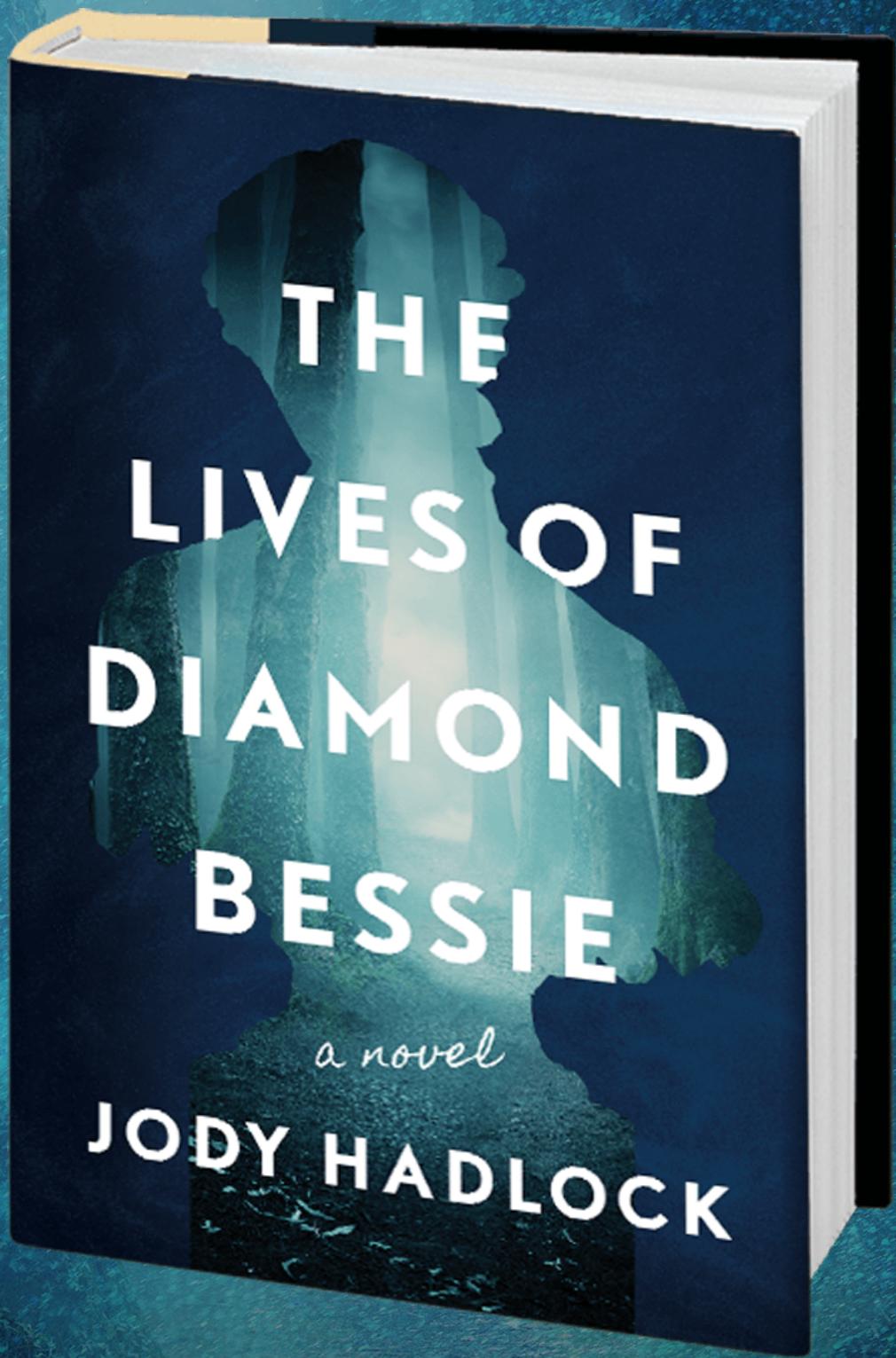


Book Club Kit



Dear Reader,

It's been a very long and winding road to make this book a reality: tons of research, traveling to every place Bessie lived—including Ireland—years where I had to set aside my writing, going through so many drafts that I lost count, and it all led to here: my book, my labor of love, in your hands. I'm truly honored and thrilled that you are considering or have chosen my novel for your book club.

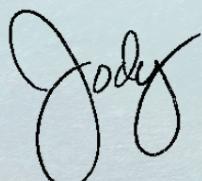
It's always been said that writing is a lonely pursuit, but I disagree. For one thing, you can usually find me writing (or researching) at a coffee shop! No matter where I travel, I always find a local coffeehouse, even though I only drink tea, LOL. But seriously, it's been a true collaboration, with editors, cover and layout designers, and others who help bring a book into the world.

If you'd like me to join your book club discussion by Zoom, I'd love to do so. If needed, you can use my Zoom account. And, depending on where you live, I might even be able to attend in person.

Before you go on to the next section with discussion questions, I should tell you, if you haven't read the book yet, there are spoilers.

And don't miss the last page with the scrumptious punch one of Bessie's madams serves on New Year's Eve!

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jody".

Discussion Questions

1. Women have gained many rights since the 1800s. Were you familiar with all the restrictions society placed on women back then? Were you surprised that they would lead women into prostitution? What do you think about how far women have come?
2. Germans and the Irish were the main immigrant groups to the U.S. during the period the book is set. How much did you know about the reasons these groups left their homelands?
3. The author used the Clytie statue as a motif. What did you think of this use of the sculpture and how Bessie's reactions to it changed at different moments of her life?
4. In the 1800s, women were discouraged from reading novels. It was considered dangerous to a woman's mind and even physical health. But women read voraciously. What is your reaction to that kind of thinking back then?
5. What connection do you see between the historical world of Diamond Bessie and today?
6. The theme of the book is forgiveness, of yourself. Do you think we're too hard on ourselves, that we need to be more forgiving, not just of others, but ourselves too?

Discussion Questions

7. Queen Mab (pronounced Maeve) is still a prominent part of Irish folklore. What did you think of the way the author used the fairy in the book?
8. Friendships between women are an important part of the novel. What did you think of the relationship between Bessie and Mollie and Mollie's fate, and the friendship between Bessie and Edla in death?
9. Were you surprised that Abe was acquitted? Do you think if the second trial was held today that he would have been found guilty again? Do you think the fact that Bessie was a prostitute influenced the all-male jury's verdict?
10. Were you surprised about Abe's life of crime after his acquittal and his apparent suicide?
11. It's been nearly 150 years since Bessie's death and she's still remembered. Songs have been written about her, a group in Jefferson has performed a play about her since 1955, and a woman in Albuquerque has a one-woman show about Bessie. Why do you think she is still remembered after all this time?

During my research I read the autobiographies of a few late 19th-century prostitutes (fascinating, to say the least). In one of them, the author described a champagne punch that her madam always served on New Year's Eve. So, of course I had to include it in my novel... and to make it myself!

The recipe described in the book didn't include the proportions for the ingredients, so I did a Google search and, lo and behold, there was a popular punch in the 1800s called Legare Street Punch, named for a historic street in Charleston, South Carolina. The madam in the autobiography and Bessie's madam put a twist on it with the fresh fruit slices and mint.

The recipe calls for Sauternes wine, which is pricey, so if you'd like, another sweet wine is a good substitute. A brandy may also be used if you don't want to splurge on a French cognac. Champagne is great, but it doesn't need to be expensive or French. Any sparkling wine will do, including prosecco.

You'll need a punch bowl and a LARGE block of ice. You can make one in the freezer at home: Fill a plastic bowl or an empty ice cream carton with warm water and freeze it overnight. Tip: put some strawberries in the water that you freeze and only use the citrus slices and mint in the punch.

"PARLOR HOUSE" CHAMPAGNE PUNCH

Size: 10-12 servings

Ingredients:

- 2 cups Sauternes or other good dessert wine (tip: my friends and I prefer it with just one cup of sweet wine)
- 1 cup cognac or brandy
- 1 bottle (750 milliliters) champagne
- 1 large block of ice
- Freshly sliced oranges, lemons, strawberries, and mint

Directions:

Combine the Sauternes (or other sweet wine) and the cognac (or brandy) in a mixing bowl. Add the champagne, stirring slowly and gently to preserve the fizz. Place the ice block in the punch bowl and slowly pour the punch over it. Add the fruit slices and a few sprigs of mint and serve immediately. Tip: the concoction is best very chilled.

Enjoy!