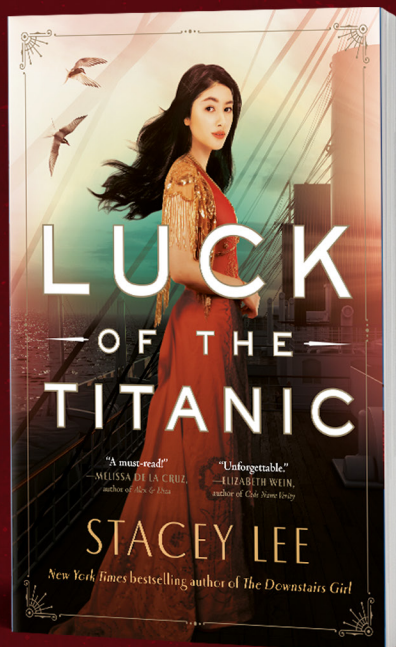
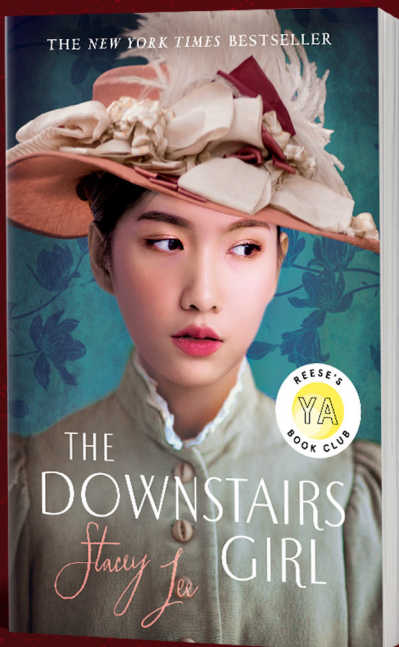
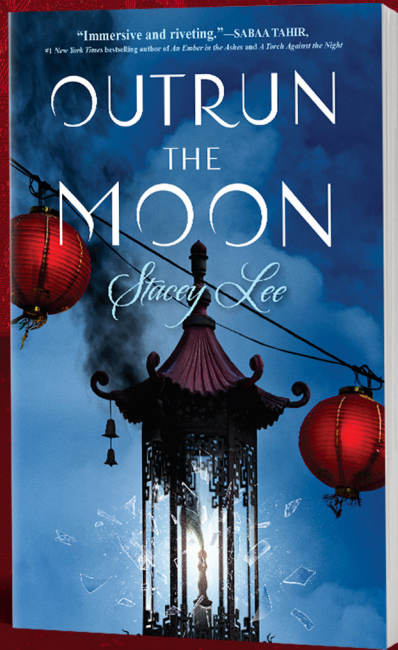
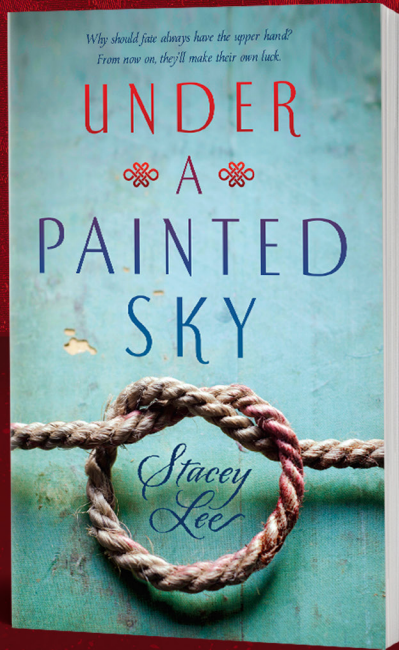
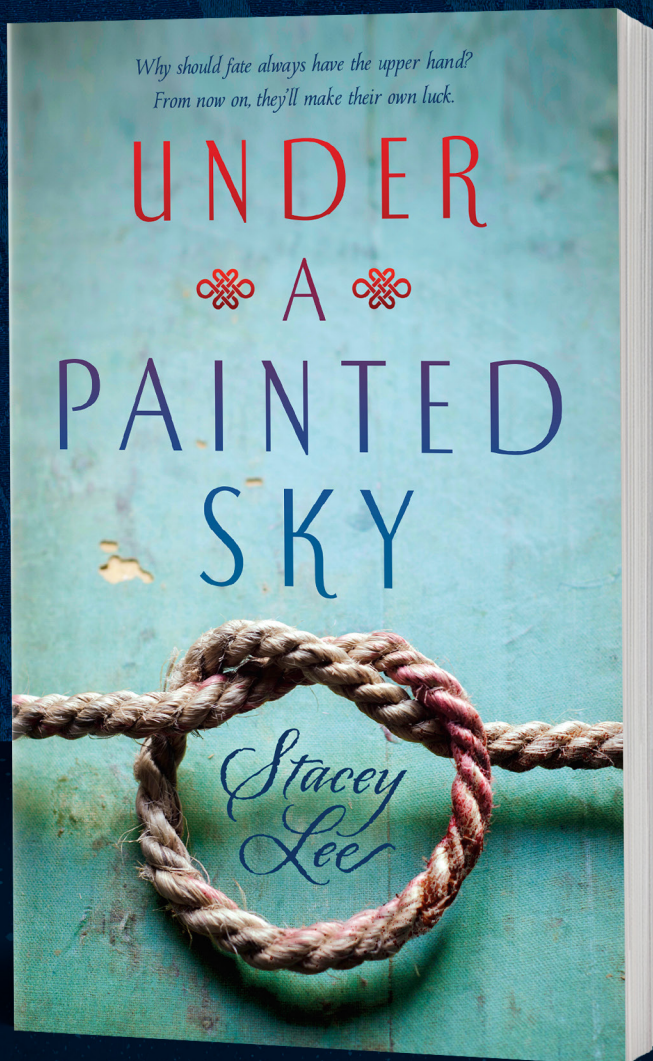


A DISCUSSION GUIDE TO THE WORKS OF
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Stacey Lee





★
“**Emotionally resonant** and not without humor, this impressive debut about **survival and connection, resourcefulness and perseverance** will keep readers on the very edges of their seats.”

—KIRKUS REVIEWS,
starred review

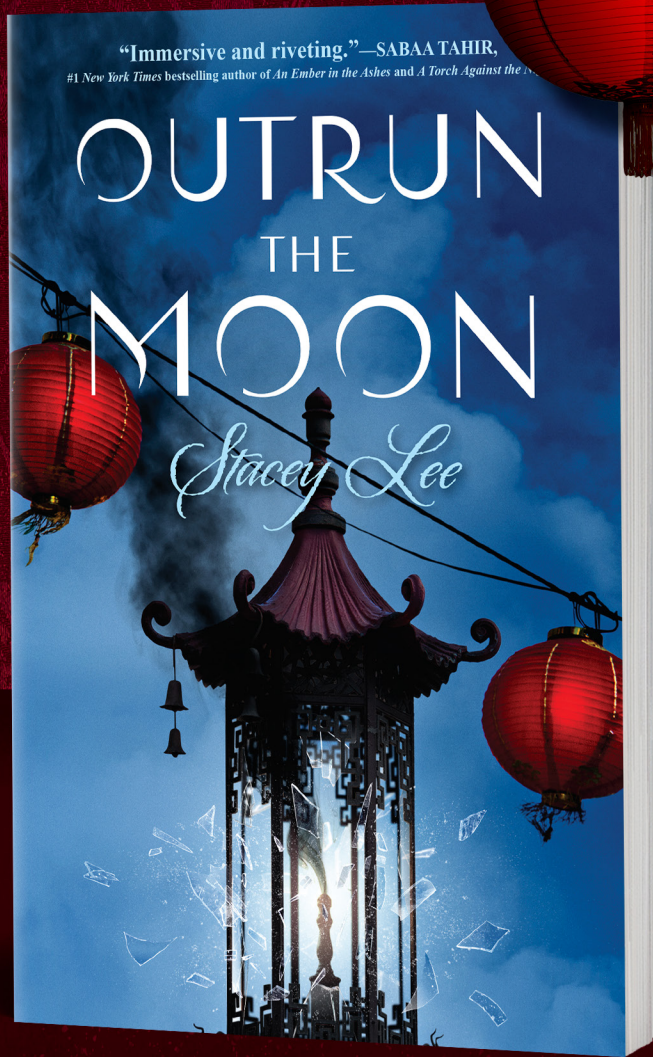
ABOUT

After a tragic accident where Samantha, a Chinese girl living in Missouri in 1849, uses fatal force in self-defense, she must run away from everything she knows. With help from Annamae, a runaway slave she meets at the scene of her crime, the two flee town for the unknown frontier. However, life on the Oregon Trail is unsafe for two girls. Disguised as Sammy and Andy, two boys headed for the California gold rush, each searches for a link to her past and struggles to avoid any unwanted attention. Then the two girls merge paths with a band of cowboys-turned-allies, and face dangers they never expected on the open trail.

WINNER OF THE SCBWI CRYSTAL KITE AWARD
AN AMELIA BLOOMER BOOK
AN ALA BEST FICTION FOR YOUNG ADULTS PICK

Discussion Questions

1. Andy says, “God makes our bodies want to live, no matter what our minds want to do” (pp. 13 and 368). In what ways do Sammy and Andy fight to survive even when surrounded by tragedy and hopelessness?
2. Sammy often reflects on luck and fate. Is Sammy responsible for the things that happen on her journey? In what ways are things out of her hands? How do she and her friends respond to unlucky situations, and what does that say about their characters?
3. Sammy begins to consider her companions to be like family. What characteristics determine family for her? What do you think makes up a family in general?
4. Because of her talents for languages and music, Sammy has a gift for communicating with many different people in many different ways. How does this help her throughout her journey? How do these abilities connect her to both her past and her future?
5. Sammy, Andy, and the Broken Hand Gang are considered to be in legal trouble, even if they had strong or necessary reasons for their actions and running away. How do societal expectations and prejudices influence the perceived morality or immorality of their actions? What should justice look like in these situations?
Some examples to consider:
 - Andy escaping slavery
 - Sammy killing Ty Yorkshire in self-defense
 - The Broken Hand Gang scaring people in order to get supplies
 - Isaac feeling responsible for the death of a baby
6. In disguising themselves, Sammy and Andy are able to conceal themselves from prejudice based on their gender, but they are unable to escape prejudice based on their race. Compare and contrast their experiences at the beginning of the book to their experiences later on—in what ways are their marginalizations as a Chinese American woman and an African American woman similar to and different than their marginalizations as a perceived Chinese American man and African American man?
7. Chinese lunar signs play a large role in the story, and Sammy often discusses them when analyzing someone’s personality and behavior, including her own. Discuss how Sammy’s approach to understanding people informs her approach to understanding her own fate. For example, what role does her interpretation of her Snake luck play in how she approaches difficult situations? What kinds of patterns does she see in the way different characters act, and how does that affect how she interacts with them?
8. Throughout much of the book, Sammy struggles with whether she should follow the path her father had planned or join her companions down a new path. The ending is ambiguous; it is not stated which way Sammy travels next. Based on their thoughts and comments throughout the story, what choices might Sammy and her friends make next?



ABOUT

In San Francisco in 1906, a spot at St. Clare's School for Girls is off-limits for all but the wealthiest white girls. However, fifteen-year-old Mercy Wong knows that education is the best way out of Chinatown's squalor. Through a mix of cunning and a little bribery, Mercy gains admittance. Then a massive earthquake destroys Mercy's home and school. With the city in shambles and martial law in effect, she's forced to wait with her classmates for their families in a temporary park encampment. Days pass, some families never surface, and the help they're promised does not arrive. But Mercy's determination helps create a haven from the ashes for those suffering in her broken city.

“Immersive and riveting.”

—SABAA TAHIR,
#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of
An Ember in the Ashes

WINNER OF THE
PEN CENTER USA LITERARY AWARD
FOR YOUNG ADULT

WINNER OF THE ASIAN/PACIFIC
AMERICAN AWARD FOR LITERATURE

AN ALA BEST FICTION FOR
YOUNG ADULTS PICK

AN AMELIA BLOOMER BOOK

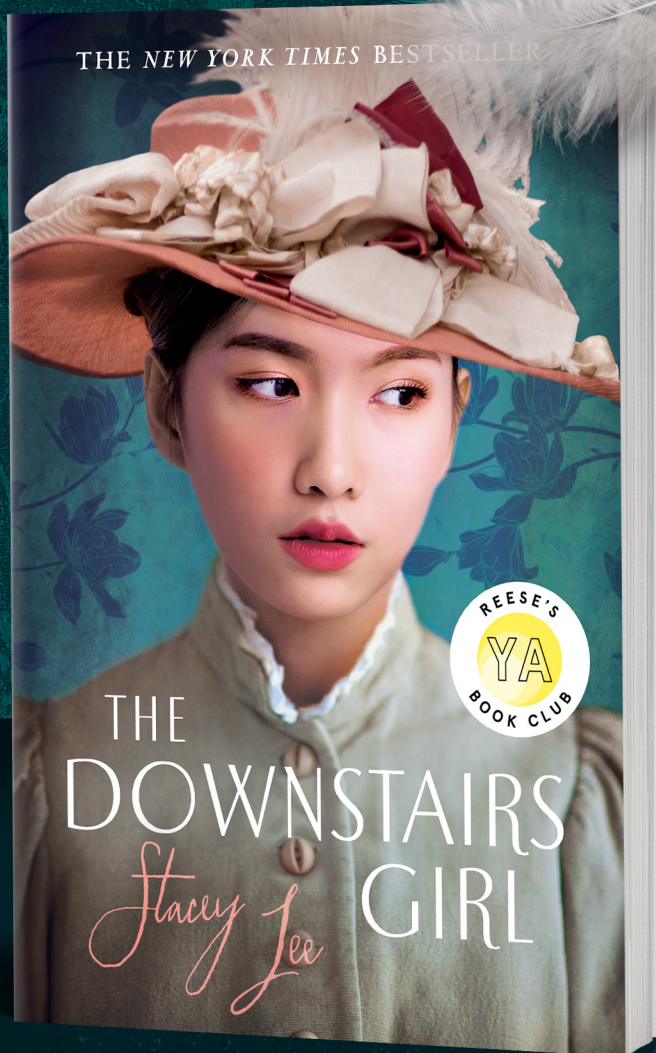
A NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR

★
“Propelled by a feisty and fabulous heroine, Lee’s sophomore novel is **powerful, evocative, and thought-provoking.**”

—KIRKUS REVIEWS,
starred review

Discussion Questions

1. Similar to Jo in *The Downstairs Girl*, Mercy Wong is criticized for having bossy cheeks—“high cheekbones indicate an assertive, ambitious nature” (p. 12). Why do you think Stacey Lee writes characters with this attribute? What other similarities between her characters can you pinpoint? What differences?
2. *Outrun the Moon* delves into the issue of what it means to be an American. Which characters other than Mercy are dealing with this question? How does race play into the subtleties of who is deemed “American” or not? How does class play into this issue?
3. On page 132, Mercy says, “we can measure our lives by our pain.” Identify the instances of pain throughout the novel and create a timeline of these moments, involving all characters. Is there a common underlying theme to these occurrences?
4. Elodie tells Mercy that “Class is not something you can connive your way into” (p. 135). Take a look at this argument and discuss the ways that the characters are either immovable or movable. How do race, gender, and class intersect when looking at these distinctions?
5. On page 28, Lee writes, “if opportunity didn’t come knocking, then Mrs. Lowry says you must build your own door.” How do the characters in *Outrun the Moon* create their own opportunities, instead of waiting for it to come knocking?
6. Read the paragraph on page 176 about the yam tiger and yeung dragon to your students. How could the power struggles described in this passage reflect the power struggles present between the different characters and ethnic groups in the novel?
7. Mercy is primarily motivated by her strong connection to her family, particularly to her younger brother, Jack. Discuss the ways in which love for family members affects the decisions that Mercy makes.
8. Consider the interaction between Minnie Mae and the deaf Black man in chapter 26. Use Mercy’s thought of “the poor man, whose intentions were so quickly imagined for him because of the way the light hits his skin” as a jumping-off point for discussions on current events in America (p. 226).
9. The idea of “passing” is pervasive throughout Lee’s writing, and shows itself in *Outrun the Moon* primarily through issues of class. Which characters are “passing” for something other than what they are, and what are the repercussions of these subterfuges?



“Immersive, important, and thoroughly entertaining, *The Downstairs Girl* sparkles with all of Stacey Lee’s signature humor, charm, warmth, and wisdom.”

—KELLY LOY GILBERT,
Morris Award finalist for *Conviction*

ABOUT

By day, seventeen-year-old Jo Kuan works as a lady’s maid for the cruel daughter of one of the wealthiest men in Atlanta. But by night, Jo moonlights as the pseudonymous author of a newspaper advice column for the genteel Southern lady, “Dear Miss Sweetie.” When her column becomes wildly popular, she uses the power of the pen to address some of society’s ills, but she’s not prepared for the backlash that follows when her column challenges fixed ideas about race and gender. While her opponents clamor to uncover the secret identity of Miss Sweetie, a mysterious letter sets Jo off on a search for her own past and the parents who abandoned her as a baby. But when her efforts put her in the crosshairs of Atlanta’s most notorious criminal, Jo must decide whether she, a girl used to living in the shadows, is ready to step into the light. With prose that is witty, insightful, and at times heartbreaking, Stacey Lee masterfully crafts an extraordinary social drama set in the New South.

“A bold portrait of this country’s past, brilliantly painted with wit, heartbreak, and unflinching honesty.

Everyone needs to read this book.”

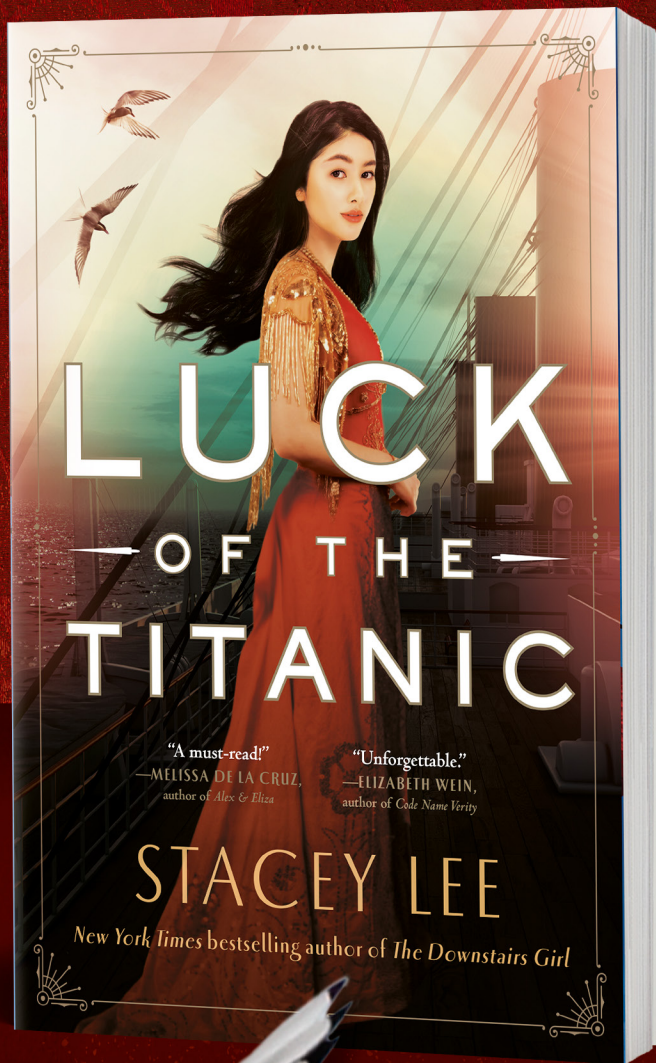
—STEPHANIE GARBER,
New York Times bestselling author of *Caraval*

“By shining a light on the lives of those whom history usually ignores, Stacey Lee gives us **a marvelous gift**: An entirely new and riveting look at our past.”

—CANDACE FLEMING,
award-winning author of *The Family Romanov*

Discussion Questions

1. Stacey Lee says in her author’s note that she’s “always trying to tell the stories of people who’ve fallen through the cracks.” Why are these important stories to tell? In what ways both literal and metaphorical is Jo Kuan someone who has fallen through the cracks?
2. Part of Jo’s identity is informed by the racial dichotomy of Black vs. white. As a Chinese person, Jo doesn’t fall into either side of this divide, providing her with both privileges as a non-Black person and marginalizations as a non-white person. What are the different ways both Jo’s privilege and lack thereof are exemplified throughout the story? What does that mean for someone who experiences intersectional identities?
3. Jo often shrouds herself in shadows, whether it’s literally in the basement of the Bells’ home, or figuratively under the pseudonym of Miss Sweetie. How else do shadows appear throughout *The Downstairs Girl*? What characters also spend time in the shadows? How do the intersections of race and gender play into their hidden selves?
4. Jo is criticized for being opinionated at Mrs. English’s millinery, but subscribers love Miss Sweetie’s saucebox comments—think about what distinguishes Jo from Miss Sweetie and compare.
5. Characters in the book are both encouraged to and discouraged from sharing their opinions based on their race and gender. What does this say about the society that dictates these unspoken rules?
6. Words and language are very important in *The Downstairs Girl*, whether they’re Old Gin’s sayings, Miss Sweetie’s clever turns of phrase, or the ways different characters address one another, depending on their station. Discuss the use of language in the novel and identify ways, both large and small, that the words used define the situation.
7. On page 39, Jo states that “Someone needs to blow the trumpets of change. Someone who has viewed society both from the top branch and the bottom, from the inside of the tree and from the outside.” How do different characters’ actions match this description? What kinds of change are they trying to effect, both big and small?
8. Miss Sweetie tackles many issues of the day in her columns and uses her platform to shed light on injustice. Discuss the changes Miss Sweetie is able to make through her writing, and how that impacts her life both directly and indirectly throughout the story.
9. Naomi says, “We got to jump in and make the rules . . . Or someone else will make them for us” (p. 115). In what ways do Jo and other characters attempt to make the rules? What role do rules—and their breaking, expanding, and reimagining—play in the story?



“A
thrilling historical
page-turner.
A must-read!”

—MELISSA DE LA CRUZ,
New York Times bestselling
author of *Alex & Eliza*

ABOUT

Valora Luck has two things: a ticket for the biggest and most luxurious ocean liner in the world, and a dream of leaving England behind and making a life for herself as a circus performer in New York. Much to her surprise though, she's turned away at the gangway; apparently, Chinese aren't allowed into America. But Val has to get on that ship. Her twin brother Jamie, who has spent two long years at sea, is there, as is an influential circus owner, whom Val hopes to audition for. Thankfully, there's not much a trained acrobat like Val can't overcome when she puts her mind to it. As a stowaway, Val should keep her head down and stay out of sight. But the clock is ticking and she has just seven days as the ship makes its way across the Atlantic to find Jamie, perform for the circus owner, and convince him to help get them both into America. Then one night the unthinkable happens, and suddenly Val's dreams of a new life are crushed under the weight of the only thing that matters: survival.

“Stacey Lee's superpower is her ability to turn **history's forgotten into today's unforgettable**; and you'll never forget the terror and joy of travelling with Valora Luck, whose unsinkable spirit gleams like a rescue flare through the icy murk of the past.”

—ELIZABETH WEIN,
#1 New York Times bestselling author of
Code Name Verity

“Stacey Lee has breathed new life and love into this iconic voyage, with **all the hopes, fears, and complexities of an immigrant journey**. I will never forget the courageous Valora Luck.”

—ABIGAIL HING WEN,
New York Times bestselling author of
Loveboat, Taipei

Discussion Questions

1. A lot of information and media exists about the ill-fated voyage of the *Titanic*, yet there is always more to be uncovered. What did you know about the *Titanic* going in? Did you learn anything new from *Luck of the Titanic* and its author's notes?
2. Valora stows away on the *Titanic*, splitting her time between posing as her former boss, Mrs. Sloane, in first class, and posing as a young man with her brother and his friends in third class. What were the advantages and disadvantages to both as she attempts to hide her true identity?
3. Valora notes, “The English love all things Chinese—silk, tea, plates—just not if it comes with a beating heart” (p. 68). While on the *Titanic*, Valora, her brother Jamie, and his friends encounter many instances of racism, prejudice, and cultural appropriation. How does this affect their experience on board? How did this affect their chances of escaping the sinking ship?
4. Throughout *Luck of the Titanic*, Valora experiences several dreams involving not being able to reach her brother and not being able to help their late father. How does the meaning of her dreams change throughout the story? What do they ultimately mean to her?
5. Jamie is less willing to forgive their father for his drinking, at one point saying, “Sometimes you can't forgive because it cheapens the people you love” (p. 81). How did you interpret his words? Do you agree or disagree with his statement?
6. At first Jamie's friend Bo and Valora don't see eye to eye, clashing over what each of them thinks is best for Jamie. How do they come to understand each other?
7. During her time on the *Titanic*, Valora encounters many signs of luck for the people around her, both good and bad. She muses that, “Luck wears many faces. The number four for Fong, twins for Ba, a crane for April. Are we all just looking for the heavens to speak, to assure us that things will turn out right?” (p. 104). Do you have any luck-related superstitions, be they good or bad?
8. At some point in the story, Valora's friend April notes, “Grudges are like heavy skirts—they're just extra weight” (pp. 217-218). Both Jamie and Bo are holding grudges as they enter onto the *Titanic*—Jamie against his deceased alcoholic father, and Bo against Fong, who he believes to be responsible for his brother's death. How do their grudges affect the decisions they make? How did their view of grudges change once tragedy strikes?
9. Throughout the story, Valora recites a piece of advice from her father: “Life is a balancing act, and the better you get at juggling, the better you get at living.” When Valora and Jamie are offered the opportunity to join the circus as a pair, Valora opts to let Jamie go, knowing that they don't want the same future: “Life is a balancing act, and the better you get at juggling, the better you get at living. But juggling is not an act of holding tight. It's an act of letting go—of giving the people you love the time and space to figure out their own orbit. And it's an act of catching” (pp. 278-279). How does Valora's view of life ultimately differ from her father's?
10. How did knowing about the fate of the *Titanic*'s voyage influence your experience reading the book? Were you surprised by the ending?



ABOUT

LOS ANGELES, 1932: Lulu Wong, star of the silver screen and the pride of Chinatown, has a face known to practically everyone, especially the Chow sisters—May, Gemma, and Peony—Lulu’s former classmates and neighbors. So the girls instantly know it’s Lulu when they discover a body one morning in an out-of-the-way stable, far from the Beverly Hills home where she lived after her fame skyrocketed. The sisters suspect Lulu’s death is the result of foul play, but the police don’t seem motivated to investigate. Even worse, there are signs that point to a cover-up, and powerful forces in the city want to frame the killing as evidence that Chinatown is a den of iniquity and crime, even more reason it should be demolished to make room for the construction of a new railway depot, Union Station. Worried that neither the police nor the papers will treat Lulu fairly—no matter her fame and wealth—the sisters set out to solve their friend’s murder themselves, and maybe save their neighborhood in the bargain. But with Lulu’s killer still on the loose, the girls’ investigation just might put them square in the crosshairs of a cold-blooded murderer.

“In this **thrilling exposé of injustice**, the power of love and community shines brightest.”

—**J. ELLE**,
New York Times bestselling author of
House of Marionne

“With its **riveting mystery and thoughtfully drawn characters**, I fell in love with this beautifully crafted novel. This book stole my heart, as all of Stacey’s stories do.”

—**ISABEL IBÁÑEZ**,
#1 New York Times bestselling author of
What the River Knows

Discussion Questions

1. Before going to sell their wares at a new location, Gemma explains, “Lipstick was a minor investment for a bigger payoff” (p. 4). What does the motif of lipstick signify? How does it help or hinder the characters that interact with it?
2. After finding Lulu’s body, we see Gemma musing, “A rivulet of anger coursed through me. Sure, the wheels of justice turned for some, but others they just ran right over. Lulu Wong was wealthy, but she had also been Chinese. Which part mattered in the end?” (p. 52). This book is set in 1932. Can you think of any examples of this phenomenon in modern times? Which part of Lulu’s identity would win out if her murder was being investigated today?
3. Before she dies, Lulu tells May, “Sometimes you can’t just open the front door to air out the house. Sometimes you have to come in from the side, through a window. Sure, it’s work to lift it, even a crack. But once you get your fingers under it, the lifting gets easier. And when the sweet breeze fills the space, change will follow” (p. 62). How did Lulu “lift the window” for others in her industry? Are there any ways you can do this in your own life?
4. May and Gemma’s relationship is sometimes complicated by their very different personalities. How do their differences help them in their investigation? How do they hinder them?
5. When the girls went to visit Mr. King, Gemma noticed, “The scowl on his face disappeared when he saw us with a bright bunch of chrysanthemums. ‘Thank you, girls. Chrysanthemums are the kings of flowers’” (p. 85). What roles do the flowers play throughout the book? Of all the things the girls could sell, why would the author choose flowers?
6. When May jokingly claims that “Acting is like peeling back layers”, Lulu responds, “We don’t have to peel back all the layers” (p. 137). What layers did Lulu keep to herself in her acting career? Did her choice to do so end up helping or hurting her in the end?
7. Compare and contrast May’s and Gemma’s respective love interests. Both are in positions of privilege, but for different reasons. How do they use their privileges differently, and how does that impact their relationships with the girls?
8. When discussing sneaking into a fancy ball, Gemma and May have this argument: “‘If O.F. is Fox, don’t you think he’ll notice two Chinese girls crashing the party? He’s got a special nose for our kind.’ ‘He hires our “kind” to fetch and carry. As long as we know our place, he won’t look twice at us’” (p. 86). How does the racial identity of the sisters impact their ability to participate in high society? How do they use this to their advantage?
9. On a date with Wallace, May notices, “Straggly eucalyptus trees dotted the hills, eyeing the telephone poles as if fearing that might be their fate too. That was progress, wasn’t it? It didn’t matter that the trees had lives. If the city wanted them to clear out, they had to go” (p. 163). What is the cost of progress? Does all progress have to come at the expense of others? Can you think of any examples of this today?
10. Despite the long fight to save Chinatown, the family still elects to leave in the end. Do you view this as a happy ending? A sad ending? Why do you think the author chose to conclude this way?



“A **captivating and crackling noir** full of suspenseful twists. Readers will fall in love with the Chow sisters and their quest for the truth.”

—**KATHLEEN GLASGOW**,
#1 New York Times bestselling
author of *Girl in Pieces*
and *The Agathas*

About Stacey Lee





Stacey Lee is the *New York Times* bestselling author of historical and contemporary young adult fiction, including *The Downstairs Girl*, a Reese’s Book Club YA Pick; *Luck of the Titanic*; *Under a Painted Sky*; and *Outrun the Moon*, the winner of the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature. A native of southern California and a fourth-generation Chinese American, she is a cofounder of the We Need Diverse Books movement and writes stories for all kids (even the ones who look like adults).

Visit Stacey at StaceyHLee.com or follow her on Twitter and Instagram @StaceyLeeAuthor.

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