



BOOKS IN A BAG

KIT 30A

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THE BOOKBINDER OF JERICO

AUTHOR: Pip Williams

ABOUT THE BOOK

In 1914, when the war draws the young men of Britain away to fight, it is the women who must keep the nation running. Two of those women are Peggy and Maude, twin sisters who work in the bindery at Oxford University Press in Jericho. Peggy is intelligent, ambitious and dreams of studying at Oxford University, but for most of her life she has been told her job is to bind the books, not read them. Maude, meanwhile, wants nothing more than what she has. She is extraordinary but vulnerable. Peggy needs to watch over her. When refugees arrive from the devastated cities of Belgium, it sends ripples through the community and through the sisters' lives. Peggy begins to see the possibility of another future where she can use her intellect and not just her hands, but as war and illness reshape her world, it is love, and the responsibility that comes with it, that threaten to hold her back.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pip Williams was born in London, grew up in Sydney, and now lives in the Adelaide Hills of South Australia with her family and an assortment of animals. She has spent most of her working life as a social researcher, studying what keeps us well and what helps us thrive, and she is the author of *One Italian Summer*, a memoir of her family's travels in search of the good life, which was published by Affirm Press to wide acclaim. Her first novel, *The Dictionary of Lost Words*, based on her original research in the Oxford English Dictionary archives, was published in 2020 and became an international bestseller. *The Bookbinder of Jericho* is her second novel, a companion to *The Dictionary of Lost Words*, and again combines her talent for historical research and beautiful storytelling.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. "Without a word, I was dismissed." What role do you think class plays in Peggy's relationship to books and knowledge?
2. Miss Garnell says, "[War] can be uncomfortable for some but an opportunity for others. It seems appalling to think there might be a silver lining." Consider the silver linings that may have existed for women during World War I. Are they different for middle- and for working-class women?
3. Each section of *The Bookbinder of Jericho* is informed by a book that Peggy helps to bind. Why do you think the author has chose to structure the novel in this way?
4. Do you think this novel has a villain? If so, who or what is it?
5. Bastiaan and Lotte are both Belgian refugees who escaped the carnage of Louvain, but their lived in Oxford turn out very differently. What do you think their stories tell us about the impact of trauma on individuals?
6. We know that Peggy has always dreamed if studying, so why do you think she is so resistant when she has the opportunity?
7. "Lotte sighed. 'She is not a child.' But she looked away, remembering perhaps, when that was exactly what she thought Maude was." How does our understanding of Maude change over the course of the novel?
8. During an argument, Peggy says of her wealthy friend Gwen: "I hated her then, her privilege and advantage..." Do you think Peggy is justified in her frustration with Gwen?
9. What do you think Tilda Taylor's Role is in the book and in the sisters' lives?

