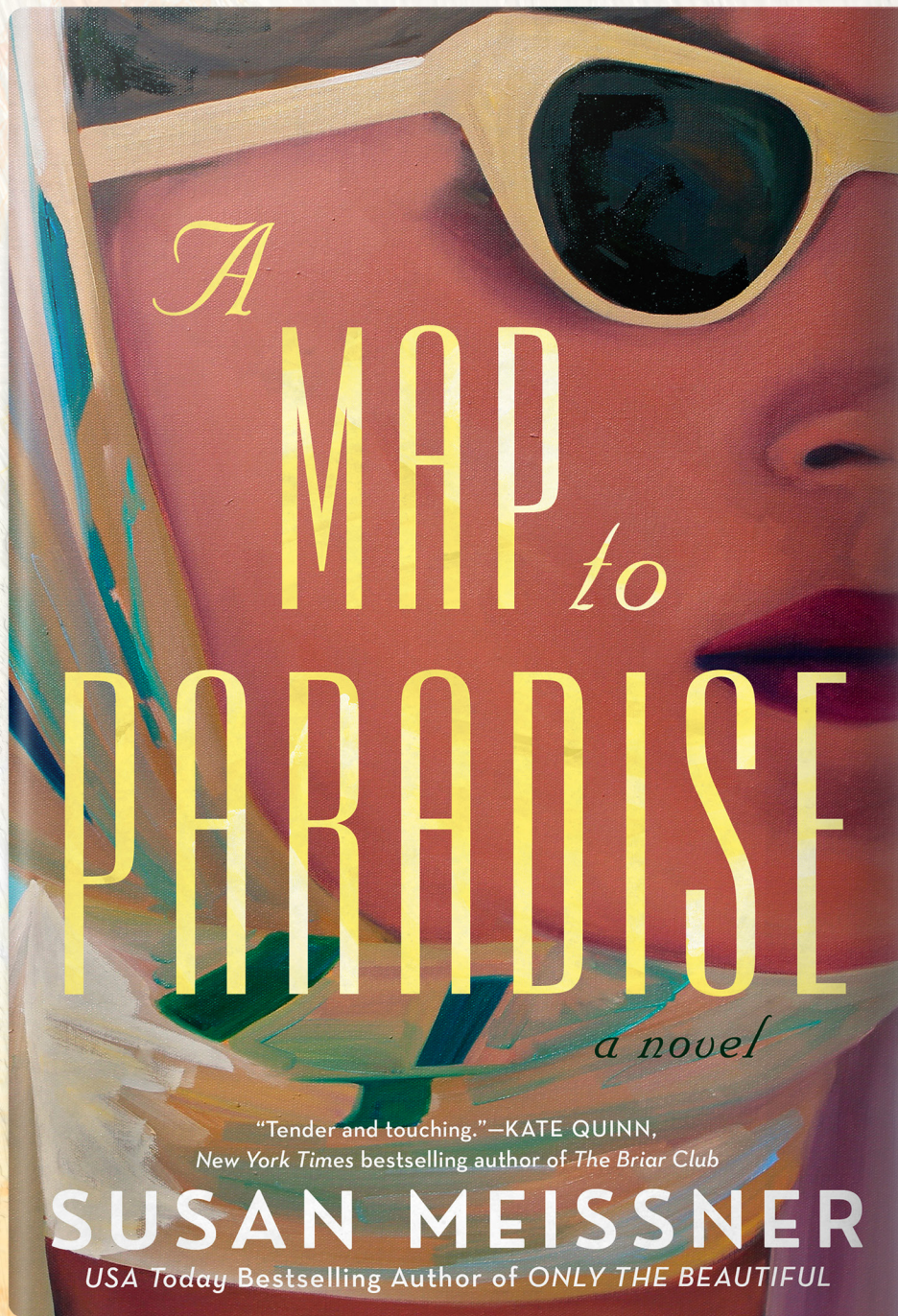


# Book Club Kit



BERKLEY



# *A Letter from* SUSAN MEISSNER


## ***Dear fellow book lover,***

The 1950s are fondly remembered as happy, postwar years full of great music, great cars, and great fashion. But take a closer look and it's clear it was also a decade of great unease and fear. The Cold War was still very new and menacing, everyone was afraid of the Bomb, and McCarthyism was rampant—especially in Hollywood, of all places. All of this contributed to a sense that everything that made us feel secure was at risk. Our sense of home hung in the balance.

We don't use the word "displacement" much in everyday conversation these days, but to be deprived of home or to be facing its imminent loss aptly describes what it means to be displaced. Your sense of belonging is gone. Where you are now is not home for you, and returning to where you do belong seems impossible without immense risk or sacrifice.

*A Map to Paradise* is a novel that explores this concept of displacement through the lives of three women living in 1956 on the same cul-de-sac in the coastal paradise that is Malibu, California. One is a newly famous actress suddenly blacklisted by association during the Hollywood Red Scare, another is her housekeeper—a Displaced Person from Eastern Europe who lost everyone and everything in World War II—and the third is the actress's next-door neighbor—a widow caring for her agoraphobic brother-in-law. If he dies, she has nothing—and he's not well.

They are all figuratively looking for a map to guide them back to a life of happiness and security, and though this is truly the only



thing they have in common, they become unlikely friends when their deepest desires are suddenly aligned on the eve of one of Malibu's historic wildfires. There is nothing like a raging wildfire to remind one that a hold on home is often fragile. This is a story not only about our collective need for a sense of belonging, but also what we are willing to do to get it back when it's been taken from us. Or the lengths we will go to in order to keep it.

Malibu is renowned for its excellent surf, movie star residents, and rugged coastal charm, but sadly, it's also famous for dozens of devastating wildfires over the last ten decades. My heart goes out to all those who've suffered losses in these historic blazes, as well as those who today live in Malibu, and who every year during fire season have to keep an eye to the sky. The loss of home, which *A Map to Paradise* explores in detail, is life-defining and can shake us to our core if we let it. But Malibu always rebuilds, and to me, that is what hope looks like.

If you'd like for me to be a small part of a book club gathering via Zoom to discuss the novel, please visit my website at [susanmeissnerauthor.com](http://susanmeissnerauthor.com) (click the book clubs tab) for details on how to arrange that visit.

You are the reason I write,


**SUSAN MEISSNER**

*But Malibu always rebuilds,  
and to me, that is  
what hope looks like.*



# Discussion Questions

1. When the women in the novel meet on Paradise Circle, all three are feeling the loss or imminent loss of their sense of belonging. Why is each woman struggling with a sense of crippling displacement? Are they on Paradise Circle by choice or circumstance?
2. Has your sense of “I’m right where I belong” ever been similarly threatened or taken from you? How did you recover it? Or how did you adapt?
3. How important is the concept of home to you? In what ways was your sense of home shaped by your life experiences?
4. June, Melanie, and Eva all see themselves as victims in some way. Do you agree that they are victims? Who do you think is and who do you think isn’t, and why?
5. Do you think the women end up becoming friends because of these similarities or despite them? Do you think their friendship helps them ultimately find happiness? What would have happened to each, do you think, if they hadn’t met?
6. What did you learn about the Hollywood blacklist from Melanie’s experience? How do you think the 1950s compares to today, with social media and cancel culture?

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7. Do you think Melanie made the right choice to stay close to Hollywood despite being blacklisted? What would you have done?
  8. What do you think of Carson? Do you think he did enough to make up for being the reason Melanie was blacklisted?
  9. Guilt can manifest itself in many ways, and Elwood had an especially hard time with it. Can you sympathize with his fear of leaving the house, or even his room? Have you ever known someone who suffered from agoraphobia?
  10. Do you think Elwood was right to leave the house to Ruthie's sons? Was June right to be upset about it?
  11. How did Nicky's arrival change Melanie? Do you think things would have been different had Alex not left him with her?
  12. June covered up the death of a man she cherished, whereas Eva covered up the death of a man who was dangerous. Do you think either was more justified in her action?
  13. Why do you think Eva kept her secret about Ernst even when June told her about what happened with Elwood? How do their experiences differ?
  14. If you had access to a time machine like the one June imagined for herself, would you use it? If so, where in time would you want to go and why?