

Rare Reads May Book Selections

***One Plus One* by Jojo Moyes**

Suppose your life sucks. A lot. Your husband has done a vanishing act, your teenage stepson is being bullied and your math whiz daughter has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that you can't afford to pay for. That's Jess's life in a nutshell—until an unexpected knight-in-shining-armor offers to rescue them. Only Jess's knight turns out to be Geeky Ed, the obnoxious tech millionaire whose vacation home she happens to clean. But Ed has big problems of his own, and driving the dysfunctional family to the Math Olympiad feels like his first unselfish act in ages . . . maybe ever.

***The Art Forger* by B.A. Shapiro**

On March 18, 1990, thirteen works of art today worth over \$500 million were stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. It remains the largest unsolved art heist in history, and Claire Roth, a struggling young artist, is about to discover that there's more to this crime than meets the eye. Making a living reproducing famous artworks for a popular online retailer and desperate to improve her situation, Claire is lured into a Faustian bargain with Aiden Markel, a powerful gallery owner. She agrees to forge a painting—a Degas masterpiece stolen from the Gardner Museum—in exchange for a one-woman show in his renowned gallery. But when that very same long-missing Degas painting is delivered to Claire's studio, she begins to suspect that it may itself be a forgery.

***Empty Mansions* by Bill Dedman**

When Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Bill Dedman noticed in 2009 a grand home for sale, unoccupied for nearly sixty years, he stumbled through a surprising portal into American history. *Empty Mansions* is a rich mystery of wealth and loss, connecting the Gilded Age opulence of the nineteenth century with a twenty-first-century battle over a \$300 million inheritance. At its heart is a reclusive heiress named Huguette Clark, a woman so secretive that, at the time of her death at age 104, no new photograph of her had been seen in decades. Though she owned palatial homes in California, New York, and Connecticut, why had she lived for twenty years in a simple hospital room, despite being in excellent health? Why were her valuables being sold off? Was she in control of her fortune, or controlled by those managing her money?

***The Blazing World* by Siri Hustvedt**

Hustvedt tells the provocative story of the artist Harriet Burden. After years of watching her work ignored or dismissed by critics, Burden conducts an experiment she calls *Maskings*: she presents her own art behind three male masks, concealing her female identity. The three solo shows are successful, but when Burden finally steps forward triumphantly to reveal herself as the artist behind the exhibitions, there are critics who doubt her. The public scandal turns on the final exhibition, initially shown as the work of acclaimed artist Rune, who denies Burden's role in its creation. What no one doubts, however, is that the two artists were intensely involved with each other. As Burden's journals reveal, she and Rune found themselves locked in a charged and dangerous game that ended with the man's bizarre death.

***Benediction* by Kent Haruf**

When Dad Lewis is diagnosed with terminal cancer, he and his wife must work together, along with their daughter, to make his final days as comfortable as possible, despite the bitter absence of their estranged son. Next door, a young girl moves in with her grandmother and contends with the memories that Dad's condition stirs up of her own mother's death. A newly arrived preacher attempts to mend his strained relationships with his wife and son, and soon faces the disdain of his congregation when he offers more than they are used to getting on Sunday mornings. And throughout, an elderly widow and her middle-aged daughter do all they can to ease the pain of their friends and neighbors.

***The woman upstairs* by Claire Messud**

Nora Eldridge, a 37-year-old elementary school teacher in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is on the verge of disappearing. Having abandoned her desire to be an artist, she has become the "woman upstairs," a reliable friend and tidy neighbour always on the fringe of others' achievements. Then into her classroom walks a new pupil, Reza Shahid, a child who enchants as if from a fairy tale. He and his parents--dashing Skandar, a half-Muslim Professor of Ethical History born in Beirut, and Sirena, an effortlessly glamorous Italian artist--have come to America for Skandar to teach at Harvard. But one afternoon, Reza is attacked by schoolyard bullies who punch, push and call him a "terrorist," and Nora is quickly drawn deep into the complex world of the Shahid family. Soon she finds herself falling in love with them, separately and together. Nora's happiness explodes her boundaries--until Sirena's own ambition leads to a shattering betrayal.