



# The White Lake Beacon Book Club

March 2021 Pick:

## The Dutch House

By Ann Patchett

The White Lake Beacon's community "Beacon Book Club" is a monthly collaboration with The Book Nook & Java Shop and the White Lake Community Library. The first weekend of the month, The Beacon announces the book selection along with a summary and questions posed for readers. Replies to the questions and commentary can be sent to the editor at [editor@whitelakebeacon.com](mailto:editor@whitelakebeacon.com).

Chosen replies will be published in The Beacon on the last weekend of the month. The monthly book is available to borrow from the White Lake Community Library and for sale at The Book Nook for 20% off. Additionally, readers are invited to discuss the book safely in person at the Book Nook or via zoom the 1st Wednesday of the following month at 6pm. More information about the meeting, including the zoom link, is available on the Book Nook website [www.thebooknookjavashop.com](http://www.thebooknookjavashop.com).

This month's selection is *The Dutch House* by Ann Patchett in honor of Women's History Month. From the publisher:

Ann Patchett, the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Commonwealth*, delivers her most powerful novel to date: a richly moving story that explores the indelible bond between two siblings, the house of their childhood, and a past that will not let them go. *The Dutch House* is the story of a paradise lost, a tour de force that digs deeply into questions of inheritance, love and forgiveness, of how we want to see ourselves and of who we really are.

At the end of the Second World War, Cyril Conroy combines luck and a single canny investment to begin an enormous real estate empire, propelling his family from poverty to enormous wealth. His first order of business is to buy the Dutch House, a lavish estate in the suburbs outside of Philadelphia. Meant as a surprise for his wife, the house sets in motion the undoing of everyone he loves.

The story is told by Cyril's son Danny, as he and his older sister, the brilliantly acerbic and self-assured Maeve, are exiled from the house where they grew up by their step-

mother. The two wealthy siblings are thrown back into the poverty their parents had escaped from and find that all they have to count on is one another. It is this unshakeable bond between them that both saves their lives and thwarts their futures.

Set over the course of five decades, *The Dutch House* is a dark fairy tale about two smart people who cannot overcome their past. Despite every outward sign of success, Danny and Maeve are only truly comfortable when they're together. Throughout their lives they return to the well-worn story of what they've lost with humor and rage. But when at last they're forced to confront the people who left them behind, the relationship between an indulged brother and his ever-protective sister is finally tested.

Ann Patchett's rags-to-riches-to-rags story with siblings bound together after being displaced by their evil stepmother is vivid and engaging. Patchett is an award-winning author who co-founded Parnassus Books bookstore in Nashville. In 2012 she was on Time Magazine's 100 list of most influential people in the world.

#### Discussion Questions

1. Maeve and Danny have a strong bond, one that even Danny's wife doesn't understand. What accounts for that bond, and how does it help each to weather life's storms? What eventually challenges their bond?
2. *The Dutch House* is the story of both Maeve and Danny, but it's told only from Danny's perspective. How would the story be different if Maeve told it?
3. Long after they've been forced out of their childhood home, Maeve and Danny continue to return to the road in front of it where they talk and reminisce. Why are they drawn back to the house?
4. Maeve and Danny have different feelings about their mother's departure from and eventual return to the family. What accounts for the differences?
5. At the heart of *The Dutch House* are discussions of wealth, poverty, class, and luck. What might Patchett be suggesting about these things through the turbulent lives of the Conroy family?



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