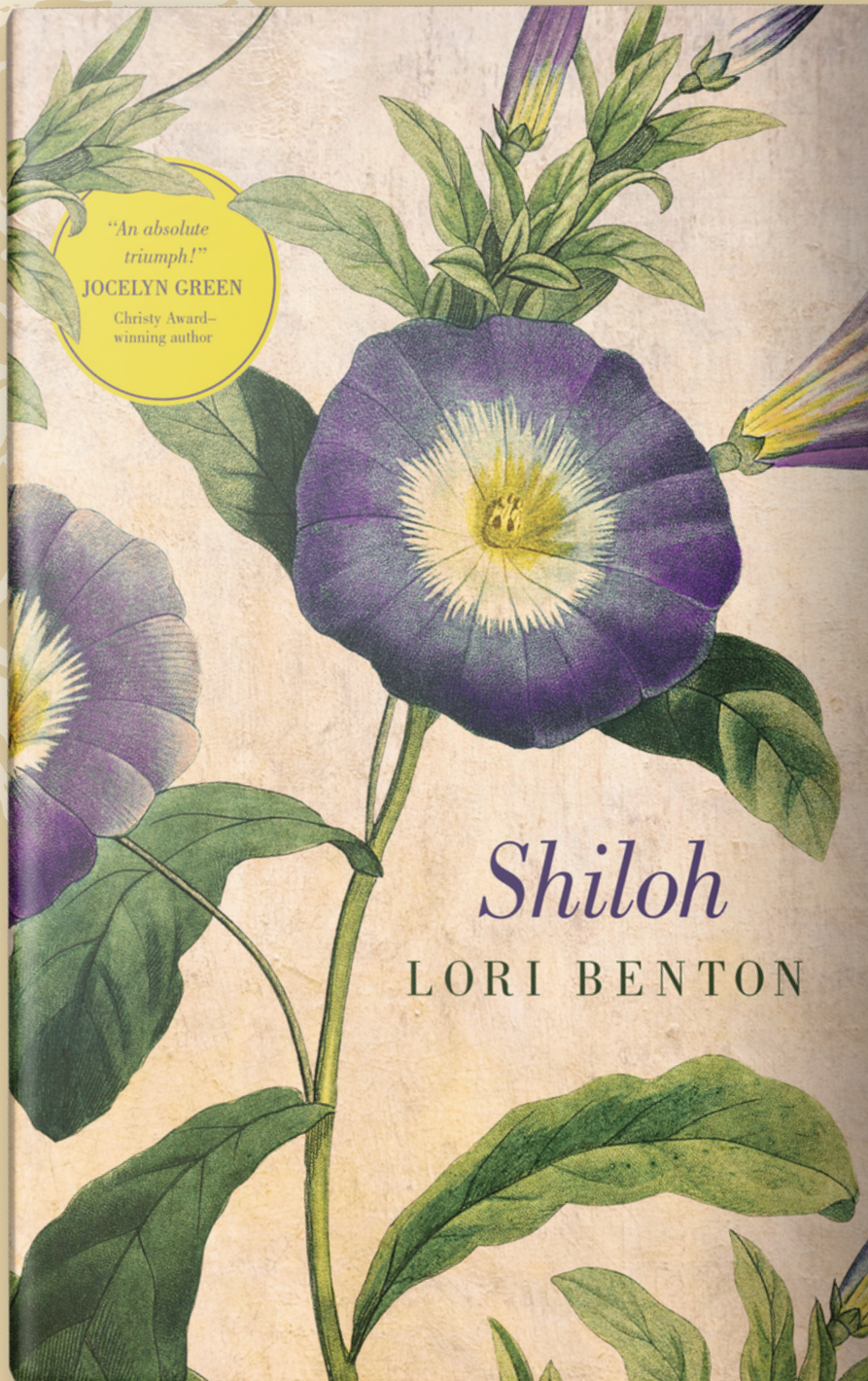


# BOOK CLUB KIT







LORI BENTON

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## *Meet Lori Benton*

Lori Benton was raised in Maryland, with generations-deep roots in southern Virginia and the Appalachian frontier. Her historical novels transport readers to the eighteenth century, where she expertly brings to life the colonial and early federal periods of American history. Her books have received the Christy Award and the Inspy Award and have been honored as finalists for the ECPA Book of the Year. Lori is most at home surrounded by mountains, currently those of the Pacific Northwest, where, when she isn't writing, she's likely to be found in wild places behind a camera.

Visit Lori's website at  
[loribenton.com](http://loribenton.com)



## Dear Reader,

Thank you for choosing *Shiloh* for your book club's read! When I think of book clubs, I imagine the reading and discussing of books (of course!), diving deep into themes, characters, setting, and in the case of my books, history. But I know there's more to a book club than that. In a book club setting, online or in person, friendships are formed. Community is built. Hospitality is practiced. And in person at least, no doubt there's food!

*Shiloh* has much to say about family, friendship, and community—particularly the community of believers and the family of Jesus Christ. How we need each other in our battles, both physical and spiritual. How we're shaped by the community we choose. How we in turn shape that community. Building a community of individuals and families coming alongside each other to walk through life in mutual support is one of my favorite aspects about writing early American frontier stories. I don't think this theme has shone stronger in any of my books than it has in *Shiloh*. In this second half of Ian and Seona's journey, it was a joy to show how God used family and community to bind up the wounds these characters have experienced.

And did I mention food? I did! In most of my gatherings with friends, there's food involved—especially since I long ago caught the baking bug. It was no different on the eighteenth-century New York frontier, you can be sure. Considering the subject of food and hospitality, what Kindred series character comes to mind? Probably it's Naomi, who has been setting wonderful meals on tables from North Carolina to New York for decades:

While Ian and Ally saw to the horses, Naomi ushered the rest into the new cabin she shared with her menfolk. Somehow plates or bowls were found for all and spots to sit. She had fixed a venison stew—"We was about to sit to it"—in her most capacious kettle and set to making up another batch of pone. When he and Ally rejoined them, Ian found barely room enough to squeeze inside, as Naomi scraped the kettle and served up the last of the stew.

*Shiloh*, p. 212-213



Join in the spirit of this impromptu feast Naomi stretched to feed an unexpected (but very welcome) crowd by re-creating the meal she served the day Seona, Lily, Gabriel, and Catriona arrived at Ian Cameron's farm. To help with that, check out my favorite resource for the eighteenth-century culinary experience, Townsends' YouTube channel. Below are links to three authentic historical recipes Naomi might very well have used. These videos will give you an idea of how cooking was done in the eighteenth century, but feel free to adapt them to your kitchen. Just be prepared to learn more than a recipe, because Townsends' videos are chock-full of history too.

- **Beef (or Venison) Stew:** While the meat shown is cooked and served as a roast, you could cut up the meat beforehand and serve the whole thing as a stew.  
<https://youtu.be/0DRkQ8SIKwk>
- **Corn Pone (Hoecakes):** <https://youtu.be/ecnSW1t4dLk>
- **Apple Pie:** Since Naomi is such an extraordinary baker, I had to include pie.  
<https://youtu.be/3WLebl5eNlg>

Whether you dive into this eighteenth-century cookery experience or simply enjoy the wonderful Townsend videos, thank you again for choosing *Shiloh* for your book club!

*Lori Benton*





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# Q&A WITH LORI BENTON

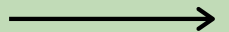
Prior to your book club discussion, read this Q&A with the author to further inform your conversation about the novel.

**What empowers the characters in *Shiloh* to hold on to hope amid tragedy and struggle?**

The hope these characters hold to isn't the hope the world offers, frail and easily crumbled. It's a hope that cannot be shaken. The hope found in the pages of Scripture, promised to us by a loving heavenly Father—that of a coming Kingdom where righteousness and justice will reign. Readers of *Mountain Laurel* will have already learned who in this cast of characters is a mainstay of that hope—the eldest of Mountain Laurel's slaves, Malcolm. Through the changing circumstances that come rolling over him and others in the pages of *Shiloh*, Malcolm continues to turn the gazes of Ian, Seona, and others in the direction of that hope, while teaching them the necessity of owning that hope for themselves and living by it.

**In *Shiloh*, Seona and Lily are now freed from slavery and able to start a new life. Did you find any interesting accounts of the lives of freed slaves in your research?**

I was intentional in finding them, wanting to understand what such women would be thinking and feeling during that desirable but soul-shaking transition. I drew primarily from two accounts. One is the stories of Sally Hemmings's children, born enslaved at President Jefferson's Monticello. Some left the plantation and passed as white, hiding their family history. Another is the account of President Washington's slave Ona Judge, who escaped enslavement while in Philadelphia and was never recaptured, despite the Washingtons' efforts.





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### **How has Ian changed since we first met him in *Mountain Laurel*? Where is he still struggling?**

When we meet Ian again in *Shiloh*, it's been just two years since he first rode up the wagon track to his uncle's plantation in the opening pages of *Mountain Laurel*, yet he's gained a maturity that could have taken decades to acquire in a less-heated crucible of circumstances. He's a steadier man. He's learned patience and the surrender of his will to God's, even as giving himself wholeheartedly to the life he has in North Carolina, without Seona and their son, is still a daily act of submission. A daily battle with temptation. More often than not he is triumphing, but life has more tests to throw his way. There's unfinished business between Ian and Seona, and he longs for his son.

### **How do different characters in this series exhibit courage? What can we learn from them?**

I certainly wasn't gentle with the Kindred characters, plunging them into situations that required courage of one sort or another. There's the courage of leadership, something Ian either resisted or abused in *Mountain Laurel*. In *Shiloh* he is offered a second chance at leading others and will be tested to see if he's grown into a man who can embrace the

challenge and the moral and physical courage leadership on the eighteenth-century frontier demands. Several characters wrestle with courage of the heart—Ian and Seona foremost but not exclusively. There's more than one complicated romance brewing in this story! Other characters demonstrate the quiet courage to bear what cannot be changed with grace, refusing bitterness a foothold. As readers will discover, each character has something lasting and profound to teach us about walking in these different forms of courage.

### **What is your hope for readers of this novel?**

Hope is a major theme woven into this story. As for my hopes, I'd be thrilled if readers feel that *Shiloh* presents them with a satisfying landing place for Ian and Seona and other characters they've come to know across the pages of the Kindred series (I'm betting it will!). And that readers' hearts are gripped and encouraged by that ultimate hope—for the Kingdom that is coming to us, with all that God has promised his children in the pages of Scripture. No more partings or misunderstandings, broken relationships or shattered dreams. No more suffering or injustice. That and so much more.







# A Note about *Shiloh*

**By Lori Benton**



To inform your discussion of *Shiloh* and gain new insights into some of the characters from the novel, read this letter from Lori Benton prior to kicking off your book club discussion.

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After authoring seven historical novels set during the eighteenth century, I decided to set myself a new challenge—making my eighth novel a sequel to two of my previous books, instead of one. *Shiloh* blends the story worlds of *Mountain Laurel*, this book's prequel, and my 2013 debut, *Burning Sky* (in which the primary story of Neil, Willa, and Joseph Tames-His-Horse is told). While I'm very pleased with how these story worlds merged and completed each other, I confess that the writing of *Shiloh* turned out to be a challenge indeed and a lesson in crowd control. As much as I would have relished letting more of *Shiloh's* denizens romp across the pages and tell their stories twelve years out from the ending of *Burning Sky*, much care and attention was given to ensuring this story's focus remained on Seona and Ian, while at the same time delivering on my long-standing promise to give readers more of Joseph Tames-His-Horse's story.

Readers may or may not know that *Mountain Laurel* is the first historical novel I ever wrote. *Burning Sky* was the second, though it was published first. By the time I had finished writing *Burning Sky*, I'd discovered the connection between those two books through the characters of Joseph Tames-His-Horse and Lily, Seona's mother. I knew they were destined to meet and quietly fall in love in the shadow of Ian and Seona's drama. But how to forge this connection between them and find a plausible reason for a large contingent of my *Mountain Laurel* crew to wind up in the Adirondack foothills remained a mystery until I began researching what was happening in New York in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Enter Judge William Cooper, founder of Cooperstown, New York, and—thrillingly for me—the father of James Fenimore Cooper, who would grow up to write *The Last of the Mohicans*, the inspiration behind more than half my novels.

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Alan Taylor's Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic*, is an engaging exploration of a man born from humble Quaker origins who rose to the status of merchant, frontier land speculator, landlord, politician, and the inspiration for the character Judge Marmaduke Temple in his son's novel *The Pioneers*—as the town his father founded at the foot of Otsego Lake would become a model for James's storied village, Templeton. In the pages of *William Cooper's Town*, I met a man, still rough around the edges (and a hopelessly atrocious speller), who could be wildly generous in attracting other men to settle on the New York frontier. This book provided such richly layered detail about Cooper's life and doings that I had no doubt the man—by now become a congressman—might well have been traveling that Pennsylvania road at the time I placed him there during a late spring thunderstorm in 1796, ready to cross paths with Ian Cameron, himself on the move and needing to resettle.

One last note on the Coopers: contrary to my presentation of young James Cooper in these pages, he did not adopt his mother's maiden name of Fenimore as his middle name until he was an adult. Readers will, I hope, excuse my bestowing it upon him as a child, for the benefit of those unfamiliar with the family connection. I simply couldn't resist giving the author of *The Last of the Mohicans* a small but blatant shout-out.

It is December of 2020 as I write this author's note. Even as I spent much of this year looking backward, immersed in the past, 2020 changed the way I think about my future, here on earth and eternally. After all we have experienced nationally and globally, my earthly future seems at present more uncertain than I ever thought it could. Given the year in which most of this story was written, it's no surprise *Shiloh* turned out to have much to do with our need for choosing what, or who, will anchor our souls in the midst of life's uncertainties. To use another metaphor that frequents these pages, in what sort of soil, and by what streams of water, will we sink our roots for nourishment?

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Seona and Ian made this choice in a world that cries out for justice, but one in which all efforts to achieve justice can be only partially successful. Their anchor was their hope in the Kingdom that Jesus promised before His ascension, when He also said we would join Him in it. A Kingdom where wholeness, justice, joy, and peace surround and overflow all who dwell therein. That promise inspires us to engage in the works God has prepared for us to do across the span of our earthly days. I have no better words to tell you how to keep yourself anchored in that hope during these difficult days than what Malcolm said to Seona: "Read [God's] Word for yourself, every page of it. Then read it again. Learn who He is. Who He says ye are. That's how ye learn to trust Him, to love Him." All other sources of hope will promise to satisfy, anchor, or deliver, but they will fail.

One final note: A key character from *Mountain Laurel* didn't appear in the pages of *Shiloh*—Thomas Ross. What in the world has he been up to, aside from that brief visit with the Boston Camerons that Seona related in one of her letters to Ian? I intend to answer that, and a few other questions readers might have about certain *Kindred* characters, in a follow-up novella called *The Journey of Runs-Far*. A December 2021 release is planned. To keep abreast of this and other book news, visit my website at [loribenton.com](http://loribenton.com), and while you're there, sign up for my newsletter.

Until then, I wish you happy reading!


Lori Benton

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Adapted from *Shiloh* author's note








# Discussion Questions


**Read and answer these questions aloud in your book club to kick off your meeting and get the conversation started about Ian and Seona's story in *Shiloh*.**

- 1.)** Though second chances at love abound in *Shiloh*, they don't come without patience and effort. Ian and Seona rekindle their romance through an exchange of letters, but barriers still exist between them that cause misunderstandings and resurrect old hurts. What are those barriers? How do Ian and Seona overcome them?
- 2.)** While still in Boston, Seona observes that "Family was like the sea . . . full of hidden currents and undertows." Ian and his brother, Ned, are divided by a lifetime of entrenched patterns of behavior and thinking toward each other. What are these patterns? How do you think they fell into them? What heals old hurts and finally helps them see one another more clearly?
- 3.)** Ian struggles with the choice between possible futures and the weight of all the lives he feels responsible for, yet John Reynold encourages him with these words: "God will make the way for you . . . Be ready to be surprised by His goodness." In what ways does this promise manifest in Ian's journey from North Carolina to Boston, then to New York? Do you live expecting God's goodness? How would your perspective on your future change if you did?
- 4.)** As Seona heads westward to begin her new life, she fears how she and Gabriel will be received in Shiloh and wonders whether she should hide the truth about who and what she was. How do these fears hold her back? Which characters challenge her fears, and what advice does each give?

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**5.)** Mentioned in one of Seona's letters, the Gaelic word *dùthchas* (a sense of belonging to a place and the people who lived there before you) is a legacy Ian desires to create for his children on their farm along Black Kettle Creek. Is he successful in making a start? What threatens his efforts to create such a legacy? Have you experienced this type of connection to a place?

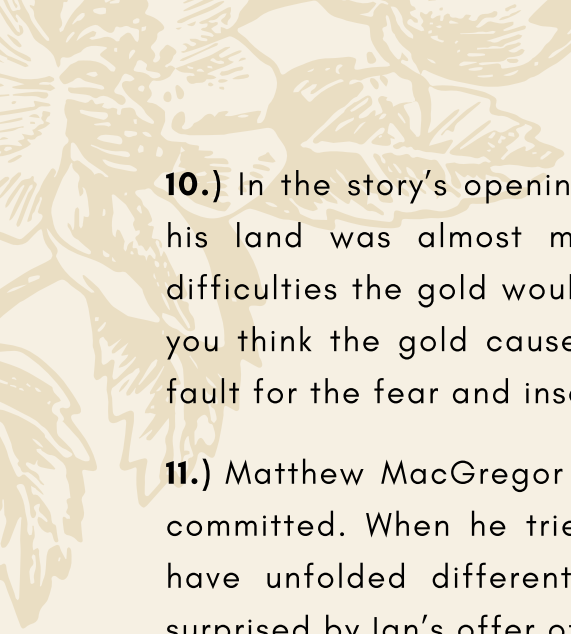
**6.)** Ian sees in his new neighbors the MacGregors an example of what he longs for with Seona and their children—family both by blood and by choice. Name the characters who choose to be linked with Ian. Why does each make this choice? Though Ian is an imperfect man who doesn't always get things right the first time, what do others see in him to desire this connection?

**7.)** New starts can come as a relief. They can also be frightening. Seona finds the reality of starting over in Shiloh—with all its possibilities and unknowns—unexpectedly paralyzing. Why do you think this is so? How does Lily view the idea of a new start in Shiloh? How does Catriona view it? Malcolm? Naomi? Ally?

**8.)** Lily lives a guarded inner life, but Seona and Ian both wonder if her mother desires more from life than circumstances have granted her. Were you as surprised by the quiet blossoming of Lily and Joseph's romance as Seona was? Looking back, what clues to its development were present that Seona was too distracted to notice?

**9.)** Many characters in *Shiloh* must learn to navigate life as free persons after years of slavery—in Malcolm's case, nearly an entire lifespan. We are privy to Seona's internal struggles with freedom, but what about Lily, Malcolm, Naomi, and Ally? What opportunities does freedom grant each of these characters? How do they embrace them? What are their challenges? Do they overcome them?





**10.)** In the story's opening pages, John Reynold implies that the gold found on his land was almost more trouble than it was worth, foreshadowing the difficulties the gold would cause Ian, Seona, and those connected to them. Do you think the gold caused more trouble than good? Who do you think was at fault for the fear and insecurity that came of it?

**11.)** Matthew MacGregor wants revenge against Aram Crane for the crimes he committed. When he tries to take it, he is nearly killed. How might the story have unfolded differently had Matthew not attacked Crane? Were you as surprised by Ian's offer of grace to Crane as Matthew was?

**12.)** Though Judith's death occurs early in the story, her tender spirit casts a long shadow, as do her dying words, "Grace. It is enough." What does Ian initially think they meant? What do they come to mean to him?

### **Your book club questions:**

Take some time and jot down a few questions you have about the story. Then raise those questions in your book club to gain new insights into the novel.

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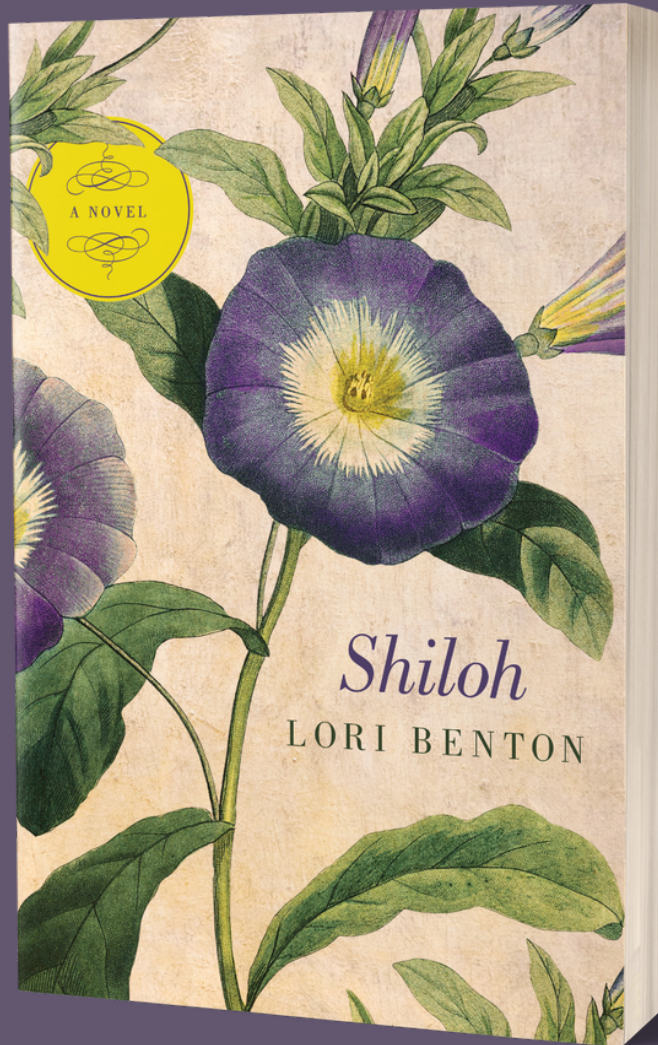
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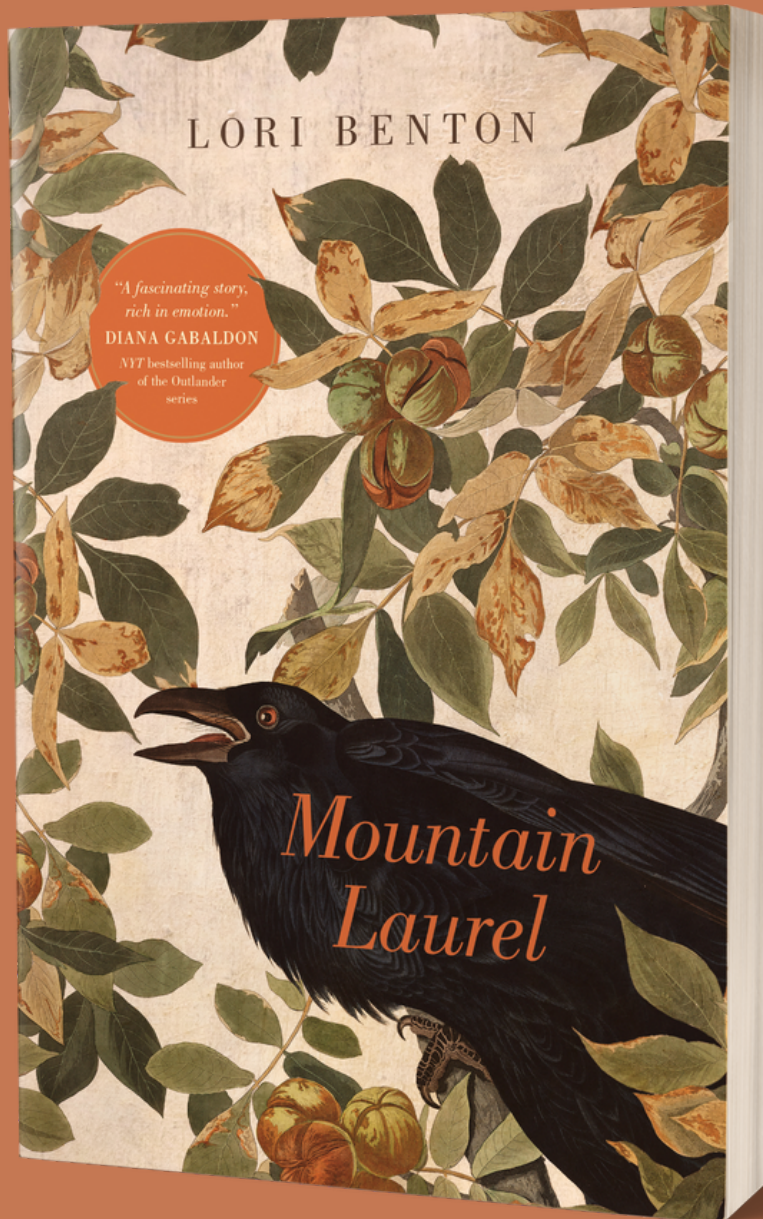
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*for your book club*

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Missed the first part of Ian  
and Seona's story? Read it  
in *Mountain Laurel*.



[Click here](#) to read the  
first chapter for free.