

BOOK CLUB KIT

“Under the Magnolias is a moving portrayal of the power of family—the one we’re born into and the one we create—and the resilience of the human spirit.”

KRISTY WOODSON HARVEY

USA Today bestselling author of
Feels Like Falling





A NOTE *from* THE AUTHOR

Have you ever had to take a step back from something in order to bring it into focus? As a woman in her midforties, my eyes now require this daily. If I'm right on top of something, I cannot for the life of me focus on it.

I think sometimes we can get too close to a situation to the point of not being able to focus on the truths of it and what truly matters.

For this reason, I set *Under the Magnolias* in the eighties. I thought if we could step back a few decades in a fictional world, we could see some things more clearly that, as a nation, we aren't understanding.

The main thing I hope will become more clear is that there is so much more to each and every person than what meets our eye on the surface. Every life has been hand-sculpted by God to be unique, so I say let's respect one another's uniqueness instead of using it against them.

The First Riffraff of Magnolia has so much more purpose than the job of side characters. Each individual in the book has an importance to the story, same as us in the real world. It's clear as day by the end what they bring to the table and how significant that is to the Foster family.

You'd think by now, living in the twenty-first century, we'd understand the importance of each individual, yet social standards and sensationalized media have distorted it until no true focus can be found.

My hope is that people will read this book, relate to one or more of the unique characters, and realize that their worth isn't measured by social standards. That they should celebrate the unique person God created them to be. And hopefully this will also make us more compassionate toward others, moving our focus off our differences and placing it on respecting everyone, no matter their walk of life.

Let me make a point here. You don't have to agree with someone's view, but you dang sure shouldn't mistreat them because of it. We don't have to compromise our beliefs and morals to show someone empathy and respect. Kindness: the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate. A simple word that could do great things, if we as a society would just put it into practice.

I wish for you to find a better clarity about kindness in *Under the Magnolias* and then set out to put it into use with each person you meet.

T. I. Lowe

A Southern Girl's Guide to Hosting

THE PERFECT BOOK CLUB GATHERING

I don't know about you, but I believe life is too complicated. This Southern girl likes to keep things simple as much as possible. So my number one piece of advice when planning a book club gathering is to keep it simple. A few meaningful touches will go further than a lot of fuss. Here are some tips to host a perfect book club, Southern style!

Setting

If the weather is nice, let Mother Nature be your decorator. Select a large shade tree to set up underneath or a flower garden. Be mindful to find a quiet spot, too, so you can focus easily on the book discussion and enjoying one another's company.

Food

Y'all know us Southern girls have to feed guests. I say keep this simple for book club. Serve one to two savories and one to two desserts. If I were hosting this book club gathering for *Under the Magnolias*, I would serve you pimento cheese tea sandwiches, deviled eggs, Twinkie salad, and mini chocolate pecan pies. Southern and simple, perfect!

Beverages

We all know sweet tea is the house wine of the South, so how fun would it be to set up a tea bar! Set out pitchers of sweet and unsweet tea, bowls of lemon wedges and mint leaves, and various sweeteners. I don't know why, but iced tea tastes so much better when drinking it from a mason jar, so that would be a fun, inexpensive touch to your Southern-style book club gathering.

If you'd like to theme the gathering after *Under the Magnolias*, have a Miss Wise tea party. Go on the hunt for nostalgic childhood sodas in the glass bottle and serve them in fancy teacups. The best place to find teacups and saucers is at thrift stores and consignment shops. Mismatched makes the fun even more fun. I've found some really pretty ones on my teacup hunts, so I bet you will too.

Party Favors

I think spending time with your friends and discussing a book is all the gift needed, wouldn't you agree? But I also don't like sending my guests home empty-handed. It would be a sweet touch to send your friends home with the mason jars or the teacups. Both will be inexpensive and a reminder of the nice time they all had at your gathering. And any respected Southern host will make way too much food, so have small boxes or containers for your guests to take a few snacks home with them. Toss in some specialty chocolates for Miss Wise. Dove sea salt caramels are my favorite!

“What a voice! If you're looking for your next Southern fiction fix, T. I. Lowe delivers. . . . A must-read.”

JULIE CANTRELL, *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of *Perennials*

Twinkie Salad

Y'all know Austin isn't much of a cook, but we give her an E for effort. I wanted to create a recipe inspired by her love for her siblings, so of course that had to include Twinkies. It also had to be easy because we know she doesn't have time for much else. My family approved this when I made a test recipe, so I hope you do too!

Ingredients:

- 10 Twinkies, each cubed into four pieces
- 1 10-ounce jar of lemon curd
- 2 8-ounce tubs of Cool Whip (I used extra creamy)
- 1 pint of strawberries, sliced
- 1 pint of blueberries

In a trifle bowl or large serving bowl, layer half of the Twinkie cubes. Place dollops of lemon curd on top of the Twinkies, using half the jar. Sprinkle half of the strawberries and blueberries on top. Then cover this layer with one of the tubs of Cool Whip. Repeat the layers, using the other half of the Twinkies, lemon curd, berries, and ending with the Cool Whip.

Chill for at least an hour before serving. Better if made the day before.

If you're making this for a party or a book club gathering, it would be fun to make individual servings in small jelly jars.

Austin's Eggs and Rice

I have to admit that this is actually my favorite childhood breakfast. Around my parts growing up, country folks never wasted food. If rice was left over from a meal, it would be served at the next meal or made into eggs and rice for breakfast. My dad was raised eating eggs and rice on his family farm, and so he made it for me and my siblings too. It's a simple recipe, yet my children think it's special each time I make it for them.

Ingredients:

- 3 cups of leftover cooked rice
- 5 to 7 eggs
- 1 tablespoon of butter
- 1 tablespoon of oil
- salt and pepper

In a large skillet, warm the butter and oil on medium-high heat until butter is melted. Add rice and sauté until rice is warmed through and is beginning to toast. Crack the eggs on top of the rice. Salt and pepper to taste. Then stir the eggs into the rice and continue cooking until the eggs are set.

I typically use seven eggs because my family likes more egg, but you can use less if you'd like. Odd side note: I like odd numbers, so I always use an odd number of eggs in this recipe. I know, I'm a little odd! Ha! Yep, girl got jokes!

“With a wide cast of fun, offbeat characters, a mix of heartbreak and humor, and a heaping handful of grit, *Under the Magnolias* will delight Lowe's legion of fans!”

LAUREN K. DENTON, *USA Today* bestselling author of *The Summer House*

Q & A with T. I. LOWE

1. *You've said that this book is the most important book you've written to date. Why?*

The subject matter of this book, even though it's fiction set in the eighties, is so relevant today. Everyone hurts. Everyone struggles. And everyone hides their truths to some degree. I was led to write this book in a way that I hope readers will realize it's not so healthy to hide, that it's okay to seek help no matter what they are going through.

2. *Can you walk us through the emotions you felt while writing this book?*

My emotions were all over the place. I fully invest in my characters. When they hurt, I hurt. When they rejoice, so do I. One scene where Austin starts unraveling and doesn't see how to hold her family together, I was right there with her. It was a tough writing day, for sure, and I walked away from the computer not knowing how she would either. I definitely stayed in my head for several months while writing this one.

3. *Some of the common themes in this book are the power of community and connectedness, as well as the impact that small and simple kindnesses can have on those around us. How do you hope those themes encourage the reader? Why did you include those themes specifically?*

I hope the reader will reflect on their own actions and attitudes toward others. As I've said, kindness is a simple act but can have such a profound effect on the one receiving it. Austin was able to stop hiding due to the strength she garnered from those who reached out to help her and her family. We can be that for someone—how powerful is that?

Simple act of kindness example: I'm always on people-watching duty, so when I go through a checkout line and the cashier is in a terrible mood and being rude, instead of complaining to the manager, I ask the cashier if they're having a bad day. I can't tell you how many times this was exactly what they needed. Just someone to take the time to acknowledge them and to let them unload a second. I've always left those situations with the cashier smiling at me. Simple kindness, ladies and gentlemen.

4. *You used to work on a tobacco farm. What made you choose this setting for the book? How did you draw from personal experience to create the setting?*

Working tobacco was my first job and my hardest job. This job taught me that everyone has to do their part. It cannot be put on the shoulders of one person. It's quite symbolic to the story. Austin tried taking care of her father and siblings all on her own, but the burden was too heavy and came close to ruining them until the community stepped up to take a part in helping.

5. *What do you hope your readers walk away with when they've turned the last page of this book?*

My hope is that they say, "Dang, that girl can write!" Ha! Just kidding. Kinda . . . No, seriously, I want them to get to the end of this book and find their own sense of freedom. To bravely go out and live without putting on airs. To exercise their compassion and empathy muscles more.

"Filled with rich, lovable characters, each rendered with profound compassion . . .
Under the Magnolias is sure to delight and inspire."

FRANCINE RIVERS, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Masterpiece*



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. A secluded farm in rural South Carolina in the 1980s provides the backdrop for much of Austin's story. How does the setting shape the novel?
2. The folks of Magnolia choose to live by the idea of "out of sight, out of mind." What are the pros and cons of this mindset?
3. At age thirteen, Austin loses her mother and gains responsibility of her six siblings as well as her mentally ill father. How does she handle this unexpected life change?
4. Vance Cumberland decides early on that Austin is the woman he wants to spend his life with. Did you like that element of the story? Was Austin right to keep him at arm's length for so long?
5. Hard work and loyalty are just as important as bountiful crops on Nolia Farms. How do these characteristics help, or hinder, Austin and her family?
6. Austin and her siblings all adopt different coping strategies. Was there one character or coping strategy that you particularly identified with?
7. Each person who comes into the Fosters' lives influences Austin's life story: Foxy Deveraux, Miss Wise, Morty Lawson, Tripp Murphy, Walyann Posten, Miss Jones. How do each of these people affect her? Which one speaks to you the most? Why?
8. How did Dave Foster's private struggle with mental illness affect you as a reader? Did you empathize with him? Want to snatch a knot in his backside? Both, at times? Why?
9. Austin tells Miss Wise, "I also believe forgiveness and getting over being mad is a gift for ourselves, not for the ones who wronged us." Can you think of any examples of this from your own life?
10. Dave Foster is about as different as they come, and not just because of his mental illness. He says in the novel, "There's nothing wrong with being different. What's wrong is when people refuse to accept it." How have you seen this play out in our world today?
11. At the end of the book, we read how some of the characters' lives have turned out in the years since the main action of the book. Did any of them surprise you? Which endings did you like the best?
12. Discuss the title of the book, *Under the Magnolias*. What are some of the literal and metaphorical examples of hidden things in the story?

"A powerful coming-of-age story. . . . The many colorful Magnolia characters, particularly the eccentrics of First Riffraff, rise to support Austin and nicely round out the slow-burning romance."

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY



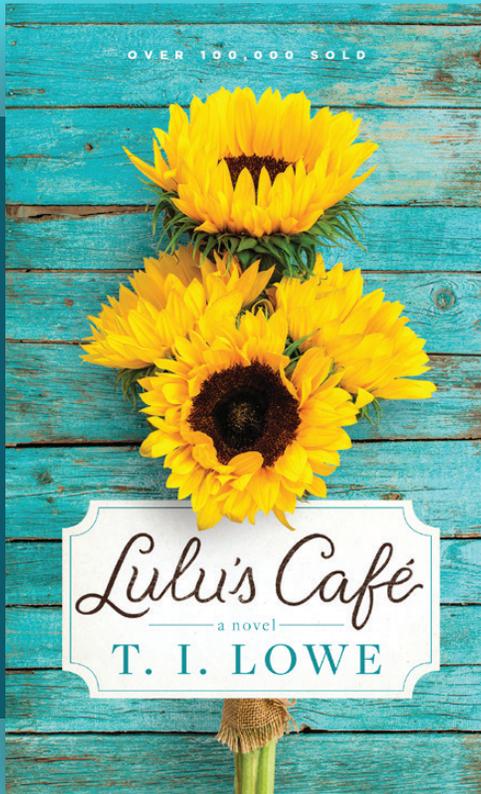
UNDER THE MAGNOLIAS *Playlist*

1. "Have You Ever Seen the Rain?"
CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL
2. "Here Comes the Sun"
THE BEATLES
3. "Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me"
ELTON JOHN
4. "Harmony Hall"
VAMPIRE WEEKEND
5. "Heaven"
BRYAN ADAMS
6. "Between the Raindrops"
LIFEHOUSE
7. "Let's Hurt Tonight"
ONEREPUBLIC
8. "I Think It's Going to Rain Today"
BETTE MIDLER
9. "Can't Help Me Now"
ROB THOMAS
10. "Let It Rain"
CROWDER & MANDISA
11. "I Can See Clearly Now"
JOHNNY NASH
12. "Landslide"
STEVIE NICKS
13. "Walking on Water"
NEEDTOBREATHE
14. "Bring the Rain"
MERCYME
15. "Still Rolling Stones"
LAUREN DAIGLE

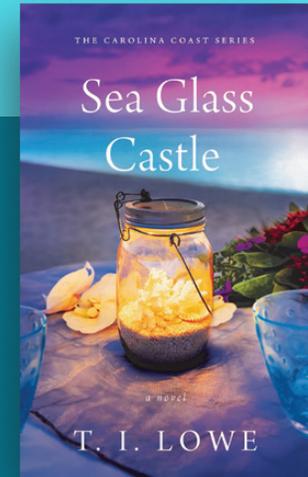
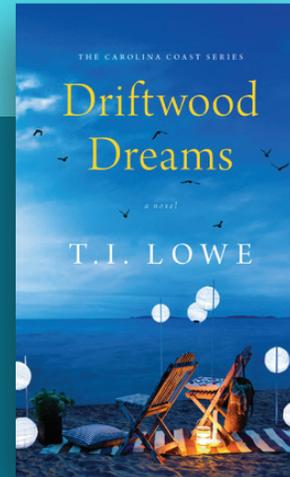
"A luminous testimony to the power of neighbors and the ability of a community's love and faith to shelter its most vulnerable residents."

LISA WINGATE, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Before We Were Yours* and *The Book of Lost Friends*

DON'T MISS T. I. LOWE'S OTHER NOVELS!



Settle in for a cup of coffee and
some Southern hospitality.



Three friends navigate love and friendship
in the Carolina Coast series.

AVAILABLE WHEREVER BOOKS ARE SOLD.

About the Author



T. I. LOWE is an ordinary country girl who loves to tell extraordinary stories and is the author of nearly twenty published novels, including her debut, *Lulu's Café*, a number one bestseller. She lives with her husband and family in coastal South Carolina.

Find her on



And get news from and updates from the author delivered directly to your in-box by subscribing to her newsletter on tilowe.com.