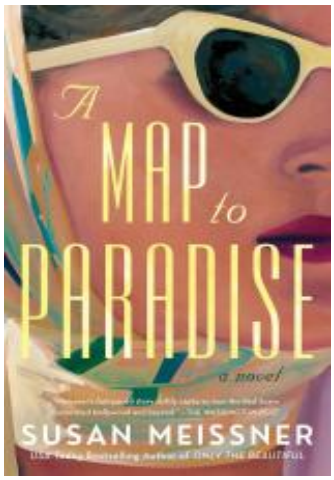
A Map to Paradise

by Susan Meissner



About the Book

***1956, Malibu, California*: Something is not right on Paradise Circle.**

With her name on the Hollywood blacklist and her life on hold, starlet Melanie Cole has little choice in company. There is her next-door neighbor, Elwood, but the screenwriter?s agoraphobia allows for just short chats through open windows. He?s her sole confidante, though, as she and her housekeeper, Eva, an immigrant from war-torn Europe, rarely make conversation.

Then one early morning, Melanie and Eva spot Elwood?s sister-in-law and caretaker, June, digging in his beloved rose garden. After that they don?t see Elwood at all anymore. Where could a man who never leaves the house possibly have gone?

As they try to find out if something has happened to him, unexpected secrets are revealed among all three women, leading to an alliance that seems the only way for any of them to hold on to what they can still call their own. But it?s a fragile pact, and one little spark could send it all up in smoke.

Discussion Guide

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?

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?

Author Bio

Susan Meissner is a former managing editor of a weekly newspaper and an award-winning columnist. She is the *USA Today* bestselling author of A MAP TO PARADISE, ONLY THE BEAUTIFUL, THE NATURE OF FRAGILE THINGS, THE LAST YEAR OF THE WAR, AS BRIGHT AS HEAVEN, A BRIDGE ACROSS THE OCEAN, SECRETS OF A CHARMED LIFE, A FALL OF MARIGOLDS and STARS OVER SUNSET BOULEVARD, among other novels.

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