

**FICTION BOOK CLUB**

*June 2019 Selection*

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***The Things We Cannot Say* by Kelly Rimmer**

In 1941, Europe remains in the relentless grip of war. Just beyond the tents of the Russian refugee camp she calls home, a young woman speaks her wedding vows. It's a decision that will alter her destiny...and it's a lie that will remain buried until the next century. Since she was nine years old, Alina Dziak knew she would marry her best friend, Tomasz. Now fifteen and engaged, Alina is unconcerned by reports of Nazi soldiers at the Polish border, believing her neighbors that they pose no real threat, and dreams instead of the day Tomasz returns from college in Warsaw so they can be married. But little by little, injustice by brutal injustice, the Nazi occupation takes hold, and Alina's tiny rural village, its families, are divided by fear and hate. Then, as the fabric of their lives is slowly picked apart, Tomasz disappears. Where Alina used to measure time between visits from her beloved, now she measures the spaces between hope and despair, waiting for word from Tomasz and avoiding the attentions of the soldiers who patrol her parents' farm. But for now, even deafening silence is preferable to grief.

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**Discussion Questions:**

1. Which characters in this book were your favorites? Why? Alina and Alice narrate the story—but is there another character you wish you could have heard from directly?



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2. Were you more engaged with Alina's story or Alice's? Why? Were you satisfied with how the two story threads came together?
3. Alina lives a relatively sheltered life. How is her behavior shaped by her family's attitude toward her? How does she change over the course of the story?
4. Alina, Julita, and Alice are all very different women within the same family, although each has a unique approach to how she raises her children. Do you think there's a relationship between how each woman approached motherhood, or do circumstance and personality play a larger role here?
5. Why do you think Wade held himself at such a distance from Eddie? Why did this damage his relationship with Alice so much? And why did Wade and Eddie's relationship change when Alice was away?
6. Tomasz was coerced to serve in the *Wehrmacht* and, in doing so, inadvertently played a role in one of the most horrific chapters in human history. How did this decision change the course of his life and the life of his descendants?
7. What do you think Tomasz *should* have done when faced with the pressure to comply with the Nazi agenda? Do you think he redeemed himself once he deserted the *Wehrmacht*, or are some acts unforgivable?
8. Do you think Tomasz ever intended to follow Alina, or did he know all along that he'd need to turn himself in after she left with Saul? And if Tomasz had escaped to safety with Alina, would he have been able to leave his guilt behind?
9. Take a moment to reflect on your own family's story. Do you know much about your grandparents' early lives? How have your grandparents' decisions in their youth affected *your* life? What questions do you wish you could (or would you like to) ask them about their younger years?
10. Did you learn anything new as you read this book, and if so, what was it?
11. Which scene in *The Things We Cannot Say* affected you the most, and why? What emotions did that scene elicit?



### **Review or Comment about this book:**

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### **Recommendations:**

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- You might also enjoy *Lilac Girls*  
(<http://www.booksamillion.com/p/9781101883082>)