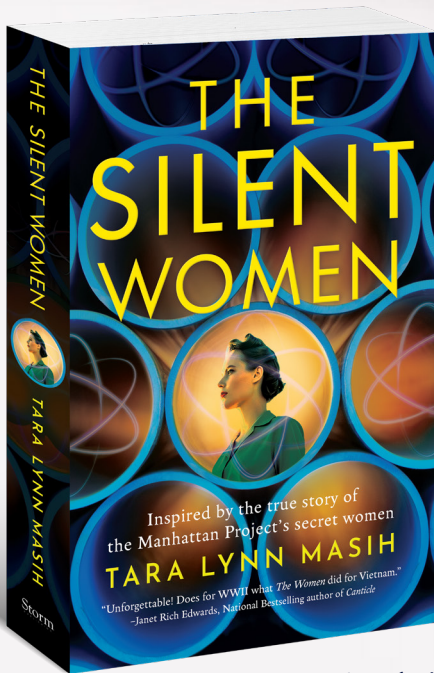


THE SILENT WOMEN

BOOK CLUB GUIDE



Dear Readers:

A *New Yorker* cartoon sits on my desk. It shows a grizzled old man behind his own desk surrounded by walls of books. A visitor says: "You might have time left for one more book, but only if it doesn't require a lot of research." So true.

I found my way, gradually, into historical fiction. First through short stories, and even shorter short stories, then into the novella, then into the novel. I recall that day when I said, "OK, this is what I love, combining history and landscape and wilderness and humanity in a very *long* story!" Sometimes I take on too much. Often, I take on too much. Both novels I've written, including *MY REAL NAME IS HANNA*, took many more years of research than anticipated.

THE SILENT WOMEN began in a small historical library in Andover. I was researching another part of New England history when the director pointed me toward the history of an Andover WAVE volunteer. I dropped what I was doing and switched gears completely, once again to WWII. I'd decided I would move on from that era, but the period is so rich in history, especially

women's and minority history, and there are so many stories I believe still should be told. My grandfather was in the army. I had only a vague idea of what he did. I checked in with my mother. She knew little but recalled his working with WAVES. We both grew excited at the opportunity to learn more about him and make him a character.

So this is not just a story that sparked my imagination, it's also personal. I got to know my grandfather through the writing of this book, as he passed early in my life, possibly due to radiation exposure as he'd been a witness to at least one bomb test. Our family may have lived with the consequences of the Manhattan Project's success, as does my main character, Song. We'll never fully know, as his army records were burned in the 1970s.

I'm never far away from the wild, and I hope you enjoy learning about each setting that Song grows into. But most of all, I hope you grow to love Song and her friends and family as much as I do. It's always hard to say goodbye to characters, especially after 8 years.

But now the story's in your hands. I hope each of you finds something good in our shared history. I hope you marvel at the universe and what we can accomplish when we work together.

I love talking with book clubs and look forward to chatting about Song and her imagined life! And anything else on your minds.

Yours,

Tara Lynn Masih

Contact me through www.TaraMasih.com and visit my blog for more behind-the-book info!



THE SILENT WOMEN

BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

1. Like *Hidden Figures*, *The Silent Women* portrays women in more scientific aspects of volunteer work. Were you engaged in their lesser-known stories? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. There is a pattern of Song being left by men, either intentionally or otherwise, while women step up to fill these voids. Has this happened in your life? Why might this theme resonate with so many women? Does it cross cultural barriers?
3. Gardening and farming figures largely in *The Silent Women*. Why might the author have taken a deep dive into both? Did it have any added effect on your reading of this WWII history?
4. Most are aware that we interred the Japanese during WWII, but were you aware that other citizens, such as Italians, were also interred (though to a lesser degree)? Discuss your feelings about internment now that you know this history.
5. *The Silent Women* has a woman of white descent at its center. But Song is surrounded by many characters on the homefront who played an important role historically. Was there minority history in the novel that surprised you, or was there a character who stood out for you as being particularly intriguing?
6. Spies abounded in Oak Ridge during the war, for both sides. Discuss Song's role as a "creep." What would you have done in her situation? Also explore the many decisions she had to make along the way under threat of losing her job if she didn't comply.
7. The history of the Ghost Army was publicized only recently, due to classified reasons. But now, a major movie is in the works (it has not yet been released as of the writing of this question, with Ben Affleck set to direct and star in it). What do you think of this secret army's role in military history? Why might Hol's experience be different today than it was in the 1940s? Or would it be similar?
8. The making of the bomb—highlighted in the major release *Oppenheimer* (2023 Oscar winner Best Picture)—was controversial even amongst the scientists and the women and men who worked on building it. What is your take on the complex ethical issues surrounding its use in Japan? Were you able to feel the conflict in Song, or others like her, and understand it as best as you can? Considering the world today, is the story of the atom bomb more, or less, relevant?
9. In the last scene that Song shares with her mother, Pearl, she notices her mother blow a soap bubble while washing dishes. Song has a déjà vu moment. Did anyone in your book club catch that moment and recall where she experienced it earlier in the novel? And if so, what is the significance?
10. As a couple, what do you think makes Song and Hol work, and what is the significance of the final line? Discuss your interpretations.

THE SILENT WOMEN RECIPES

ingredients

1 cup light brown sugar, firmly packed	1 tsp cinnamon
1 cup water	1/2 tsp nutmeg
1/3 cup shortening (can sub. butter, veg. oil 1:1 ratio; applesauce 2:1)	1/2 tsp salt
1 cup raisins	2 1/4 cup sifted flour
	1 tsp baking soda
	1 1/4 tsp double-acting baking powder

Colleen Rowan Black's Eggless-Butterless- Milkless Cake*

If you want to make something from the depression/time of war rationing, this "made the rounds in the Happy Valley Trailer Camp in 1944." Colleen was the inspiration for Song. She suggests today's chef topping it with icing or whipped cream to make it more flavorful.

*From *Cooking Behind the Fence: Recipes and recollections from the Oak Ridge '43 Club*, 9th ed. Published by the Oak Ridge Heritage & Preservation Assoc., 2015.

Combine sugar, water, shortening, raisins, spices, and salt in medium saucepan. Bring to boil over medium heat, boil 3 mins., stirring constantly. Cool. Measure flour, add soda and baking powder. Sift again. Gradually stir dry ingredients into raisin mixture. Beat well. Pour in greased loaf pan. Bake at 325 for one hour.

Aunt Bea's Gingerbread Boys

This is a hand-me-down recipe from my mother-in-law, Madalyn Gilligan, clearly a vintage recipe as well. Her gingerbread boys were a holiday favorite, as were Aunt Bea's. See the recipe above for notes on shortening and soda.

ingredients

1 cup shortening	1 1/2 tsp soda
1 cup sugar	1 tbsp ginger
1/2 tsp salt	1 tsp cinnamon
1 egg	1 tsp ground cloves
1 cup molasses	Raisins and/or Red Hots
2 tbsp vinegar	cinnamon candy for decoration
5 cups sifted all-purpose flour	

Thoroughly cream shortening, sugar, and salt. Stir in egg, molasses, and vinegar; beat well. Sift together dry ingredients; stir into molasses mixture. Chill (about 3 hours). On lightly floured surface, roll to 1/8 inch thick. Cut with gingerbread boy cutter. Place 1 inch apart on greased cookie sheet. Use raisins or Red Hots for faces and buttons. Bake in moderate oven (375 degrees) about 6 minutes. Cool slightly; remove from sheet. Makes about 5 dozen.





THE SILENT WOMEN

..... AVAILABLE SEPTEMBER 9, 2026

in paperback/ebook/audio from Storm Publishing at all your online dealers and through your local bookstores.

"The Silent Women will transport you to the home front of WWII, from the Oklahoma dust bowl to the strawberry fields of Massachusetts and the secret city of the Manhattan Project in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. A richly detailed tribute to the women behind the war. Unforgettable! It does for WWII what *The Women* did for Vietnam."

—JANET RICH EDWARDS,
NATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *CANTICLE*

