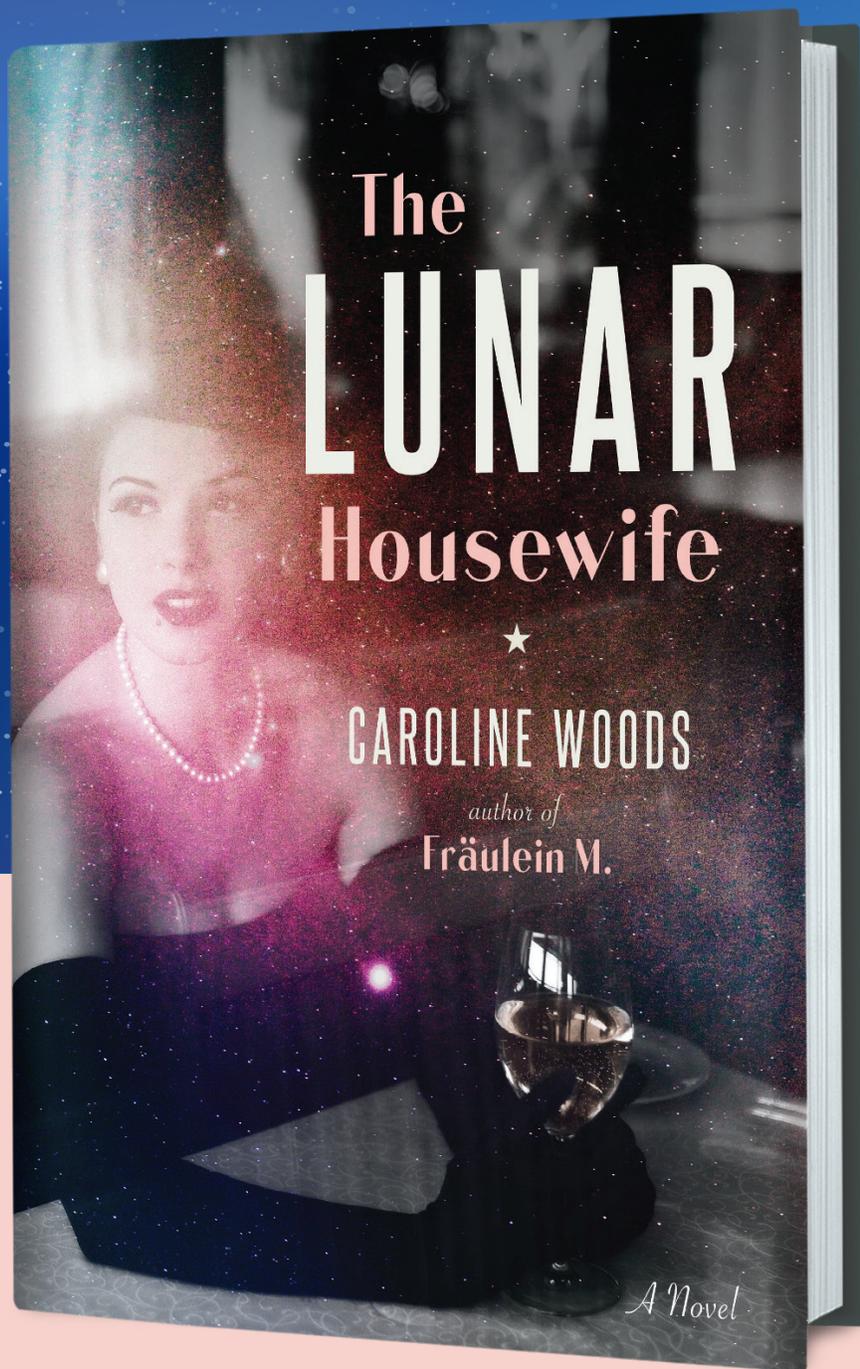


# BOOK CLUB KIT

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## Dear Reader,

This novel arose from a question: Just how involved was the CIA in censoring artists, spreading anti-Communist propaganda, and spying on writers in the early years of the Cold War?

It only made sense to go about answering that question from the point of view of a young female writer. Louise Leithauser, the protagonist of *The Lunar Housewife*, is very much a tribute to the real-life women who exposed the shadowy connections between powerful men of letters and the CIA: women like Frances Stonor Saunders and Immy Humes, daughter of *Paris Review* cofounder Doc Humes.

I wrote most of this novel in the spring of 2020, just after we all went into lockdown, a period when many parents had no childcare and felt completely isolated and alone. The novel within this novel, also titled *The Lunar Housewife*, is about two people sequestered in a lunar colony. They are both in love with and suffocated by each other's company, which I think a lot of us can now relate to—thus *The Lunar Housewife* is just as much a 2020s novel as it is a 1950s one.

As I wrote late into the night, after my children were asleep, *The Lunar Housewife* grew into a David-and-Goliath type of story, about a woman going up against giant forces outside her control: rampant sexism and a powerful government conspiracy. Somehow, through scrappy ingenuity and the force of her determination, she finds a way to save not only her own skin but also the integrity of her art.

I hope that you enjoy your foray into the glamorous, scandalous world of postwar New York City publishing, even if you may find, as Louise does, that the glamour fades a bit as you pull back the curtain, revealing something a little darker, a bit more sinister.

Thank you for reading!

*Caroline Woods*

# Questions for Discussion

1. What did you know about the CIA's interference in the arts, literature, and music before picking up this book? What more would you like to know?
2. Louise is initially determined to hide her past as a waitress from her boyfriend and new colleagues. What roles do sexism and classism play in her decision to lie to Joe about her background? Do you think this was the right thing to do?
3. From the very first chapter, Joe gaslights Louise, convincing her she's either crazy or imagining things every time she's close to figuring out the truth. How have you been gaslit in your own life? Have you figured out any effective ways to shut down gaslighting?
4. Black authors like James Baldwin and Langston Hughes were among the most censored and surveilled writers of the Cold War era, largely because the CIA and FBI were afraid their critical takes on American society would make the U.S. look bad abroad. In what ways do you see this same tension continuing today?
5. Louise struggles to define herself in opposition to the other women in the novel: Beverly and Glenys, neither of whom she wants to be. How did Beverly and Glenys surprise you, and what are some things you think all three women have in common?
6. Ernest Hemingway makes a big cameo in *The Lunar Housewife*, serving as an unexpected friend and ally to Louise. What did you make of his assertion that "there's great freedom in being a girl"? How does he operate in and outside the rampant sexism at play in this novel?
7. While they are on the moon together, Sergey tells Katherine that she's making the same amount of money he is to do housework in the lunar colony. In the 1970s there was a push by some feminists to compensate women for unpaid domestic labor. What are your thoughts on this—would it represent a step forward, or a step backward, for women? Has the COVID-19 pandemic shifted your thinking on this at all?
8. Louise's novel begins to change in response to what's happening in her own life. Which parts of *The Lunar Housewife* do you read as a direct response to what she's learned about Joe, Harry, and the country as a whole?
9. What do you think happened to Harry? How much do you think Joe knew about it, and how culpable was he if there was foul play? Do you believe Joe continues to gaslight Louise through their final interaction, or is there ever a point at which he tells the whole truth?

## Further Reading

### *ART AND MADNESS*

Anne Roiphe

### *“STRANGER IN THE VILLAGE,” INCLUDED IN NOTES OF A NATIVE SON*

James Baldwin

### *A FAREWELL TO ARMS*

Ernest Hemingway

### *ERNEST HEMINGWAY, THE ART OF FICTION NO. 21*

The Paris Review Issue 18,  
by George Plimpton

### *FINKS* | Joel Whitney

### *THE CULTURAL COLD WAR*

Frances Stonor Saunders

## Further Listening

### *WIND OF CHANGE*

podcast by Patrick Radden  
Keefe and Crooked Media

## The Lunar Housewife



# PLAYLIST

(AVAILABLE ON SPOTIFY)

[Visit Here](#)



1. **THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND**  
Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings
2. **CARAVAN** | Thelonious Monk
3. **MAMBO ITALIANO**  
Rosemary Clooney
4. **SPACE ODDITY** | David Bowie
5. **YAKETY YAK** | The Coasters
6. **WHAT'D I SAY** | Ray Charles
7. **EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE** | The Police
8. **VENUS** | Lady Gaga
9. **MY MAN IS A MEAN MAN**  
Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings
10. **DON'T BE CRUEL** | Elvis Presley
11. **COLD HEART—PNAU REMIX**  
Elton John, Dua Lipa, and PNAU
12. **PRETEND** | Nat King Cole
13. **SKYFALL** | Adele
14. **CAST YOUR FATE TO THE WIND**  
The Vince Guaraldi Trio

# The Lunar Landing

*(a cocktail)*

**INSPIRED BY RECIPES FROM**

***The Negroni:  
A Love Affair with  
a Classic Cocktail***  
by Matt Hranek

In *The Lunar Housewife*, Louise orders a Negroni on the side of a conspiratorial gossip-ridden lunch. This version is inspired by a drink Papa Hemingway was known to favor and called simply “Gin, Campari, and soda.” It’s light on the sweet vermouth because, let’s face it, finding out your boyfriend has been going behind your back with the CIA will leave you feeling more bitter than sweet. Nevertheless, it’s the perfect summer cocktail: light, herby from the gin, and a tiny bit bubbly from the soda.

Make sure you use Gordon’s for the gin—Papa’s favorite, it was also served in James Bond’s Negroni in *For Your Eyes Only*.



## ***Ingredients:***

**1 ounce Gordon’s gin**

**1 ounce Campari**

**1 ounce soda water or  
lemon-flavored sparkling water**

**Splash of sweet vermouth**

**Strip of lemon peel, for garnish**

Always begin with the Campari and end with the gin. Combine all ingredients in a lowball glass over big, clear cubes of ice (or a moon-shaped ice ball, if you have it!) and stir. Garnish with a strip of lemon peel and enjoy.

# Louise's "Try the Lobster" Lobster Thermidor

**Adapted from**  
**Food & Wine Magazine**

## ***Ingredients:***

**Two whole (about 1.5 lbs each) pre-steamed fresh lobsters**

**¼ cup unsalted butter**

**One medium shallot, finely chopped**

**Two garlic cloves, minced**

**Six ounces mushrooms, thinly sliced: cremini or whatever you can find at the supermarket**

**¾ cup heavy whipping cream**

**Two egg yolks**

**Two tablespoons dry sherry**

**½ teaspoon kosher salt, plus more to taste**

**¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper**

**½ cup plus two tablespoons finely grated Parmesan or pecorino cheese, divided**

**Chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

**Lemon wedges**

1. Most lobster thermidor recipes call for steaming your own live lobsters, but who has time for that? Visit your local grocery store—not, god forbid, the one owned by that fella from high school your mother's trying to set you up with—and ask them to pretty-please precook the lobster.
2. Once you're home, twist off the lobsters' claws, and give each a good, satisfying whack. Think about all the people who've gaslit you as you do so. Remove the meat and set aside; discard claw shells. Place one of the lobsters on a cutting board, and using a large, heavy knife and kitchen shears, cut the lobster in half lengthwise. Carefully remove tail meat. Discard tomalley (the green stuff). Rinse lobster shells and dry thoroughly. Place shells, cut side up, on a rimmed baking sheet. Repeat with remaining lobster. Chop tail and claw meat into half-inch pieces; set aside.
3. Heat butter in a large saucepan over medium. Add shallot, and cook, stirring often, until softened, three to four minutes. Add garlic and mushrooms, and cook, still stirring, until the liquid has evaporated and mushrooms begin to brown, five to six minutes. Meanwhile, whisk together heavy whipping cream, egg yolks, and sherry.
4. Help yourself to a little of the sherry while you peer out your front window to make sure no one followed you home from the grocery store.
5. Add the cream mixture to the mushroom mixture, and cook, stirring constantly, until sauce thickens slightly, one to two minutes. Remove from heat, and stir in salt, cayenne, and a half cup of the Parmesan or pecorino. Fold in lobster meat, and season to taste with salt. Spoon mushroom mixture evenly into lobster shells (about a half cup each). Sprinkle with remaining two tablespoons cheese.
6. Preheat broiler with oven rack six inches from heating element. Broil until filling is light golden brown, two to three minutes. Garnish with parsley. Serve to your dearest friends with lemon wedges and a stiff cocktail.