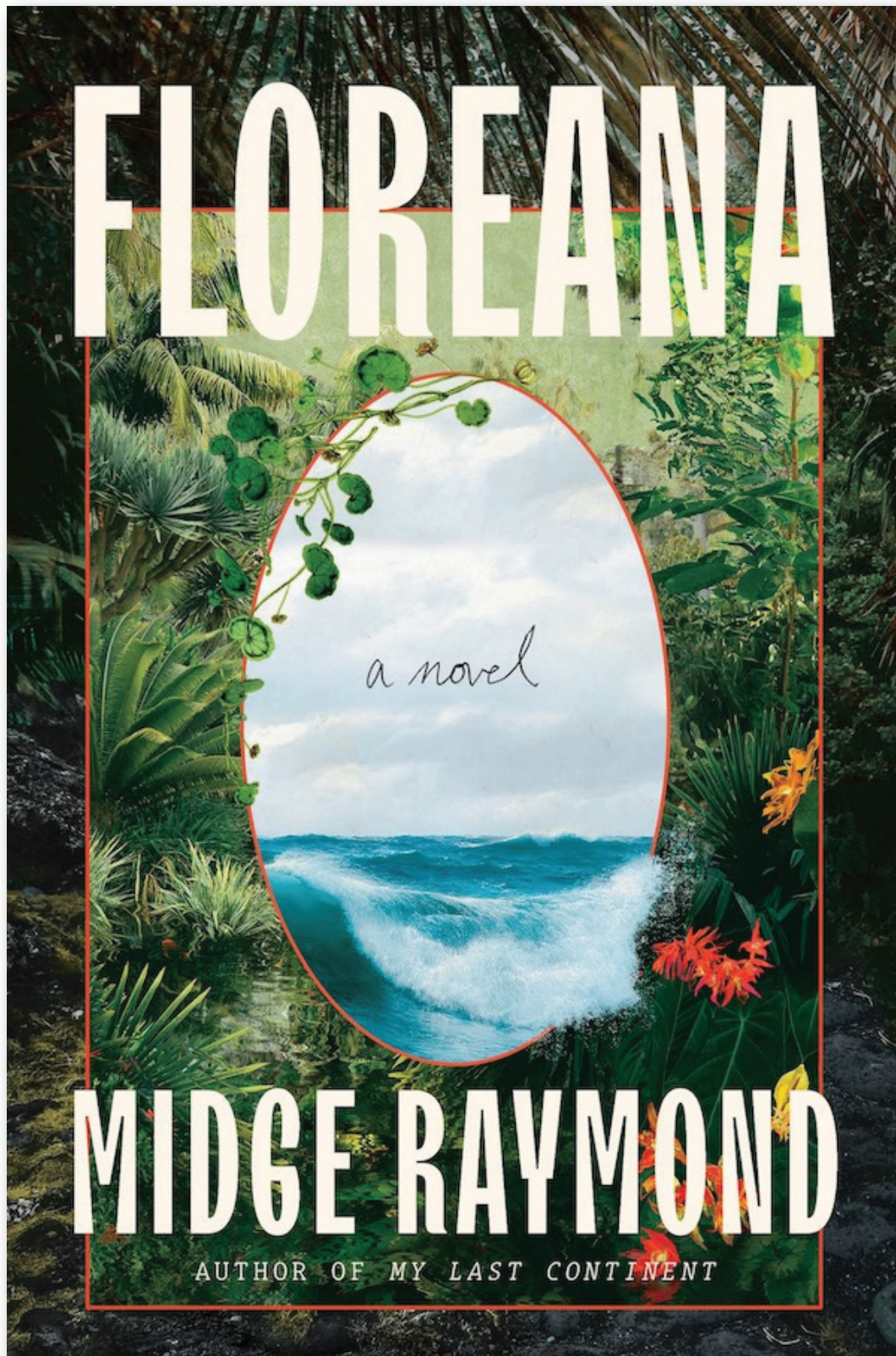


Book Club Kit





Suggested Discussion Questions

📖 How are Mallory and Dore different, and how are they alike? What similarities and differences have to do with being a century apart, and which are timeless?

📖 Both Mallory and Dore have reasons to escape to Floreana. Have you ever thought of escaping to a remote island or another country? What do you hope would be different there? What challenges would you face?

📖 When Dore arrived on Floreana in 1929, all of the island's tortoises were gone, taken by sailors and then wiped out by the predators these visitors left behind. By the time Mallory returns in 2020, tortoises have been reintroduced to Floreana. Can you think of other examples of animals whose populations have been decimated by humans, only to be rehabilitated by humans later?

📖 Mallory and Dore each struggle with finding their place in the world. In what ways are their struggles similar, and in what ways are they different? How has the world changed for women in the past century?



📖 Both Callie and the Baroness disrupt the lives of others on Floreana Island. In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different?

📖 Dore Strauch and Margret Wittmer published memoirs about their experiences on the island—and each woman had a different version of the events that took place. To what extent are memoirs true stories? How much do the facts matter to you when you are reading a memoir?

📖 The Galápagos Islands, whose endemic flora and fauna are still recovering from the effects of early settlers, are now protected by the Galápagos National Park. Yet the islands see close to 300,000 visitors per year. How much tourism is too much for such a fragile ecosystem? Would you travel there? Why or why not?

📖 Historical fiction uses real places, time periods, and people as the inspiration for fictional stories. Do you read historical fiction to get a feel for a certain time and place of the past? To what extent do you expect historical fiction to be accurate?





About “The Galápagos Affair”

Dore Strauch, a twentysomething hausfrau in Berlin who had multiple sclerosis, fell in love with her doctor, Friedrich Ritter, in the mid 1920s. They decided to leave their spouses and civilization behind and seek paradise on Floreana Island in the Galápagos.

Dore and Friedrich arrived on Floreana in 1929. Though they never married, they were known as “the Ritters.” (Back in Berlin, they had arranged for their spouses to meet and, they hoped, form a life together in their absence.)

A few years after the Ritters, another German family—Heinz Wittmer; his pregnant wife, Margret; and his teenage son, Harry—arrived to start a new life on Floreana. The Wittmers were independent and capable, and they all might have lived harmoniously on the island if it weren’t for the third arrival: a woman who called herself the Baroness and her two lovers, Rudolf Lorenz and Robert Philippon. The mercenary, cunning, gun-wielding Baroness created havoc amid the settlers and was disliked by them all.



One day, the Baroness and Robert Philippon disappeared from the island. Margret Wittmer claimed they had left for Tahiti, whereas Dore believed an act of violence had occurred. Rudolf Lorenz, at the time, behaved as though a burden had been lifted. The truth remains unknown, as the Baroness and Philippon were never seen or heard from again.

Rudolf Lorenz left Floreana on a boat that later became marooned on an uninhabited island, where he and the captain both perished.

Not long afterward, Friedrich grew mysteriously ill, apparently from eating bad poultry, and Dore and the Wittmers witnessed his death, though Dore’s and Margret’s accounts of this event are completely different. After Friedrich’s death, Dore left the island; she died in Berlin in 1942. The Wittmers stayed on Floreana and to this day have descendants on the island. The mysteries of these deaths and disappearances have never been solved.

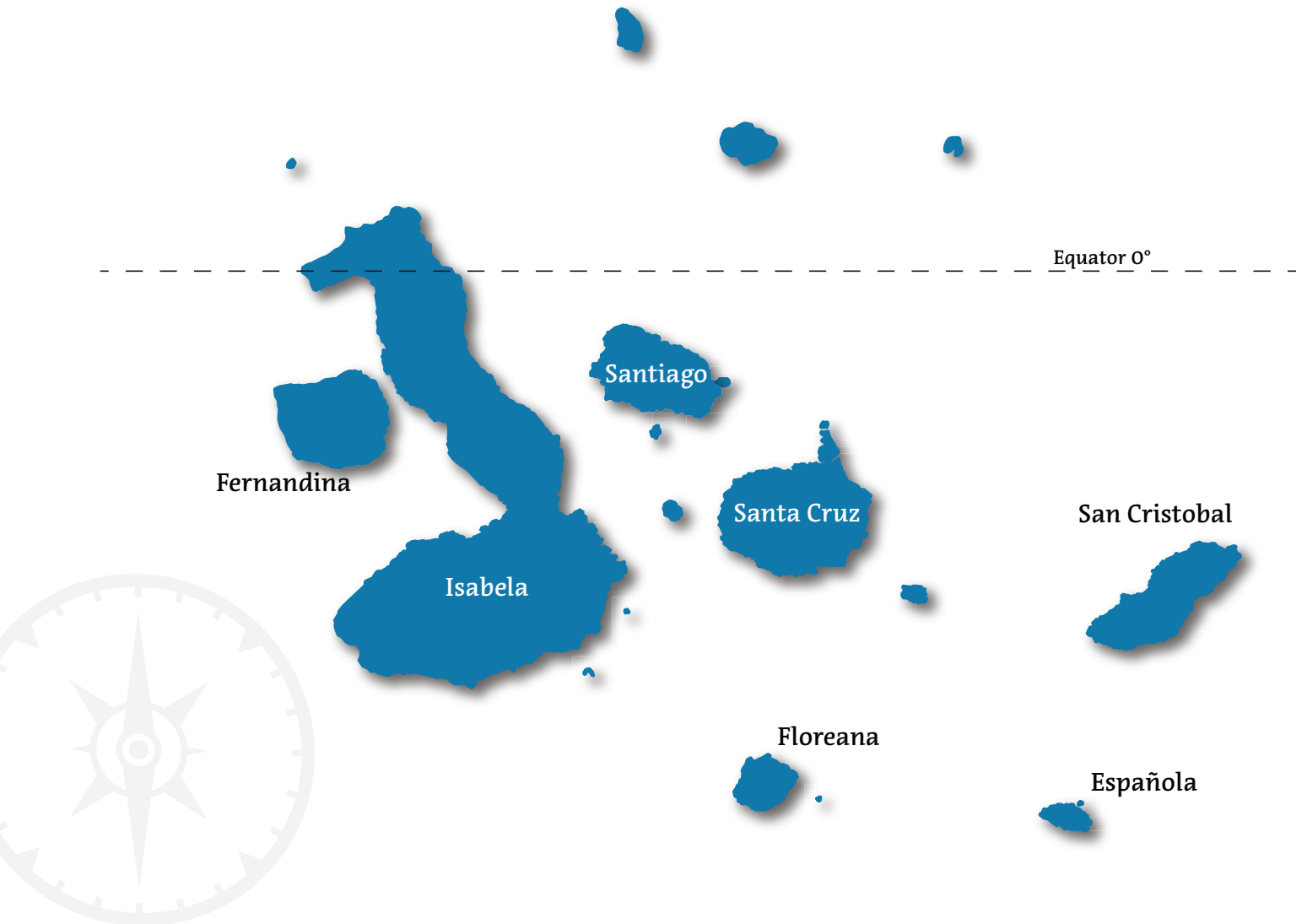




About the Galápagos Islands



The Galápagos Islands are located in the Pacific Ocean, about 600 miles off the coast of Ecuador. The Galápagos archipelago comprises more than 100 volcanic islands, with eighteen main islands, including Floreana, the sixth largest. The islands have no indigenous human populations and were first discovered by Europeans in the 1500s. In 1832, the archipelago was annexed as a territory of the Republic of Ecuador. In 1978, the Galápagos Islands were designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Currently, the Galápagos National Park manages 97 percent of the Galápagos archipelago and 98 percent of the island of Floreana, which is home to about 140 residents.





Q&A with Midge Raymond

Q: What inspired *Floreana*?

A: When I visited the Galápagos, it was with a University of Washington alumni trip for the chance to see Galápagos penguins with Dr. Dee Boersma, who holds the Wadsworth Endowed Chair in Conservation Science at UW. (I had volunteered with Dee in Patagonia, where she has studied Magellanic penguins in Argentina for more than forty years, an experience that was an inspiration for my first novel, *My Last Continent*). We saw only a few penguins during the Galápagos trip—but I did learn about the bizarre human history of Floreana Island. Learning about “the Galápagos affair” and the mysterious fates of the settlers captured my imagination. When I realized that the disappearances and deaths were still essentially unsolved mysteries, I thought it would be fun to imagine what might’ve happened there. And, inspired by Dee’s penguin conservation work, I decided to combine the two ideas by creating the narratives of two women, a century apart, who come to Floreana for reasons that seem different but actually are quite similar.

Q: What sort of research did you do?

A: Having traveled to Floreana with Dee (visit [The Center for Ecosystem Sentinels](#) and subscribe to the newsletter to learn more about her research), I already knew of her conservation efforts for Galápagos penguins, which includes building nests for the penguins in collaboration with the Galápagos National Park. I learned more details from the Center’s e-news and updates from the lab. Regarding the Galápagos affair, there are only a few sources available about these events (which actually helped me to re-imagine what might’ve happened). To find out what is known about that time, I consulted Dore Strauch’s memoir, *Satan Came to Eden*; Margret Wittmer’s memoir, *Floreana*;

the book *The Galápagos Affair* by John Treherne; and the documentary *The Galápagos Affair: Satan Came to Eden*, directed by Daniel Geller and Dayna Goldfine.

Q: Why did you decide to write two narratives, one historical and one contemporary?

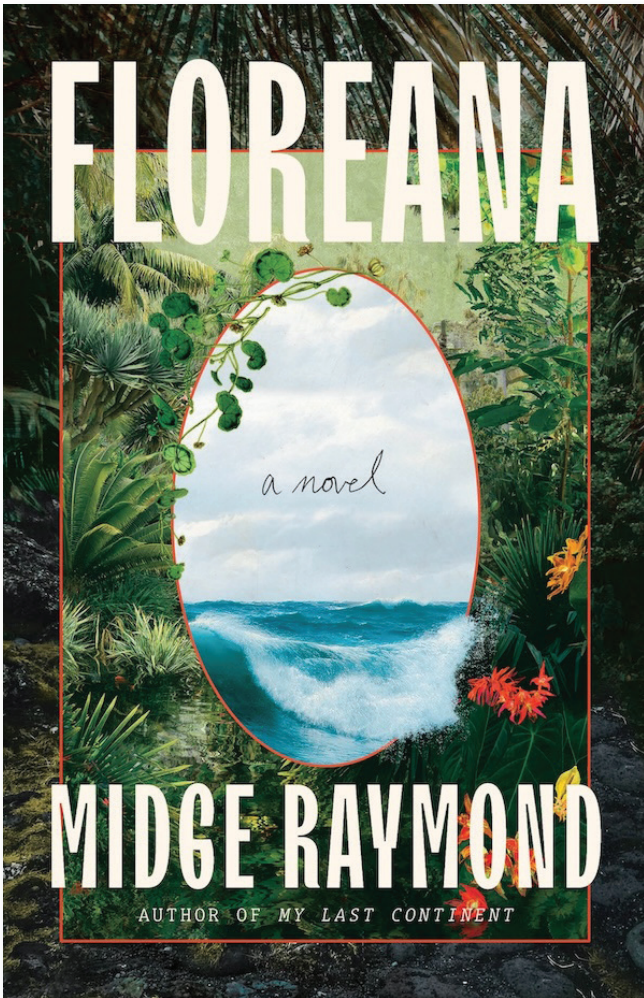
A: I wanted to write about both the Galápagos affair as well as the current conservation work in the islands (which goes far beyond penguins), so I needed both narratives to give the full picture. Also, with the true story of what happened to the settlers still unknown, I liked the idea of someone in this century finding a long-lost diary that offered all the answers. Another intriguing aspect of writing the two narratives is being able to show what is different in the islands now and what is still the same. On the one hand, human settlers have wreaked havoc on the endemic species of the Galápagos, and there is a lot of work to be done to undo this damage. On the other hand, it is a place where animals are now so well protected that seals will lounge with you on the beach, and penguins will swim right up to you. The National Park has been doing a good job of showing visitors the flora and fauna of the islands while keeping them protected at the same time.

Q: What is your writing process?

A: I’m one of those rare writers who doesn’t have a daily routine; I write when I can. And I find it hard to be creative on a computer, so I prefer notebooks and longhand. I usually sketch out ideas in a notebook, then get them into a digital file, and at some point I’ll create a loose outline. From there I start writing, often drafting scenes or chapters on the computer but always editing and revising longhand.



Praise for *Floreana*



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ISBN: 978-1662525124

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e-book, and audiobook.

“The truth behind this real-life event remains a mystery, but Raymond imagines an exciting version of events that is **gripping and intriguing**, while creating a vivid scene of the wild, remote island in the 1930s. The book explores wildlife conservation, survival, the struggle for existence, animal welfare and the human condition ... **highly recommended**.”
— *Library Journal* (starred review)

“An engrossing narrative of self-reckoning.”
— *Publishers Weekly*

“In the 1930s, a set of murders straight out of Agatha Christie took place on Floreana Island. Raymond’s novel toggles between this old story and a new one, proposing a plausible solution to this enduring mystery. Is this what really happened? Who cares! Raymond’s novel is **riveting and revelatory**, a murder mystery embedded in other mysteries—of love and regret, loss and redemption, and how we can manage to hold on to the parts of this beautiful world that were never ours in the first place.”

— Karen Joy Fowler, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Booth* and *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*

“*Floreana* is a **stunning and deeply layered** murder mystery, historical novel, and environmental love letter all in one. Midge Raymond beautifully and seamlessly weaves the hidden lives of two women, a century apart, as they negotiate the fragile terrain of the Galápagos Islands along with their own troubled psyches ... A haunting tale for our times.”

— JoeAnn Hart, author of *Arroyo Circle* and *Highwire Act*

“*Floreana* is a **beautiful, unexpected, and powerful** novel about the fragility of life and love in its many forms—a book that is all at a once a riveting theory on an unsolved historical mystery, a close character exploration of love and loss that tackles the themes of motherhood and the innate desire to nurture and be nurtured, the pain of unfulfilled expectations, and the simple beauty and tenuousness of nature. Not to be missed!”

— Samantha Greene Woodruff, bestselling author of *The Lobotomist's Wife* and *The Trade Off*



About the Author



Midge Raymond is the author of the novels *Floreana* and *My Last Continent*, the short-story collection *Forgetting English*, and, with coauthor John Yunker, the mystery novel *Devils Island*.

Her writing has appeared in *TriQuarterly*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, the *Los Angeles Times* magazine, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Poets & Writers*, and many other publications. Midge has taught at Boston University, Boston's Grub Street Writers, Seattle's Hugo House, and San Diego Writers, Ink. She lives in the Pacific Northwest, where she is co-founder of the boutique publisher Ashland Creek Press.

Praise for *Floreana*

"Who knows what happened on Floreana Island in the Galápagos in the 1930s? In this **suspenseful and immersive** novel, Midge Raymond offers a possible series of events leading up to infamous awful fates of a few of the settlers, as well as telling an equally compelling contemporary story. Come for the disastrous love affairs, stay for the careful depiction of efforts being made toward penguin conservation. Much like the fantasy of desert island life, *Floreana* offers a rich bounty of attractions."

— Alice Elliott Dark, author of *Fellowship Point* and *In the Gloaming*

"*Floreana* masterfully weaves together the tales of two women who escape to the same faraway island almost a century apart. Both storylines feature deeply buried secrets, yearning, questions about what people owe to those that surround them, and the profound need for connection and purpose. The echoes and reverberations in the two timelines—about new beginnings and love and families and conservation and hope—perfectly illustrate how human concerns are universal and timeless. Raymond's **beautiful and absorbing** novel kept me turning the pages, eager to find out what and who would fail to thrive on Floreana Island and what might blossom there."

— Karin Lin-Greenberg, author of *You Are Here*

"This book is a triple hitter: **it's a great novel, beautifully structured and woven; it's a compelling mystery; and it's a striking lesson about ecology and the importance of keeping our world intact.** Midge's style is so fluid and pitch perfect that I never saw several twists coming, and she knocked me breathless. *Floreana* is both devastating and full of hope, leaving the reader with a sense of grief but also great renewal. It's a must read for those who expect an extraordinary delivery in their book choices. Reading *Floreana* was time magnificently spent."

— Laurie Notaro, author of *The Murderess*