

**Long
Island
Comprom-
ise**

A novel

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A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

So you've chosen *Long Island Compromise* for your book club! I can't tell you how grateful I am for it, and how much I hope it's better than the one you chose last month, and that Trish doesn't get too drunk again!

The book has plenty for you to talk about—to debate, to be anguished over, to enjoy or not enjoy. That's the magic of a book club, to openly discuss these matters together without the author hearing or the world weighing in. I've been asked to contribute some ideas for your book club, but I think I'm the exact wrong person to talk about the book. I've had my say. Instead, I'll tell you that I've just come from a tour around the country, and that I was always surprised by the questions I got. By the second week of my journey, people who showed up to my readings had sometimes read the book, and their insight and feedback always floored me. I've been the gracious recipient of an audience that rounds up on me, that thinks my messiest sections were intentional—but that's readers, right? The reader wants to love, which is why my authority is the last word. But it's not. This is your book now. I have primacy in it, but it's time for me to shut up. I've had my say.

Instead, I'll just give you some background: I began writing *Long Island Compromise* in 2014, when I was on a trip to Russia to report a magazine story about the U.S.'s only male synchronized swimmer. I had come to the point in my career where I realized that there was no amount of success as a journalist that would lead to true solvency, that the middle class really was at its end, that there was no future where my hard work led to security. The rage of this presented itself to me whole. I wrote the first 70 pages of this book right there, in a matter of days, between synchronized swimming events in an aquatic arena.

It wasn't to be my first book, though. For reasons better left for another time, I ended up writing *Fleishman Is in Trouble*. But on the day I handed in the last pass of that book, I returned to the story of the Fletchers, a wealthy family from Long Island who find that their fortune has suddenly dwindled to nearly nothing, and they're left to wonder who they would be if they didn't have their money. I wanted to explore whether inherited wealth dooms you in a way—if it's better to come from money and have the perception of safety or if a person is better off having to learn how to fight for their own survival. It's a good question, and one I tried to answer in this book.

However, it wasn't the whole story. Questions of another kind of inheritance—inherited trauma—kept tapping on my shoulder, and the book came alive when I finally turned to those questions and let them take control of the story. Who are we without our money is a good question, but who are we without our trauma? That was the question for me.

Long Island Compromise is my best attempt at an answer to all those questions with a good story. I hope it makes you laugh and cry. I hope it makes you ask yourself questions about your own prejudices and proclivities about money, family, and forgiveness. I hope you love Mandy Patinkin as much as I do.

And I hope at some point I'll get to hear what you thought of it. Whatever happens at your meeting, I hope it's a great one that engenders the best discussion, the most violent enthusiasm, the best cheese and crackers. Please make sure Trish gets home safe.

My gratitude forever,

TAFFY





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever known a family like the Fletchers? What were they like? What myths were built around them?
2. Reflecting on the Fletcher family's story, how do you think the title *Long Island Compromise* relates to the novel's exploration of trauma, wealth, family dynamics, and the pursuit of happiness? What does the idea of "compromise" signify in the context of the family's journey?
3. The Fletcher family is portrayed as resuming their "prized places in the saga of the American dream" after Carl's return. Discuss how the novel examines the concept of the American dream through this family's experiences. Do you think their understanding of the dream changes over time? How has your family defined the American dream?
4. What elements of satire did you notice in the portrayal of suburban life, wealth, and family dynamics? How do these satirical elements contribute to the novel's commentary on American society?
5. How does money stunt each character? How does it enable them? How have feelings about money influenced you and your own relatives?
6. "But all that money was like the white-picket fence around the Fletcher estate: It obscures the view. You couldn't see the Fletchers clearly through the mist of their fortune." What do you make of this statement? What are other traits or factors that can make it hard to see people clearly?
7. The family fortune dwindling to almost nothing forces the Fletcher family to confront their past and future. Discuss how wealth (or the lack of it) influences each family member's sense of identity and success. How does the discovery at the end of the book complicate this even further?
8. The theme of survival is recurrent throughout the novel, with the family hovering "at the delicate precipice of a different kind of survival." Discuss the different forms of survival depicted in the book and what they reveal about the characters and their values.
9. "A dybbuk was a miserable soul that could not progress to a heavenly rest and instead stayed on Earth and infested something—a person or a thing—or it took on a life as a disembodied ghost, in order to do its final bidding and cause as much chaos as possible." Do you believe there was a dybbuk in the works in the Fletcher family? Discuss. Is there a curse or haunting in your own family line?
10. A major question this book asks is whether or not money can ever buy you security and safety. Do you think it can?
11. Does your family have shared heritage—or shared trauma—that manifests in different ways in different family members? What factors do you think contribute to this difference?
12. If the family had taken time to process the kidnapping after it happened, what do you think might have changed for the Fletchers?
13. By the end of the story, did you arrive at an answer to one of the novel's central questions: Is it better to be born with money or without?





THE LONG ISLAND COMPROMISE READING LIST

- **THE CORRECTIONS** - JONATHAN FRANZEN
The mothership of dysfunctional family stories, with sentences that will leave you staggering.
 - **AMERICAN PASTORAL** - PHILIP ROTH
To tell the story of a moment through the experience of one family—I read this when it first came out; I return to it often.
 - **THE NEST** - CYNTHIA D'APRIX SWEENEY
The multi-POV brat-child inheritance novel of my dreams.
 - **CAPITAL IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY** - THOMAS PIKETTY
If *Long Island Compromise* is anything, it's an adaptation of this banger of a book about the disappearance of the middle class.
 - **THE LATECOMER** - JEAN HANFF KORELITZ
The modern Jewish multigenerational POV story about siblings who just can't get it together.
 - **THE REAL AMERICANS** - RACHEL KHONG
A sweeping epic of family grappling with making their way as outsiders.
 - **THE BONFIRE OF THE VANITIES** - TOM WOLFE
It's comforting that you can try to tell the story of a time and place and, eventually, have to end the story. Wolfe was a guiding light for me on this.
 - **ENEMIES, A LOVE STORY** - ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER
The story of post-trauma of the generation of Jews that survived the war has never been told as viscerally or as warmly.
 - **THE GREAT GATSBY** - F. SCOTT FITZGERALD
The ur-Long Island unsound, and proof the place has been making writers crazy for long before I got there.
 - **THE HOUSE OF MIRTH** - EDITH WHARTON
Class struggle in New York, and trying to get ahead when it's clear you probably never will.
 - **CALL IT SLEEP** - HENRY ROTH
Nothing beats *Call it Sleep* for its rendering of post-immigration time and place.
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