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“an exciting voice
in historical fiction.”
—Renee Rosen, bestselling
author of
White Collar Girl

THE WAY TO LONDON

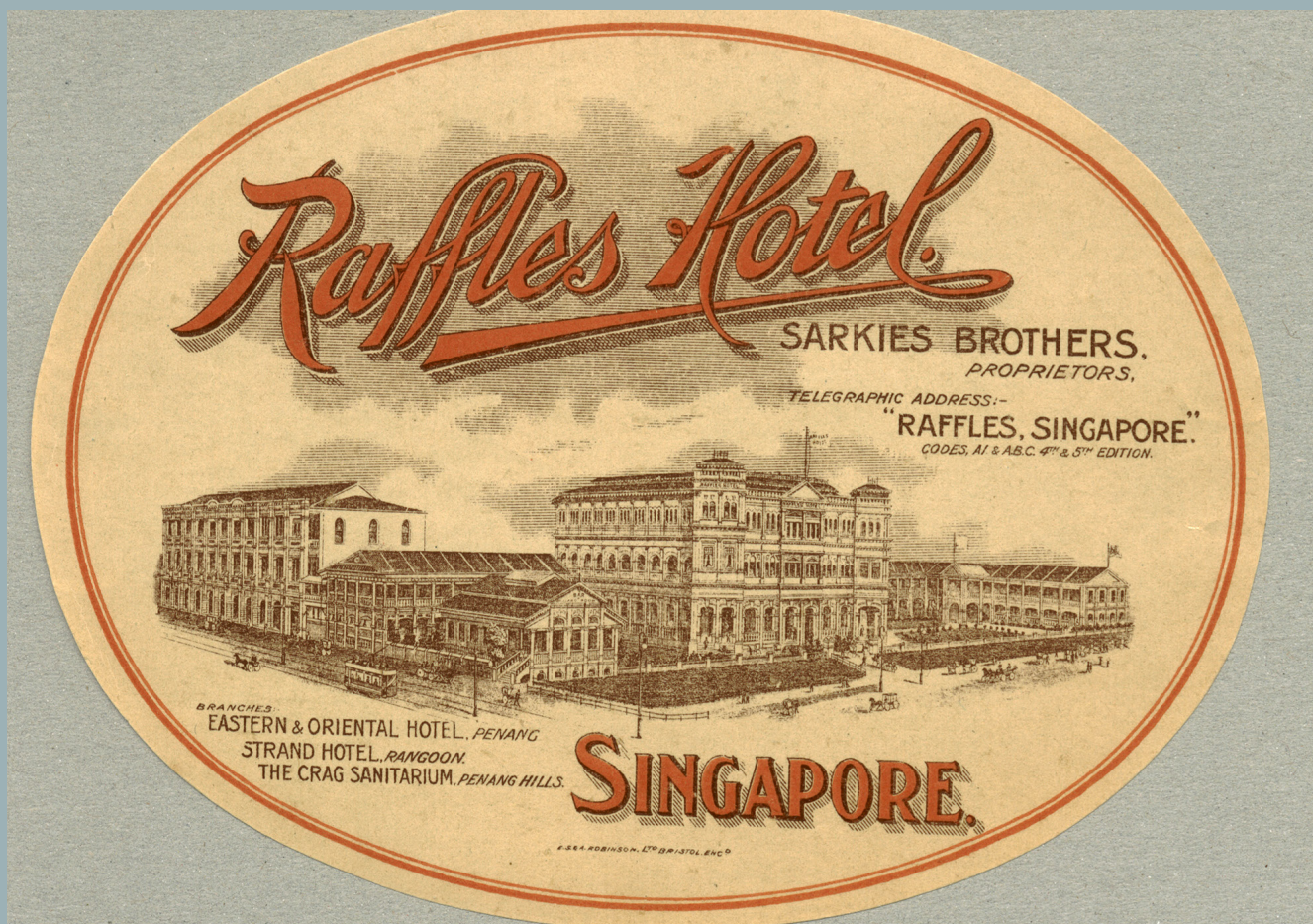
A Novel of World War II

ALIX
RICKLOFF

Author of Secrets of Nanreath Hall

Book Club Guide

The Way to London



Welcome Readers

I'm so glad you've chosen THE WAY TO LONDON for your book club. To help with your evening, I've put together some extras to make it as fun and informative as possible. I've included an author's note that will give you a little glimpse into what inspired me to write the story as well as some background information on the history behind the book. There's also a list of discussion questions to keep the conversation going and some suggestions for further reading of both non-fiction and fiction titles in case you want to dig deeper. And to add some festive flair to the occasion, I've thrown in a few drink ideas that will definitely put you in the spirit.

Enjoy and happy reading!

Alix



Author's Note

When I sat down to write
THE WAY TO LONDON, I knew I
wanted to return to Nanreath Hall,

the Trenowth family's country estate on the Cornish coast
that had been taken over by the military for use as a military
convalescent hospital.

Eighteen months into World War II and the country has resigned itself to a long grim fight. While the ferocity of the London Blitz is over, the Germans continue a steady relentless bombing campaign that has grown to include cities and towns throughout the country. Known as the "Baedeker blitz" a reference to the popular tourist guide of the era, these raids targeted cities of cultural or historical significance like Bath, Canterbury, and Exeter (which is mentioned in the book). Rationing of everything from food to clothing to petrol has reduced life to one of "make do and mend".

Into this gray world bursts Lucy Stanhope.

Lucy grew from a single mention in *Secrets of Nanreath Hall* as the pampered, headstrong cousin living a life of luxury in Singapore. It was only a few lines, but that off-stage character stuck with me, and it was her story I wanted to tell.

This was no easy task. While I'd done extensive research on the WWII British home front, the history of Singapore and the Malay Peninsula was completely new territory for me. A British colony since 1824, Singapore was

central to trade and commerce in this region and boasted a large ex-pat population. These men and women saw the war in Europe as distant and dismissed the threat of a Japanese attack. Should the worst happen, they relied on the might of the British Navy and the natural defenses of the impregnable jungle terrain to keep them secure. This would prove to be a catastrophically optimistic reading of the military situation. The Japanese launched their attack on Singapore in December of 1941 and, within weeks, had swept down the Malay peninsula, overwhelming the British army who surrendered in February 1942. The chaos of the invasion and the resulting evacuation under enemy bombardment tore families apart and ended tragically with 100,000 people taken prisoner. While Lucy escapes this fate, she is thrown from the tropical paradise of wealthy colonial Singapore to the grim privations of wartime England where her brash unconventionality is less than welcome.

Her traveling companion, the young evacuee Bill, took shape after I read *No Time To Say Goodbye* by Ben Wicks which is about the evacuation of British schoolchildren during WWII.



As war loomed, posters and pamphlets were used to persuade parents that their children would be safest far from the inner cities, especially London. It worked, and in the first three days of the evacuation at the start of the war in September 1939, nearly 700,000 unaccompanied schoolchildren were relocated to the countryside. Many returned home through the following months when the expected bombings didn't occur but were again evacuated after the fall of France in June 1940 and didn't see their families again until the end of the war five years later.

Sadly, Bill's experience as an evacuee was not out of the ordinary. It was common for these lonely homesick evacuees to have trouble adjusting to country life while host families could be equally surprised by the children they were housing, making it common for misunderstandings and conflict to erupt.

I loved the idea of the spoiled little rich girl and the street-smart bad boy pairing up on a journey across country. On the surface, they seem like complete opposites, but as we follow them from Cornwall to London we realize how much they have in common and how desperately they need each other.



Discussion Questions

1. What did you think of Lucy at the outset of the story? Did you find her an unlikable character? A sympathetic character? Why?
2. Mrs. Pratchett and her daughters leave Singapore while Lady Amelia and Fortecsue choose to stay. If threatened by war, could you leave everything you own behind and flee, or would you remain behind and hope for the best? Do you know anyone who's made this decision?
3. Bill and Lucy come from very different backgrounds, but they share many similarities? What are they? What in their lives might have contributed to this resemblance in temperament?
4. Bill is one of thousands of children who left their homes and families during the evacuation of London at the outbreak of WWII. If you were a parent during that time, would you have kept your children with you or sent them away? Explain your choice.
5. All three main characters travel to London in search of something. Do all three find what they are looking for?
6. In the end, Lucy has to make a choice that will affect the rest of her life. What are some difficult choices you've had to make? Looking back, do you feel you made the right decisions?
7. Lucy encounters many different mothers throughout her journey. Which mother did you most identify with? Which mother do you feel played the most pivotal role in the story? Explain.
8. Lucy identifies with Mrs. Britt's desire to ignore reality and live in a dream. Why do you suppose that is? What realities does Lucy ignore? What makes her finally face the truth?
9. Both Michael and Lucy form poor first impressions of each other and slowly revise their opinions over the course of the long trip to London. Have your instincts ever been wrong when it came to someone?
10. Lucy constantly compares herself to her mother Lady Amelia throughout the book, and, by the end, is afraid she is becoming just like her. Are there any ways in which you see similarities between yourself and your mother? Give examples.

Drinks

to Put You In the Book Club Mood:



Singapore Sling (first served at the bar in Singapore's Raffles Hotel around 1915)

- 1 ½ ounces gin
 - 1 ounce Bénédictine Liqueur
 - ½ ounce cherry liqueur
 - 1 ounce lime juice
 - ¼ ounce simple syrup
 - 2 ounces club soda
 - Lemon slice for garnish
 - Maraschino cherry, for garnish
1. In a cocktail shaker filled with ice cubes, pour the gin, Benedictine, cherry liqueur, lime juice, and simple syrup.
 2. Strain into a highball glass over fresh ice.
 3. Top with club soda.
 4. Garnish with a lemon slice and cherry. Serve and enjoy.

Gin Rickey (Lucy's favorite at the Singapore Swimming Club)

- 2 ½ ounces gin
 - ½ ounce lime juice
 - ½ ounce simple syrup
 - Lime slice for garnish
1. Add gin, lime juice, and simple syrup to a shaker with ice and shake.
 2. Strain into a cocktail glass.
 3. Garnish with lime slice

Gimlet (popular in the 1930's at London hotels like the Savoy)

- 2 ounces gin
 - ½ ounce lime juice
 - Club soda
 - Lime slice
1. Add the gin and lime juice to a highball glass.
 2. Top it off with club soda
 3. Garnish with the lime slice

Want to Learn More?

I've put together a short list of both fiction and non-fiction titles for anyone interested in reading more about Singapore or the British evacuation of schoolchildren during WWII.

Singapore at Random by Susan Tsang

The Battle for Singapore by Peter Thompson

When There Were Tigers in Singapore by Edmund Schirmer

The Singapore Grip by J.G. Farrell

The Frangipani Tree Mystery by Ovidia Yu

Don't Forget to Write (the true story of an evacuee and her family) by Pam Hobbs

The Children's War by Ruth Inglis

Evacuees Evacuation in Wartime Britain 1939-1945 by Mike Brown

Carrie's War by Nina Bawden

Goodnight, Mr. Tom by Michelle Magorian



Author Bio

Critically acclaimed author of historical fiction, Alix Rickloff's family tree includes a knight who fought during the Wars of the Roses (his brass rubbing hangs in her dining room) and a soldier who sided with Charles I during the English Civil War (hence the family's hasty emigration to America). With inspiration like that, what else could she do but start writing her own stories? She lives in Maryland in a house that's seen its own share of history so when she's not writing, she can usually be found trying to keep it from falling down. *THE WAY TO LONDON* is her latest release.