

'Woollett has done it again ... A cautionary tale inspired by true events,  
by one of my favourite authors. Read this book now.' J.P. POMARE

LAURA ELIZABETH  
WOOLLETT

BOOK  
CLUB  
NOTES

THE  
NEWCOMER

SCRIBE

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A PERFECT VICTIM

Dear Book Clubbers,

A friend once told me that, if your life is going well at 27, it will go to hell at 28. She blamed this on Saturn's return — an astrological rite of passage, in which Saturn returns to the position it was in at the time of your birth. If you make it to 30, you've lived through a full lap of Saturn around the sun.

Saturn is the cosmic Grim Reaper. A reminder that time is finite, actions have consequences, and chaos comes for us all. Afraid of losing control, Saturn devours his own children.

At 27, my life seemed to be going places. Then I was 28, and what once came easily not only didn't come — it didn't seem worth doing. I didn't recognise myself. A numbness encased me, cracked open by monthly mood-swings that left me even less recognisable. Murder podcasts were my serotonin.

Paulina Novak is the child of my Saturn's return. Unlike me, she doesn't survive hers — not because she doesn't want to live, but because somebody kills her while she's still figuring out how to.

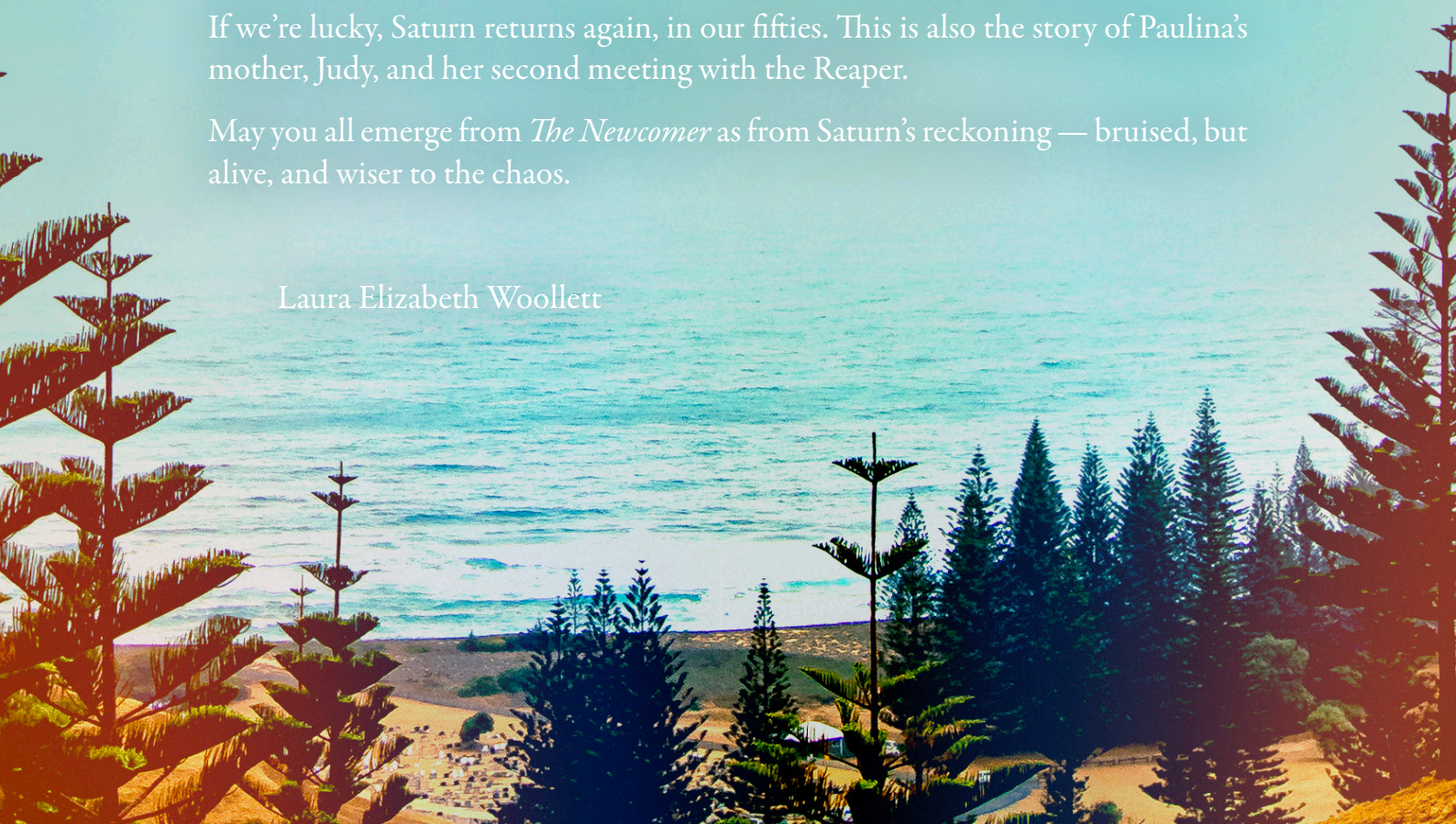
Though Paulina's actions and experiences aren't mine, her feelings are. The urgency, the upheaval, the insecurity, the flirtations with the void, the volcanic rage. All the rage.

Life didn't magically get simpler when I turned 30. But there was a greater appreciation for the complexity — and a gratitude to have made it so far.

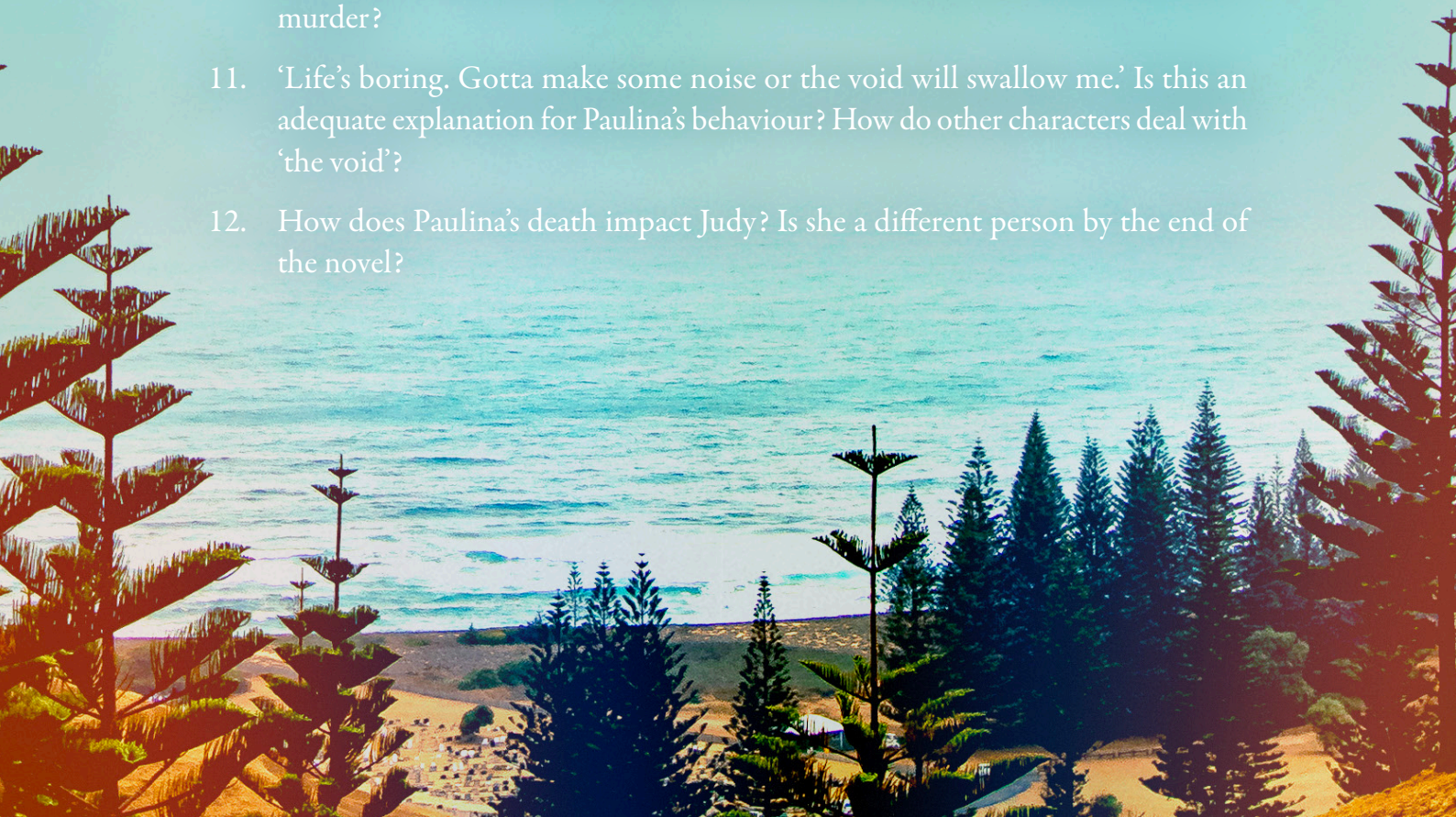
If we're lucky, Saturn returns again, in our fifties. This is also the story of Paulina's mother, Judy, and her second meeting with the Reaper.

May you all emerge from *The Newcomer* as from Saturn's reckoning — bruised, but alive, and wiser to the chaos.

Laura Elizabeth Woollett






1. *The Newcomer* begins from Judy's perspective on the day of Paulina's murder. What was the significance of highlighting the crime victim's mother in this way?
2. 'There's no justice. There's just senselessness, and living with the senselessness.' What do you think of Judy's statement? Is there any justice in *The Newcomer*?
3. What feelings does Fairfolk Island evoke, as a setting? How does this setting create drama for the characters?
4. Is Paulina a different person on Fairfolk Island than on the mainland? What do we learn about Paulina's life in Sydney and the events leading up to her move to Fairfolk?
5. Paulina refuses to leave Fairfolk, even when her life is in shambles. Why does she insist on staying? What does the island represent to her?
6. Paulina agonises over turning thirty. What role do ageing and age-difference relationships play in *The Newcomer*?
7. Is Jesse being truthful when he says he and Paulina are "just friends"? What's the significance of his friendship with Paulina?
8. Jesse is a Yuggera man, yet he is born and raised on Fairfolk. How does this influence his identity and his relationship with the island and its inhabitants?
9. Though Paulina and Judy are close, they keep secrets from one another. Are these secrets harmful, or do they protect them?
10. Paulina is a challenging character, whose behaviour may be seen as antisocial, destructive, and self-destructive. Did this influence your feelings about her murder?
11. 'Life's boring. Gotta make some noise or the void will swallow me.' Is this an adequate explanation for Paulina's behaviour? How do other characters deal with 'the void'?
12. How does Paulina's death impact Judy? Is she a different person by the end of the novel?



LAURA ELIZABETH WOOLLETT THE NEWCOMER BOOK CLUB NOTES

**Laura Elizabeth Woollett** is the author of a short story collection, *The Love of a Bad Man* (Scribe, 2016), and two novels, *Beautiful Revolutionary* (Scribe, 2018) and *The Newcomer*. *The Love of a Bad Man* was shortlisted for the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Fiction and the Ned Kelly Award for Best First Fiction. *Beautiful Revolutionary* was shortlisted for the 2019 Prime Minister's Literary Award for Fiction, the Australian Literature Society Gold Medal, and the Kathleen Mitchell Award. Laura is the City of Melbourne's 2020 Boyd Garret writer-in-residence and is a 2020-22 Marten Bequest scholar for prose.



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