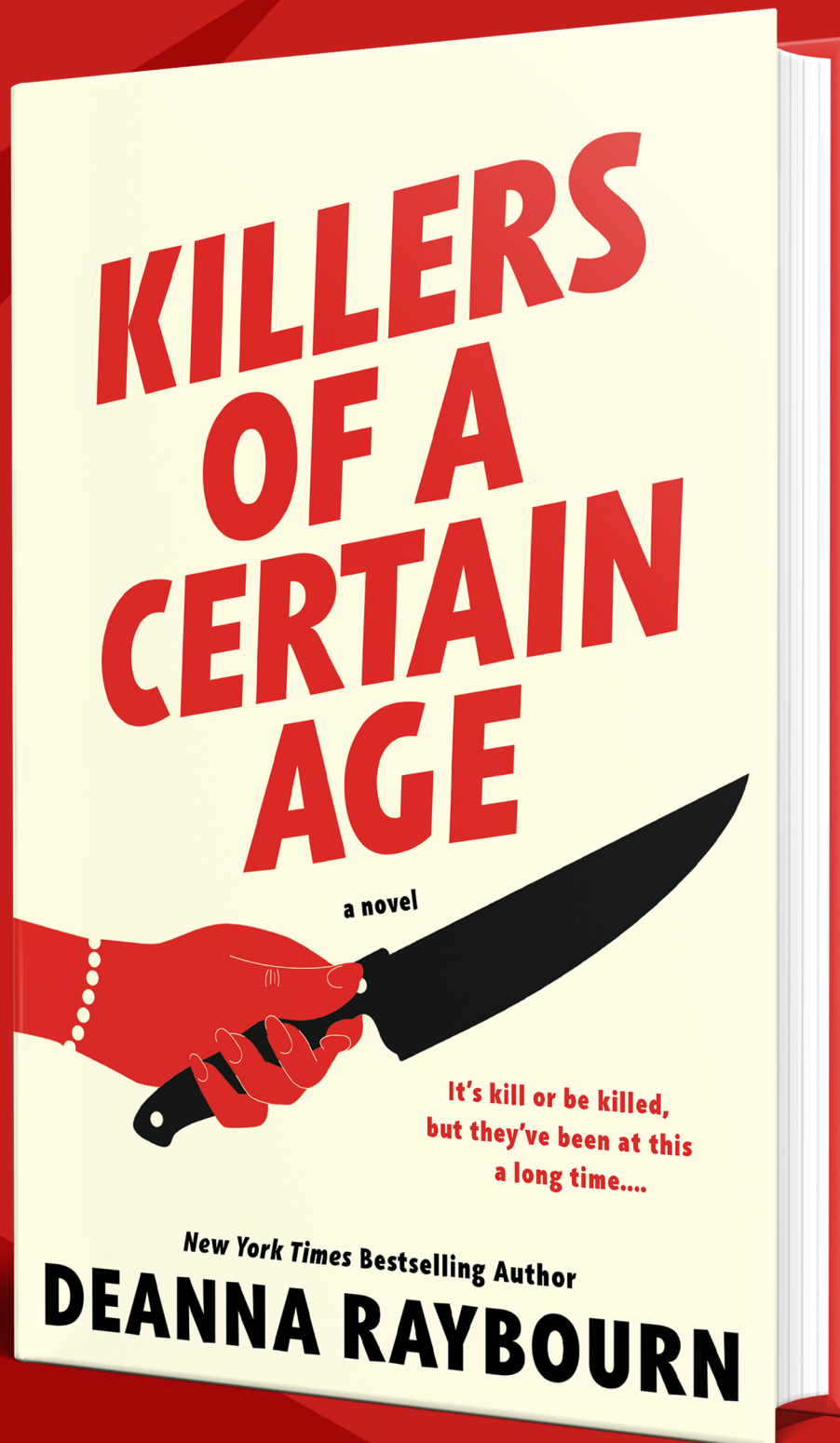


BOOK CLUB KIT



DEAR READER,

I am so delighted to finally share my *Killers of a Certain Age* with you! I'm not sure I've ever had as much fun with any group of characters as I have with the cast of *Killers of a Certain Age*. They are the brashest, ballsiest, most badass assassins, and their special skill is hiding in plain sight—because you can't guard against what you don't see.

Recruited fresh out of college, this quartet of killers has been trained to do whatever it takes to get the job done, no matter how messy—and these assassins aren't afraid to get their hands dirty. For forty years they've traveled the world, taking out dictators and traffickers and hunting down the occasional Nazi war criminal. And now that they're ready for retirement, the organization they've given their lives to has put a target on their backs. But this foursome won't go down without a fight.

Writing about these four dynamic women has been an absolute joy. I've never had the chance to explore a set of friendships the way I have in this book, and I found myself thinking of all the incredible women I have known throughout my life—long-lost relatives, colleagues, friends, and even the occasional frenemy! The one thread that connects them all is strength. Whatever challenges they faced, however often they got knocked down, they got up, wiped away the tears, and started again. And again, and again. Because if there's another thing women have in common? It's resilience. Bouncing back is our birthright, sisters. And Billie, Natalie, Mary Alice, Helen, and the rest of the women in *Killers* bounce HARD. I hope you love them as much as I do!

HAPPY READING,

 Deanna 

A CONVERSATION WITH DEANNA RAYBOURN

Tell us about *Killers of a Certain Age*! What inspired you to write this story?

My editor called up one day and said they wanted a book about mature women doing kickass things and would I be interested in writing something like that. They gave me carte blanche on the specifics—whatever time period I liked, however many women I chose, doing whatever I wanted. I was free to write the story of my dreams. It was almost TOO much freedom! I quietly panicked as I tried to figure out where to start. But I knew immediately I wanted to stretch myself and write something contemporary. And I wanted to write a quartet. Something about that dynamic of four different personalities and how they would relate to one another really appealed to me. All that was left then was to decide what sort of kickass things they would be doing. I could have made them spies or detectives, but there's really nothing more kickass than assassins.

Killers of a Certain Age centers on four women who also happen to be elite assassins by profession—and who find their agency targeting them to be taken out, just as they are about to retire. Your story resonates all too well in a world that often doesn't value age and experience over youth. What made this story resonate with you?

Once I hit fifty, I realized I was far more comfortable in my own skin than I ever had been as a younger woman. I have so much more confidence in my abilities, in my experience, and that's come right as I've hit the age where society starts ignoring us. Women over fifty seem to get more invisible with each passing year, and that's a startling thing to navigate at first, but it's also our superpower. The more other people look past us, the more we can get away with, and that ability to fade into the background is a key component to what helps my four assassins literally get away with murder.



Photo © Holly Virginia Photography

Each woman brings her own unique skills and personality traits to the job. Did you identify with any one character in particular?

Hands down Billie. The book covers all four of the assassins, but Billie is the main focus, and she has qualities I relate to. She does her homework, but she operates largely by instinct. She's absolutely not interested in dealing with anybody else's bullshit. She can also be a little too certain that she knows best, which is one of my worst qualities.

Your past Edgar-nominated mystery novels, including the Veronica Speedwell series, have been set in the historical past. What was it like making the transition from writing a historical fiction series to a standalone contemporary novel?

It was a ludicrous amount of fun. It was a tricky adjustment—after a dozen and a half historical books, my Victorian voice is honed and familiar. But finding my contemporary tone was just pure joy. Every draft of the book got more authentic as I got more comfortable letting down my guard and just writing from my gut. My husband says the voice of this book is very similar to my Twitter feed, and he's right.

What kind of research was required to write this book?

I paid a visit to the International Spy Museum for a little undercover inspiration, and I read memoirs of secret agents to get a feel for how they operate. And then there was a lot of research into how to kill people. Some of the methods I used were straightforward, but I had to be a little more imaginative for a few of the hits, and that took a bit of ingenuity. I was lucky enough to travel to every setting described in the book, so that helped when I went to set the scenes.

If *Killers of a Certain Age* were made into a film and you could choose your dream cast, who would play your characters?

I usually hate to dream cast because I want readers to be able to picture who THEY like in a role, but I will admit I kept a picture of Diane Lane taped to my computer monitor while I wrote.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1.

The Museum is founded with the intention of bringing justice to those who have never been held accountable for their atrocities. Is this mission statement fulfilled?

2.

How would you characterize the relationship among the four assassins?
How do they each fulfill their roles with regard to their respective talents?

3.

Each of the four is recruited very young, at a vulnerable point in her life. How does this make them susceptible to recruitment?
Is this ethical?

4.

The foursome have spent their entire adult lives in the service of the Museum only to be betrayed by the organization to which they have given so much. How does this betrayal drive their actions?

5.

How do each of the flashback missions relate to the current kills?

6.

Naomi Ndiaye is a character who performs a critical role in the plot. How would you describe her? She allows circumstances to play out in order to secure the future of the Museum even though this puts the four assassins at greater risk.
Was she right to do so?

7.

Billie, Mary Alice, Helen, and Natalie each bring something unique to their missions. How would you describe them? Which do you relate to more? Which talents would you bring to a mission?

8.

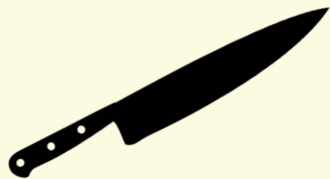
Minka and Akiko are strong supporting characters. How does this network of women hold one another up? How does Constance fit into the idea of women who support other women?

9.

Billie keeps a secret safe house in New Orleans. Does this make her wise or paranoid?

10.

The four assassins have to “burn” their real identities and start over. Could you do this?



11.

Much of the team’s success comes from being older and therefore overlooked and underestimated. How do they use this to their advantage? What advantages did they have as younger women working in a traditionally masculine trade?

12.

How would Billie’s life have been different if she had pursued a relationship with Taverner? Was he right to follow his dreams of marriage and fatherhood even though it meant giving up the love of his life?

13.

How would you characterize the relationships the four assassins have with the significant people in their lives? Does keeping their occupations secret protect these relationships? Or does it prevent real intimacy?

14.

What do you think is next for the four assassins?