

Family dynamics

The Mayfair Bookshop imagines the lives of socialite Nancy Mitford and her five sisters

by JUDY GELMAN

Costco's suggested Book Club read provides insight into a selected novel, as well as an appropriate recipe to accompany your own book club's discussion.

Eliza Knight explores the life of writer and socialite Nancy Mitford in her historical novel *The Mayfair Bookshop*. Knight interweaves the story of Mitford and her five sisters with the modern-day story of Lucy St. Clair, an American who travels to London to work at Heywood Hill, the legendary bookshop where Mitford was once employed. There she discovers that her life and Mitford's are intertwined.

A high school history teacher introduced Knight to Mitford's writing. Then, during research for her family studies degree in college, Knight delved into the history of the Mitford family, in particular the "intelligent, charming and quick-witted sisters, who all appear in some form in Nancy's novels," says Knight.

She continues, "I was drawn to their complicated family drama, and was fascinated by the sisters' dynamics and extreme differences, and how each owned their unique identity. They had in common their dedication to their own beliefs—and stubbornness. Yet the sisters were close, supportive and loved each other fiercely."

Food plays an important role in *The Mayfair Bookshop*. "Our modern-day



Eliza Knight

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heroine, Lucy, discovers new restaurants and the deliciousness of a blueberry scone when she arrives in London," Knight explains. "Nancy was accustomed to sumptuous meals, although her mother was health-conscious and ran her house accordingly. During World War II, Nancy was aware that the rich were still dining at the Savoy, while those not 'nobly' born dined at 'British Restaurants,' communal kitchens for those affected by the war. Rich or poor, with wartime rationing, the British devised new cooking methods, and Nancy, who claims she can only cook eggs, takes lessons from her maid."

For an evening book club discussion of *The Mayfair Bookshop*, Knight suggests sipping French 75 cocktails, as Mitford does in the novel, and pairing them with a charcuterie board, canapes, mini-quiches and baked brie cups with fig jam. For a brunch or teatime gathering, she recommends cucumber sandwiches, Costco chicken salad on mini-croissants, tea and the treat Knight and her characters savor: blueberry scones, specifically the Buckingham Palace recipe, featured here. ■

Judy Gelman is the creator of the website bookclubcookbook.com.

Blueberry Scones

3¼ cups all-purpose flour
2 Tbsp baking powder
½ cup sugar
8 Tbsp cold unsalted butter, in small cubes
3 eggs, divided
¾ cup buttermilk
1 cup fresh blueberries
Clotted cream and jam, for serving

Whisk flour, baking powder and sugar together in a large bowl. Scatter butter over dry ingredients, then cut in using a pastry blender or fork.

In another bowl, whisk together 2 eggs and buttermilk. Stir liquid into dry ingredients until dough holds together. Gently fold in blueberries.

Place dough onto a board lightly dusted with flour; gently knead. Dust dough with flour, then roll and pat into a 1-inch-thick rectangle. Cover with plastic wrap; refrigerate 30 minutes. Return dough to board; cut dough into 2-inch round biscuits. Rework dough scraps to cut additional scones. Transfer scones to a parchment-lined rimmed baking sheet, leaving 1½ inches between scones. Let scones rest 20 minutes.

Heat oven to 400 F. Whisk remaining egg; brush egg on top of scones. Bake 12 to 15 minutes, or until scones are lightly browned. Cool briefly; serve with clotted cream and jam. Makes 12 to 14 scones.

Adapted from *Buckingham Palace Fruit Scones* (royal.uk; search "fruit scones")



COSTCO CONNECTION

The Mayfair Bookshop (Item 1647263; 4/12) is available in most Costco warehouses.