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***SPOILER ALERT***
THIS DOCUMENT INCLUDES SPECIFICS YOU MIGHT WANT TO AVOID UNTIL YOU HAVE FINISHED READING THE BOOK
THE PAPER SWAN PLAYLIST:

Click [here](https://www.spotify.com) to listen to THE PAPER SWAN playlist on Spotify

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**Chapter 2:**
MAMALU’S ‘LULLABY’
Marta Gomez, Cielito Lindo

**Chapter 6:**
ESTEBAN THINKS HE’S BRUCE LEE
Carl Douglas, Kung Fu Fighting

**Chapter 9:**
LEAVING CASA PALOMA (SKYE)
Andrew Belle, In My Veins

**Chapter 12:**
ESTEBAN & SKYE
Train, Drops of Jupiter

**Chapter 14:**
TURNING THE LIGHTS OFF (ESTEBAN)
Andrew Belle, In My Veins

**Chapter 19:**
WAREHOUSE EXPLOSION
Aloe Blacc, Ticking Bomb

**Chapter 23:**
THE SUPERMARKET
Imagine Dragons, Demons

**Chapter 24:**
THE BEACH
One Republic, Counting Stars

**Chapter 25:**
SKYE WAKES UP
Portishead, Roads

**Chapter 26:**
THE COURTROOM
A Great Big World, Say Something

**Chapter 27:**
THE VISIT
3 Doors Down, Here Without You

**Chapter 32:**
WHY DIDN’T YOU TELL ME?
Seether, Broken

**Chapter 33:**
MARRY ME
John Newman, Love Me Again

**Chapter 34:**
MAYBE SOMEDAY I’LL BE THE HERO
Hoobastank, The Reason
FUN STUFF

ARTWORK:
The fabulous Christina from [DOODLES BY CHRISTINA](#) has created this incredible collage for the book. Get your group together and see who can identify the most elements. You can purchase your own watermark-free copy here (US) and here (International).
EASY PAPER SWAN:

Get your book club to follow the instructions below (or check out a YouTube video) and see who can come up with the best paper swan.

Click HERE to watch the book trailer
Click HERE to view the teasers
LOVE

Consider the following quote from Chapter 1:

“In the end, all the hurts and grudges and excuses are nothing more than floaty apparitions that scatter like pale ghosts in the face of all the people you loved, and all the people who loved you.”

The theme of love underpins many of the events in The Paper Swan: wanting to protect those you love, losing love, finding love etc. Do you think this quote still applies by the time you reach the end of the book? Why or why not?

Can you identify the different kinds of love in the story (e.g. the love between a parent and child; the love for power, money, prestige; the love for a friend etc.)? Discuss the interplay between these, and how one affected the life of another.

Does love incapacitate us to reason at times? Can you think of any instances in the book where a character acts out of love, but does something you did not agree with?

What is your definition of love? Is love always ‘good’ or does it have different aspects?
VENGEANCE

noun
1. infliction of injury, harm, humiliation, or the like, on a person by another who has been harmed by that person

At the start of The Paper Swan, Damian is fueled by the need to punish Warren and avenge MaMaLu. What are your thoughts on the notion of punishment inflicted in order to satisfy a need for the ‘balancing of wrongs’? In general? In this story?

Can you think of any scenes in the book that were motivated by vengeance? How did they make you feel? Do you think there was any justification for them?

How did the themes of love and vengeance play out as the story progressed?

“My love for Damian certainly felt big enough and wide enough, and yet it lay crammed into the few inches that separated us, wrestling with his need for retribution. Lovengeance.
I traced the letters on my pillow.”
CHOICES

A number of characters made questionable choices in this story. Can you identify some of the choices made by:

- Damian
- Skye
- Warren
- Victor
- El Charro
- Rafael

Could you understand the motivations behind them? Did you agree/disagree with them? What would you have done differently? In what way do you think that would have affected or altered the course of events in the story?
PERCEPTIONS OF GOOD & BAD

“It’s all fucked up, Rafael. There are no good guys or bad guys. Everyone has a reason.”

Could you identify the ‘good’ guys and the ‘bad’ guys at the start of this novel? Did you perceptions of any shift as the story progressed? If so, why, and at what point?

Do you think there is any merit to the above quote?

Can you think of any personal instances where you could see both sides of the story?

From where do we derive our concepts of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’? What part do our families, schools, peers, faith, society, laws, culture, the era we are born in, the media etc play into it? Are we born with a ‘conscience’ or do we develop one?
FORGIVENESS

“He had what he’d always wanted, but he faced an unexpected hurdle, a final battle. With himself. Was he worthy of redemption? Of love? Of forgiveness? That was something only he could decide for himself.”

What were some of the issues that were keeping Skye and/or Damian from moving forward after Damian gets out of prison? What did Skye have to forgive Damian for? What did Damian have to forgive Skye for?

What was Damian wrestling with in the above quote?

Do you think accepting our character flaws is a ‘good’ thing or a ‘bad’ thing? How hard/easy is it for you to forgive yourself? Do you ever turn things away because you feel undeserving, or do you accept and welcome them? Do you find it easy to let go of grudges or is it hard for you to forgive others?

How do you think Skye felt on learning the truth about what her father and Victor had done to MaMaLu? Do you think Skye forgave her father for looking out for family first? Why or why not? How did this affect their relationship?

How do you think Damian felt on learning that Skye had kept his daughter from him? Would you have done things differently?

Are there people in your own life that you need to forgive or release in order to move forward?
STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

noun, Psychiatry.

1.

an emotional attachment to a captor formed by a hostage as a result of continuous stress, dependence, and a need to cooperate for survival.

Were Skye’s reactions towards Damian genuine or do you feel she was affected by the Stockholm Syndrome?

Did you stop and question her thoughts, feelings or actions at any point? If so, can you point out any instances where this happened?

How do think you would react to a traumatic incident such as a kidnapping, or being held captive? What would keep you from falling apart? How would you fortify yourself mentally and emotionally?
CHARACTERS

Can you describe the characters in THE PAPER SWAN?


Who did you like the best? Why?

Who do you like the least? Why?

Do you think they were realistically portrayed?

Do the main characters change by the end of the book? Do they grow or mature? What events trigger such changes?

Was the ending satisfying? Why or why not? If not, how would you change it?
SYMBOLISM

Some of the symbols used in THE PAPER SWAN are:

- The Paper Swan
- Skye’s mother’s necklace / Mamalu’s seashell necklace
- The tin of Lucky Strike cigarettes
- Casa Paloma: the mansion vs. the staff wing

Pick a symbol that resonates with you and discuss what it meant.

Are there any others you can identify?

Do you enjoy looking for hidden meaning in a novel? Does it make you feel more connected to what the author was trying to say?
STRUCTURE & WRITING

What did you think of the overall structure of the novel? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to “get into it”? How did you feel reading it—amused, sad, disturbed, happy, confused, entertained? Did the story keep you interested? Would you say this is a plot-driven book: a fast-paced page-turner? Or does the story unfold slowly with a focus on character development? Were you surprised by the plot’s complications? Or did you find it predictable, even formulaic? How credible did the author make the setting and dialogue?

What scene did you find was the most pivotal for the book? How do you think the story would have changed had that scene not taken place? What scene resonated most with you personally in either a positive or negative way? Why? Did certain parts of the book make you uncomfortable? If so, why did you feel that way? Were there any scenes that made you laugh? Was there anything that surprised you about the book?

What did you think about the time-line and points of view? Were you able to move between past and present seamlessly? Do you have a preference for the first person POV (Skye’s parts) or the third person POV (Esteban/Damian’s parts). Why might the author have chosen to tell the story the way she did?
Here is the most highlighted quote from the novel:

“We are sand and rock and water and sky, anchors on ships and sails in the wind. We are a journey to a destination that shifts every time we dream or fall or leap or weep. We are stars with flaws that still sparkle and shine. We will always strive, always want, always have more questions than answers, but there are moments like these, full of magic and contentment, when souls get a glimpse of the divine and quite simply, lose their breath.”

Do you have any favorite quotes or passages in the novel that you enjoyed or found insightful?

Are there any books that you would compare this one to? How does this book hold up to them? Did you enjoy the author’s use of language and style of writing? Did this novel give you something to think about or debate? Would you recommend this book to a friend? If so, how would you describe it? What did you enjoy most about it?
Q & A WITH AUTHOR, LEYLAH ATTAR

What inspired you to write THE PAPER SWAN? I enjoy playing the devil’s advocate. Consciously or subconsciously, we perceive the world through our own set of beliefs - rights and wrongs - that we imbibe socially, culturally, through our friends, peers and family. Could we ever identify with someone who whose actions we would never condone? My first novel, 53 Letters For My Lover, was about a woman having an affair. The Paper Swan is about a kidnapper/murderer. There is no right or wrong way to feel about these characters. It’s more about the experience, an exploration of your own psyche, learning who you are, what your limits are, what you can accept, what you will reject.

Was the finger scene really necessary? It’s a traumatic scene, and one that isn’t easily forgotten. The story would have progressed without it, and truth be told, it would have been easier for me, easier for the characters and easier for the reader. But the challenge is when you’re pulled out of your comfort zone and put in a scenario that makes you stop and think. Would you forgive? COULD you? Does being locked away in prison make up for wrong-doing?

Maybe you end up hating both characters - Skye because you can’t fathom how she could get past some of the events that transpired, and Damian, because he was so ruthless. Or maybe you understood their motivations and ended up loving them. Either way, if you felt something - love, hate, disgust, heart-break, if the story stayed with you in some way, my job is done.
Was anything in the book of a personal nature?  The part where Skye jumps into the ocean to escape Damian, and ends up being circled by what she thinks is a shark, happened to me while vacationing in Mexico (the shark part, not the escaping from Damian :). I freaked out when I saw this black form, only to realize it was a baby dolphin. I still kick myself for not enjoying the moment, but hey, first impressions and all!

MaMaLu’s Lucky Strike Tin was a nod to one of my favorite flawed characters on television - Don Draper, from Mad Men. There is an episode where he pitches an ad for Lucky Strike cigarettes.

The origami is from when I was a kid. We wrote notes to our besties, made paper airplanes out of them and sent them flying in class. Nowadays, there’s a more sophisticated system called texting, with the added bonus of (mostly) ending up on the right desk.

There is some Spanish in The Paper Swan. Do you speak the language? Do you have a personal connection to Mexico?  Mexico is one of my favorite destinations. I love everything about it - from the culture and the food, to the small fishing villages and gorgeous beaches. Paza del Mar is based on the town of La Manzanilla, on the southern edge of Bahia de Tenacatita. My biggest concern and challenge while writing The Paper Swan was to get the cultural aspects and language to be as authentic as possible. I don’t speak Spanish, and I will be forever grateful to the Spanish-speaking readers, authors and bloggers, who chimed in with their feedback before publication. The online reading community continues to blow me away. It is filled with some of the most amazing, graceful, generous people I have ever met.
Did you have to research the cartels for this book? A lot of the events and people in the book were inspired by real life news articles and interviews. Some of the stuff was really tough to read. What comes through in the book is only a fraction of the horrors that really go on.

How long did it take you to write this book? About six months, but if you add the research phase and editing, it’s closer to ten.

Is there anything you would like to share with your readers? I want to send out a huge thank you for choosing The Paper Swan as a book club read! I’ve dropped in some fun things for readers to discover, including the way the book is formatted. There are five parts to the story. They coincide with Damian and Skye’s countdown: 5,4,3,2,1... Each part is formatted to reflect that - a kind of reverse countdown - so they are titled ...1, ...2 etc.

The beautiful cover was designed by the talented Hang Le. We wanted something to reflect that it was a love story, so if you look closely, you’ll discover a red heart on the left hand side.

The baseball cap that Damian is wearing at the start has an SD logo for the San Diego Padres, but it’s also included for Skye and Damian’s initials.

What’s next? Another epic love story, in a different part of the world, that you will hopefully enjoy as much as this one!