

EVENT TITLE: The Inside Connection: The Possibilities and Pitfalls of Linked Story Collections. (Lydia Conklin, Jonathon Escoffery, Jean Chen Ho, Leigh Newman, Maurice Carlos Ruffin)

Sum of the Parts:

Writing a linked story collection has its particular challenges (and its particular joys!) We'll look at the craft questions associated with the process, such as the range of wildly different techniques used to build such a collection (for example: a single character who appears in all the stories versus thematic connections versus a single setting or time period); the issue of story order; the search to find a title, and the pressure to turn such a collection into a novel (or not).

Event Organizer & Moderators:

Leigh Newman's collection *Nobody Gets Out Alive* (Scribner 2022) was long listed for the National Book Award for Fiction. Her stories have appeared in the *Paris Review*, *Harper's*, *Best American Short Stories 2020*, *Tin House*, *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*, *One Story* and *Electric Literature*, and have been awarded a Pushcart prize and an American Society of Magazine Editors' fiction prize. *Still Points North* (Dial Press), her memoir about growing up in Alaska, was a finalist for the National Book Critic Circle's John Leonard prize. In 2020, she received the *Paris Review's* Terry Southern Prize for "humor, wit, and sprezzatura."

Jonathan Escoffery is the author of the linked story collection, *If I Survive You*, a *New York Times* and *Booklist* Editor's Choice, an IndieNext Pick, and a National Bestseller. *If I Survive You* has been long-listed for the National Book Award, the PEN/Jean Stein Book Award, the PEN/ Robert W. Bingham Prize For Debut Short Story Collection, the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence, and the Aspen Words Literary Prize, and is a finalist for the Southern Book Prize and the California Bookseller Alliance's Golden Poppy Award. It has been named a 'best' or 'most anticipated' book by *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, NPR, Entertainment Weekly, *People*, *Oprah Daily*, *GQ*, Good Morning America onlin, and elsewhere.

Jean Chen Ho is the author of Fiona and Jane, named a Best Book of the Year by NPR and one of TIME's 100 Must-Read Books of 2022. Her writing appears in New York Times Magazine, The Cut, Electric Literature, Los Angeles Times, Georgia Review, GQ, Harper's Bazaar, Guernica, and elsewhere.

Jean is the 2023 Mary Routt Endowed Chair of Creative Writing at Scripps College. She is a doctoral candidate in Literature and Creative Writing at USC, and she holds an MFA from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Jean is a Kundiman fellow, and has been awarded residencies at Hedgebrook, MacDowell, Tin House, I-Park Foundation, and Vermont Studio Center

Lydia Conklin link story collection, [Rainbow Rainbow](#), was published in June 2022 by Catapult in the US and Scribner in the UK. They are an Assistant Professor of Fiction at Vanderbilt University. Previously they were the Helen Zell Visiting Professor in Fiction at the University of Michigan. They've received a [Stegner Fellowship in Fiction at Stanford University](#), a [Rona Jaffe Writer's Award](#), three Pushcart Prizes, a grant from [the Elizabeth George Foundation](#), a Creative & Performing Arts Fulbright to Poland. Their fiction has appeared in *Tin House*, *American Short Fiction*, *The Southern Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, and elsewhere, and is forthcoming from *The Paris Review*. They have drawn graphic fiction for *Lenny Letter*, *Drunken Boat*, and the Steppenwolf Theater in Chicago and cartoons for *The New Yorker* and *Narrative Magazine*.

Maurice Carlos Ruffin is the author of *The Ones Who Don't Say They Love You*, a New York Times Editor's Choice that was also longlisted for the Story Prize, and *We Cast a Shadow*, which was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award, the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, and the PEN America Open Book Prize.

Opening Comments:

Leigh Newman can't be here today due her new job at Oprah's' Book Club. But we have a replacement, TK.

We all came here because we are story writers—who have written and loved collections, though our ideas and understanding of how linked collections function do vary.

Read bios and say hi.

Reading:

5-minute reading by each author

Questions

1. Did you start by thinking the collection would be linked from the beginning? Or was this something that developed as you wrote?
2. What is the link between the stories? Is it a character? A family? A community? A plotline? A place? A theme?
3. What were some linked collections that inspired you to use this technique?
4. Do some readers not notice the stories are linked? How do you feel about this?
5. Was there one story that brought the whole collection together—in some fundamental way—even though all the stories are connected?
6. Did you have other stories that were involved but that you cut? Why?
7. Do you think linked stories seem more like a novel? Or, rather, what makes them different from a novel?