

## Allison's Book Corner June 2021

***Early Morning Riser*** by Katherine Heiny  
(Knopf 2021)

We are all familiar with the saying that “laughter is the best medicine.” Medical studies have shown that laughter boosts immunity, lowers stress hormones, decreases pain, relaxes your muscles and can prevent heart disease. In case you haven't noticed, most of my reading leans toward memoirs and gloomy non-fiction. The latter can be a bit of a drag if you look at the current news headlines. It is time to laugh.

Surprise! This month's selection is a light-hearted novel about a small town in the middle of America. Welcome to Boyne City, Michigan, where everyone seems to know everyone - and their personal business. The author takes us from 2002 to 2019 with our characters. When we meet the protagonist, Jane, she is in her late twenties and has just moved to town to



teach second grade. Our author conveys right away that Jane is a natural beauty who does not need to wear much makeup. As luck would have it, one day Jane accidentally locks herself out of her house. The local handyman, locksmith and furniture restorer helps her -- and sort of moves in. He is a handsome charmer who knows every local and still mows his ex-wife's lawn. Duncan is very easy for Jane to fall in love with, but to her annoyance and mild amusement, he has dated almost every woman in town and perhaps even within a 10- or 20-mile radius.

And so it begins. First, I have to tell you that soon after you start reading about Duncan, you will

recognize this man. Men want to *be* him and women *want* him. (Not this woman, but I digress.) After awhile, you start to picture the actor Matthew McConaughey playing this guy, if ever a movie is made based on this novel. Trust me, ladies, you will picture McConaughey as Duncan. And to my great surprise, I get to page 297 and this actor is actually mentioned. I laughed out loud. That is what is so nice about this book. There are several laugh-out-loud moments. I do not want to give those moments away.

As you can well imagine, in this small town you have a cast of very interesting and eccentric people. There's Freida, the mandolin player and only woman of a certain age who Duncan has *not* been intimate with. Freida pulls out her mandolin whenever she feels like it. Sometimes the mandolin appears at rather inappropriate moments. Aggie is Duncan's voluptuous ex-wife. Aggie left Duncan for Gary, who is a very odd gentleman, to put it nicely. Jane's mother has absolutely no filter and does not realize how people may misinterpret what she says. And I can't leave out Jimmy. Jimmy is a young adult with a learning disability, very possibly on the autism spectrum, but he never received the early intervention support he would have received in a larger town. Duncan interacts very well with Jimmy and lets him work with him at his furniture shop. Jimmy's mother and the community look out for Jimmy until a big accident shifts things in an unexpected way.

Author Katherine Heiny has given us a light-hearted novel with some depth. There are life lessons within these pages. One quote I especially like and relate to is Jane thinking about her mother. "Sometimes she thought being with her mother was like crossing a desert: long, hard stretches of burning sand that exhausted you, but every once in a while, you happened on a little oasis of kindness."

The title of this novel comes from a song by the folk-pop duo, "The Weepies." If you get a chance, google the song and take a minute to listen. It is a very upbeat, snappy tune heavy on guitars and with some tambourine thrown in for good measure - the musical version of our novel. The only thing missing is Freida's mandolin.