

"A delicious story full of righteous rage, thorny entanglements, and powerful sisterhood. These women are here to remind us that everything gets better with age and experience—especially revenge." —KAT ROSENFELD, author of *No One Will Miss Her*



THE CHANGE

A Novel

KIRSTEN MILLER

IT'S NOT OVER. IT'S TIME.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE TIME HAS COME

For most of her life, my mother was a badass. This is not just the opinion of a loving daughter; anyone who ever met her will agree. The lady had a tobacco-cured voice and a Southern accent that made curse words too delicious to resist. I'm pretty sure fuck was my mom's favorite word. Dropping regular f-bombs and shunning skirts were acts of rebellion against her own prim, proper mother. A tireless champion of children and underdogs, my mom never passed up a righteous fight.

For a long time, I assumed she considered no subject off-limits. My mother was always happy to hold forth on local sex scandals, family ghost sightings and the alarming case of dysentery that kept her holed up in Istanbul for three weeks in the sixties. But the one thing my mom never discussed was menopause. As far as I'm aware, the word never once crossed her lips.

Women of my mother's generation were trained to believe that menopause was the beginning of the end. For her, it turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. She was in her fifties when she announced she was packing it in. She sold her business and took up residency on her living-room couch with a beer in one hand and an iPad on her lap. She didn't just leave her job, she retired from the world. The same woman who spent the first two-thirds of her life crashing through glass ceilings and breaking down barriers spent the final third falling down Internet rabbit holes. Her life lost direction. Now, as I near my forty-ninth birthday, I think I know why: my mom stopped moving forward because she thought there was nowhere to go.

Society provides women with a roadmap for our lives. We all know its familiar milestones: childhood, school, dating, career, marriage, children, menopause, death. Around age fifty, we pass the penultimate milestone and the map we've been following no longer offers much guidance. It's around this time that we often find ourselves being quietly ushered out of the work world—just when we're hitting our stride. We see fewer women our age in advertising or on television. We're weeded out of searches on dating apps. Images of older women are rarely flattering, with endless negative stereotypes to choose from: cat lady, bitter divorcee, aging starlet,

hag, nag, or cougar. It all sends a not-so-subtle message to women. We think you're pathetic. It's time you should go.

I believe things are finally changing. The generation of women now hitting menopause belong to the most educated, self-sufficient and economically powerful group of women in the history of humankind. That may sound grandiose, but it's true. In America, women over age forty represent twenty-five percent of the population. If you find that surprising it's because we've long been denied the representation we deserve. But it doesn't have to be that way. All we must do is refuse to disappear.

By the time a woman hits fifty, she knows who she is, and she knows what she's doing. It's time to settle scores, solve mysteries, and savor revenge. The post-menopause years are when you discover your power. It makes perfect sense. Perhaps you noticed one post-menopausal stereotype missing from my list earlier in this essay. It was the obvious one: witch. This is the label we should all embrace. Witches exist and they always have: women with experience, wisdom and no fucks left to give. Fortunately, they can't burn us at the stake anymore, so we're finally free to use that power. What shall we do with it? Here's my suggestion: Let's change the whole fucking world. Let's make sure our daughters and sisters are safe, cared for, and able to prosper. Let's punish those who've exploited and abused us. And let's leave the planet a better place before our final credits start to roll.

Back in the days when my mom was a bona-fide badass, I heard her called a witch more than once. It was the name people threw at her when she refused to back down or be put in her place. I wish she'd learned to embrace it. If she had only known just how powerful she was, she could have used that last third of her life to do so much good in the world. Instead, she taught me an important lesson: don't waste a fucking minute. I lost my mother while I was writing this book. But she was, and will continue to be, my greatest inspiration.

—Kirsten Miller

THE CHANGE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Each of the three protagonists of *The Change*—Jo, Nessa, and Harriett—develops a particular power in mid-life that's uniquely suited to them. If mid-life were to bring you a specific new power, what would it be? How would you use that power?
2. Author Kirsten Miller has said that certain elements of *The Change* are “ripped from the headlines.” Were there storylines or characters who reminded you of real-life events or people? Why do you think the author drew inspiration from current events?
3. Jo starts her gym Furious Fitness because she sees that the women who come there “were blowing off steam before they exploded.” Why are so many women in the book so full of rage—and what do they do with that rage? Do you identify with that anger?
4. Harriett tells Jo: “I feel like I spent the first twenty years of my life trying to figure shit out. The second twenty I wasted on the wrong people... Then I reached this stage of my life, and all that fell away... And for the first time in my life I knew what the hell I was doing.” Age and experience have made Harriett smarter and more powerful than ever. But that's also the moment when her boss and her husband dump her. Does that ring true for you? Have you seen this dynamic at work in your own life?
5. Mattauk, where the women live, is a seemingly idyllic beach town, but “Nessa wondered what [her parents] would have said if they had known there was a monster lurking in the shadows of their storybook town. Would that have come as a surprise? Or had they known, deep inside, that's how things worked—even in pretty little places like Mattauk.” What do you think? Do people move to places like Mattauk thinking that exclusivity will keep them safe? Does it?
6. The women of *The Change* pit themselves against evil men, but not all the men we meet are bad guys. What did you make of characters like Franklin, Art, Josh, Eric, even Chase? What do they tell us about men's potential as partners and allies?
7. Stories of Culling Pointe's past victims are interspersed throughout the book. Why do you think Kirsten Miller chose to include those? Did they affect the way you felt about the main story?
8. Did the truth about Claude shock you? Were there clues about her complicity that the other women should have seen earlier? Were you surprised that she turned on Leonard in the end?
9. Claude tells the girls who she procures, “What you just received was a shot in the arm... A little dose of ugliness. A glimpse of the way things really work. You survived, and now you're not only immune, you're stronger than you were before. Take the money you've made and the wisdom you've earned and put them both to good use. That's what I've done.” Do you think there's any truth to that? Do you think Claude really believes it?
10. Claude later tells Harriett that “Nothing's going to stop [predatory men] from doing what they want to do. These are some of the richest men in the country... The only thing I could do was make sure some good came out of it.” Did you buy this argument? Did any good actually come out of what happened at Culling Pointe?
11. What do you think becomes of Jo, Nessa, and Harriett in the years after the close of this novel? How will their new powers affect the next phase of their lives? What would you like to see them do?



THE CHANGE PLAYLIST

“A Little Wicked” by Valerie Broussard

“BNR” by Crumb

“Edge of Seventeen” by Fleetwood Mac

“Bust Your Windows” by Jasmine Sullivan

“Writer in the Dark” by Lorde

“Q.U.E.E.N” by Janelle Monáe

“Drew Barrymore” by SZA

“Peek-A-Boo” by Siouxsie and the Banshees

“Talía” by King Princess

“Amy Amy Amy” by Amy Winehouse

“High Enough” by K. Flay

“Alaska” by Maggie Rogers

“One Way or Another” by Blondie

“Formation” by Beyoncé

“What You Waiting For?” by Gwen Stefani

“Dog Days Are Over” by Florence + the Machine

BEHIND THE BOOK

"Miller triumphs...*THE CHANGE* is that rare treat: a suspenseful story with great pacing, memorable characters, and an engaging voice. Fantastic in every way, this fierce anthem against misogyny is a smash."
—Publishers Weekly (starred review)

Big Little Lies meets *The Witches of Eastwick*—a gloriously entertaining and knife-sharp feminist revenge fantasy about three women whose midlife crisis brings unexpected new powers—putting them on a collision course with the evil that lurks in their wealthy beach town.

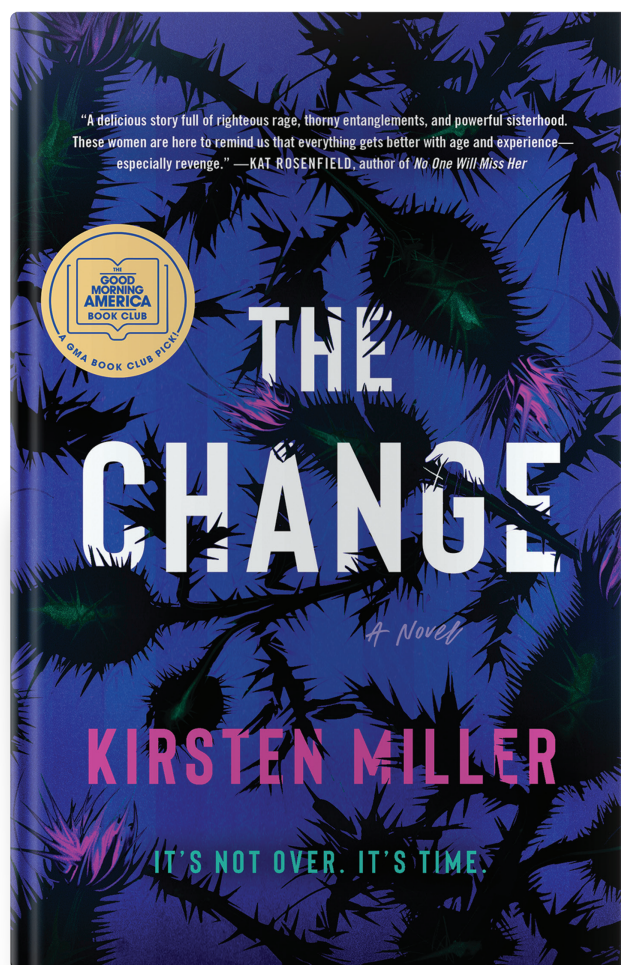
In the Long Island oceanfront community of Mattauk, three different women discover that midlife changes bring a whole new type of empowerment...

After Nessa James's husband dies and her twin daughters leave for college, she's left all alone in a trim white house not far from the ocean. In the quiet of her late forties, the former nurse begins to hear voices. It doesn't take long for Nessa to realize that the voices calling out to her belong to the dead—a gift she's inherited from her grandmother, which comes with special responsibilities.

On the cusp of 50, suave advertising director Harriett Osborne has just witnessed the implosion of her lucrative career and her marriage. She hasn't left her house in months, and from the outside, it appears as if she and her garden have both gone to seed. But Harriett's life is far from over—in fact, she's undergone a stunning and very welcome metamorphosis.

Ambitious former executive Jo Levison has spent thirty long years at war with her body. The free-floating rage and hot flashes that arrive with the beginning of menopause feel like the very last straw—until she realizes she has the ability to channel them, and finally comes into her power.

Guided by voices only Nessa can hear, the trio of women discover a teenage girl whose body was abandoned beside a remote beach. The police have written the victim off as a drug-addicted sex worker, but the women refuse to buy into the official narrative. Their investigation into the girl's murder leads to more bodies, and to



the town's most exclusive and isolated enclave, a world of stupendous wealth where the rules don't apply. With their newfound powers, Jo, Nessa, and Harriet will take matters into their own hands...



KIRSTEN MILLER is a groundbreaking feminist author in YA literature, best known for her popular Kiki Strike series. In addition to writing novels, Kirsten spent twenty-five years as a strategist in the

advertising industry. During that time she worked for some of the largest agencies in the world, as well as boutique agencies and an eight-person start up. She's proud to have quit at least two of those jobs over ads and incidents described in *The Change*.