**The Atomic City Girls**

**By Janet Beard**

**About the Book**

In November 1944, eighteen-year-old June Walker boards an unmarked bus, destined for a city that doesn’t officially exist. Oak Ridge, Tennessee has sprung up in a matter of months—a town of trailers and segregated houses, 24-hour cafeterias, and constant security checks. There, June joins hundreds of other young girls operating massive machines whose purpose is never explained. They know they are helping to win the war, but must ask no questions and reveal nothing to outsiders.

The girls spend their evenings socializing and flirting with soldiers, scientists, and workmen at dances and movies, bowling alleys and canteens. June longs to know more about their top-secret assignment and begins an affair with Sam Cantor, the young Jewish physicist from New York who oversees the lab where she works and understands the end goal only too well, while her beautiful roommate Cici is on her own mission: to find a wealthy husband and escape her sharecropper roots. Across town, African-American construction worker Joe Brewer knows nothing of the government’s plans, only that his new job pays enough to make it worth leaving his family behind, at least for now. But a breach in security will intertwine his fate with June’s search for answers.

When the bombing of Hiroshima brings the truth about Oak Ridge into devastating focus, June must confront her ideals about loyalty, patriotism, and war itself.

**About the Author**:

Born and raised in East Tennessee, Janet Beard moved to New York to study screenwriting at NYU and went on to earn an MFA in creative writing from The New School. Her first novel, 'Beneath the Pines', was published in 2008, and her follow up 'The Atomic City Girls' came out in February of 2018. Janet has lived and worked in Australia, England, Boston, and Columbus, Ohio, where she is currently teaching writing, raising a daughter, and working on a new novel.

**If you enjoyed this book*:***

* Where the Crawdads Sing by Delia Owens
* The Tattooist of Auschwitz by Heather Morris
* Educated by Tara Westover
* Sold on a Monday by Kristina McMorris
* The Alice Network by Kate Quinn

**Discussion Questions**

1. This is not the only book written about this subject. Have you read any other books about Oak Ridge? If so, how did they compare?
2. What did you know about Oak Ridge before reading this book? What was most surprising to learn?
3. What did you think about the way the book switched between different people who had different roles in Oak Ridge? Was that helpful to you, or confusing?
4. Both June and Sam violate the Army’s rules by sharing top-secret information about the Manhattan Project. Do you think their actions are justified?
5. Is Cici justified in reporting June to the Army?
6. Joe warns Ralph against his political activism because he thinks it’s useless and dangerous. Ralph does help affect change but becomes a victim of violence. Are the risks he takes too great? Do you think Joe still feels the same way in the end?
7. In the epilogue, June struggles to explain to her children that “different times call for different actions.” Do you think that’s true? Were June and Sam doing the right thing by working on the Manhattan Project during the war?
8. Do you think this book, as a historical fiction novel, does a good job at portraying the mindset of the people who worked at Oak Ridge?