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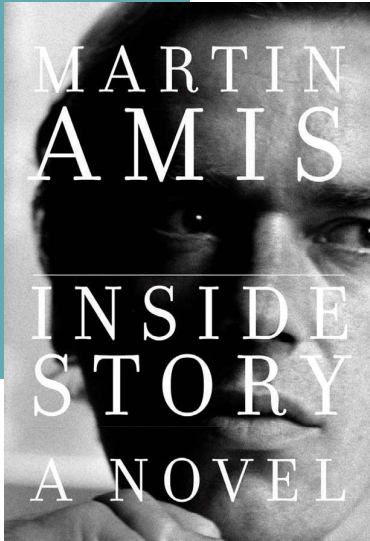
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### Inside Story

Though this book is categorized as a novel, there is little that, on the surface, appears fictional in British writer Martin Amis' capacious "novelized memoir," **Inside Story** (Knopf, \$28.95, 9780593318294). The book, he writes in its opening pages, "is about a life, my own, so it won't read like a novel—more like a collection of linked short stories, with essayistic detours." These short stories might better be called "episodes" that congeal into a metanarrative that is largely about the author's lasting friendships with three late writers whose deaths left various scars on his personal landscape: his dear friend Christopher Hitchens, his mentor

A "novelized memoir" by Booker finalist Martin Amis explores friendship, love and death.

Saul Bellow and his parents' close friend, the poet Philip Larkin. Amis' account sprawls back and forth across decades and continents, shifting not only in time but also in tense and voice, interrupted by a sometimes overwhelming quantity of explicating footnotes. This intentional disregard for conventional storytelling further blurs the line between truth and imagination. The reader presumes that much of the content is true at heart, with specifics morphed by the passage of time and the untrustworthiness of memory. But which parts are made up?

Readers might suspect that the character of Phoebe Phelps, a quirky, often infuriating girlfriend from the 1970s who remains Amis' obsession for his entire adult life, is based in truth, if perhaps wildly exaggerated. But was she really a former escort turned high-class madam masquerading as a financial executive? Who knows? Amis certainly isn't saying, nor should he. The important thing is that Phoebe drops a tantalizing, if dubious, bombshell halfway through that provides the book's most compelling plot twist.

In one of the labyrinthine footnotes late in the book, Amis says of Bellow, "All the dead were in his custody, and he couldn't let them go." These elegant words might be applied to the real-life Amis as well. Now 71, this once-young buck of the British literary scene cannot help but look death, mortality and the meaning of life squarely in the face. And he does so with a singular panache and much offhanded wit, forging through upheavals past and present: 9/11, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Trump presidency, totalitarianism, Islamism, the sexual revolution, Alzheimer's and cancer, among many other dark realities.

Most readers will likely deem **Inside Story** more memoir than novel. It is certainly a sui generis work either way. Early on I christened it a "kitchen sink" book (as in, "everything but the") and had to laugh, about halfway in, when the fictional Amis actually "poured the [drink] down the kitchen sink." Yet whatever its hybrid status suggests, it regally caps Amis' estimable literary career with cheeky candor and more than a touch of razzle-dazzle.

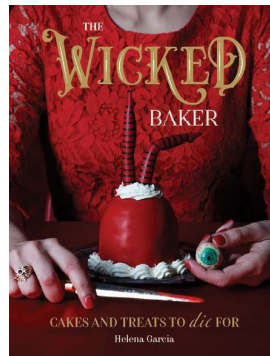
Robert Weibezahl is a publishing industry veteran, playwright and novelist. Each month, he takes an in-depth look at a recent book of literary significance.



### ★ A Kitchen Witch's Guide to Recipes for Love & Romance

Food gives us energy; food *is* energy. This framing of cooking as a blend of mindful practice and energy work, right alongside reiki and acupuncture, is at the root of Dawn Aurora Hunt's **A Kitchen Witch's Guide to Recipes for Love & Romance** (Tiller, \$24.99, 9781982150419). Adding witchcraft to the mix—think candles, smudge sticks, essential oils,

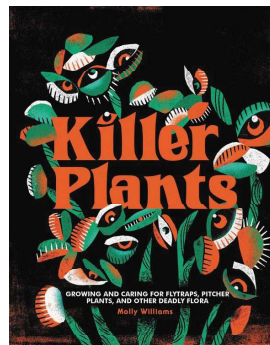
mantras—takes things from healthy and delicious to sensual sorcery. Bow tie pasta with lemon and artichokes, when paired with the practice of "creating a sacred space for enriching love and togetherness," becomes a way to rekindle the flame and honor a season of new beginnings. Peaches and cream? Way sexier with a sigil carved into the peach flesh. Grab your wooden spoons, some white sage and a box of matches, and make some kitchen magic for—and with—your partner.



### The Wicked Baker

**The Wicked Baker** (Quadrille, \$19.99, 9781787136007) is Helena Garcia's celebration of all treats spooky and strange. If you take even the eensiest dram of pleasure from Halloween, you'll enjoy every page. A Cousin Itt made of shredded phyllo wears round green spectacles of gingerbread dough. A cake resembling a black candle drips blood-red "wax" icing. Many of these complex creations are not for the faint of heart. But hey, the Brain Cinnamon Rolls sound manageable, and I'm game to whip

up the pale green Slime Pudding that's little more than Greek yogurt, condensed milk and citrus. This book brings the holiday escapism we all crave.



### Killer Plants

**Killer Plants** (Running Press, \$18, 9780762499267) is your go-to for carnivorous cultivars like bladderworts, pitcher plants and Venus' flytraps. "The plants in this book present a bit of a challenge to their keepers," author Molly Williams tells us upfront. That is, they're pretty persnickety when it comes to care—they insist upon distilled water and special potting mix, for starters—but are possibly worth it for the weird-and-rare factor if you're a plant-

hound. Williams even goes a step further in a section on "Rare Carnivorous Plants You May Never Find," which reads like an episode of "Nature." Niche though these plants may be, entire shops and societies around the world are devoted to them. A list of contacts rounds out the book, so you can go forth and find your fellow killer-plant people.

Susannah Felts is a Nashville-based writer and co-founder of The Porch, a literary arts organization. She enjoys anything paper- or plant-related.

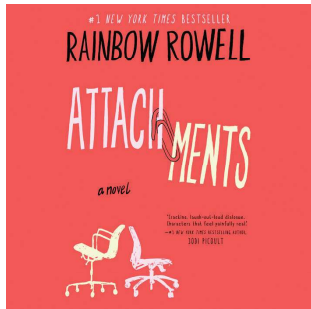
**THE HUNGOVER GAMES**  
*A True Story*



★ **The Hungover Games**

Listening to **The Hungover Games: A True Story** (Hachette Audio, 5.5 hours), written and read by Sophie Heawood, is like having a gossipy brunch with your wittiest friend. British entertainment journalist Heawood takes us on a journey of unexpected single motherhood while living in Los Angeles,

from her affair with an immature rocker to her attempts at dating with a baby at home. She takes life advice from the celebrities she profiles and sometimes gets a little too personal with them. Heawood's narration makes the book even funnier and her experiences even more charming. In particular, her stories from the OB-GYN's office and some remarkably bad dates left me cackling.

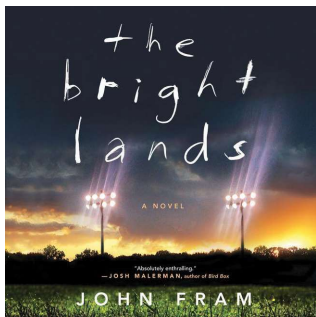


**Attachments**

Great news for Rainbow Rowell fans: Her charming 2011 novel, **Attachments** (Penguin Audio, 9 hours), has finally been released on audio, narrated by Rebecca Lowman. Just before the beginning of the new millennium, Lincoln is hired as an IT guy for a small city paper, where part of his job is to read any internal emails that get flagged by the new security system. He spends most

days reading exchanges between Beth and Jennifer, two co-workers he's never met but feels like he knows. Can there be love *before* first sight? For a book that mainly follows a man's perspective, it's surprising that a woman narrates the audiobook, but it somehow totally works. Lowman makes the email exchanges come alive with humor, and her performance has a down-to-earth quality that's perfect for the more somber parts of the book.

Sign up for our audio newsletter at [BookPage.com/enews](http://BookPage.com/enews).



**The Bright Lands**

John Fram's suspenseful debut, **The Bright Lands** (Harlequin Audio, 13 hours), narrated by Luis Selgas, is a spooky, queer thriller set in a small Texas town ruled by high school football. After a decade in New York, Joel returns to his conservative hometown to help his younger brother, Dylan, a football star who seems to be in trouble. Shortly after Joel arrives, Dylan turns up

dead, and Joel's visit becomes a murder investigation. Selgas is the perfect narrator for a mystery, as it feels like he's always holding a little something back. He also performs a solid mix of Western accents for the side characters, adding to the book's overall sense of place.

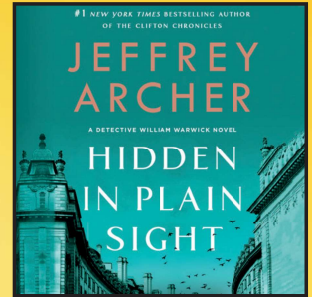
Anna Zeitlin is an art curator and hat maker who fills her hours with a steady stream of audiobooks.

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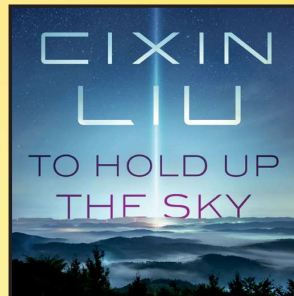
*Let Love Rule* is a work of deep reflection. Lenny Kravitz looks back at his life with candor, self-scrutiny, and humor.

READ BY LENNY KRAVITZ



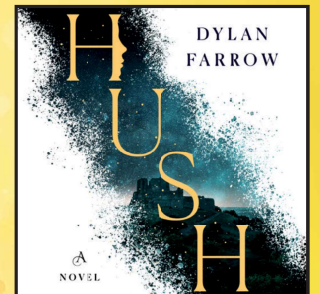
The second audiobook featuring Detective William Warwick, by the master storyteller and number one *New York Times* bestselling author of the Clifton Chronicles.

READ BY GEORGE BLAGDEN



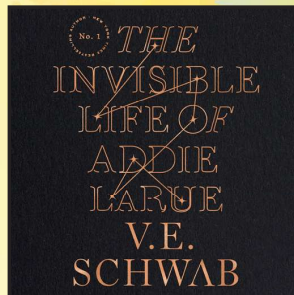
From *New York Times* bestselling author Cixin Liu comes a short story collection of captivating visions of the future and incredible reimaginings of the past.

READ BY A FULL CAST



*Graceling* meets *Red Queen* in this exciting debut audiobook by an electrifying new voice.

READ BY EMILY SHAFFER



*The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue* is *New York Times* bestselling author V. E. Schwab's genre-defying tour de force.

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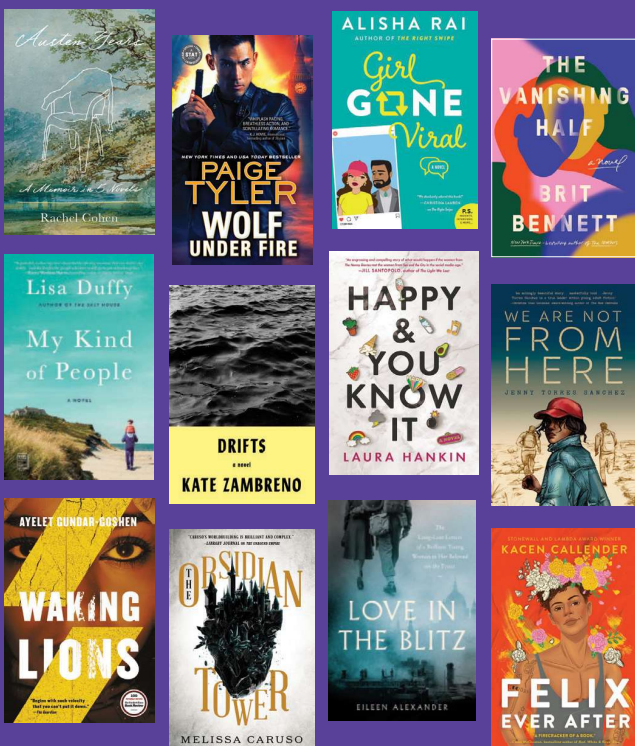


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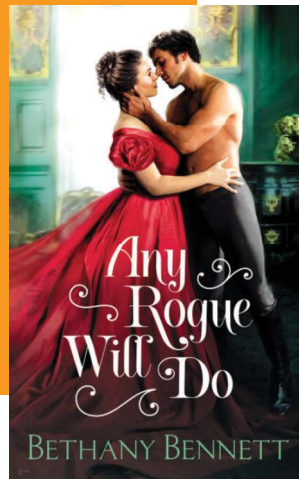
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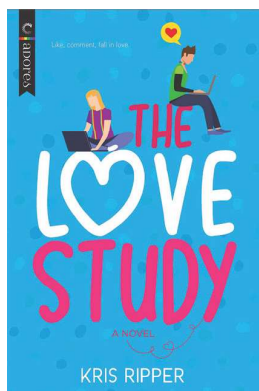
romance by christie ridgway



## ★ Any Rogue Will Do

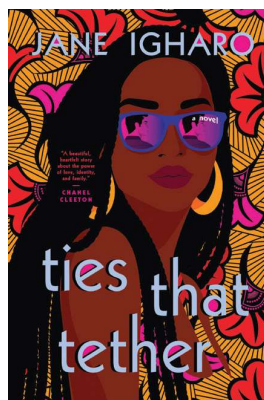
Bethany Bennett combines two beloved tropes in **Any Rogue Will Do** (Forever, \$7.99, 9781538735664). In this Regency-set enemies-to-friends-to-lovers story, a reformed rogue finally gets the lady of his dreams. Ethan, Viscount Amesbury, tried to win Lady Charlotte Wentworth's heart before, but the attempt ended in gossip and disaster. Years later, Ethan now has a chance to help the woman he once maligned. Self-aware, never self-indulgent and ready to go after what she wants, Charlotte knows she's no longer the simpering miss that Ethan first met. But the two must also address disparities in

class, wealth and gender autonomy. This is a fast-paced and spicy debut, with likable characters and a feel-good finale that boasts a just-right blend of tenderness and groveling.



## The Love Study

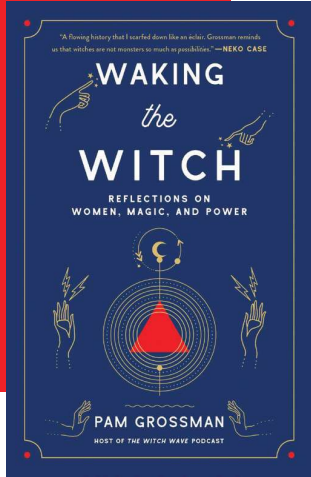
An involvement-wary pair forges a relationship in Kris Ripper's **The Love Study** (Carina Adores, \$14.99, 9781335943194). Declan is instantly intrigued by Sidney, the nonbinary host of a popular advice channel on YouTube. Sidney convinces Declan to participate in a series they bill "The Love Study" by going on arranged dates and discussing his experiences for Sidney's audience. But Sidney is the one he truly wants. Can he convince them both that it will be worth their while? In a wry first-person voice, Ripper captures all the awkwardness of first dates. Dec is a self-deprecating and endearing protagonist, and readers' hearts will ache for him and Sidney. Their many friends add to the fun in this dialogue-driven and warmly appealing romance.



## Ties That Tether

Cultures clash in debut author Jane Igharo's **Ties That Tether** (Berkley, \$16, 9780593101940). Azere knows that marrying a Nigerian man is her destiny, and she accepts her domineering mother's setups in hopes that the right man will come along. But attraction knows no boundaries, and when she meets Rafael Castellano at a bar, she's instantly smitten. Hot love scenes commence, but Azere knows this affair can only be fleeting. Rafael, the son of Spanish immigrants, has sympathy for Azere's plight, but he's not ready to give up on their romance. Azere's anguish is clear, and readers will feel her wrenching conflict as she ponders how far she should go to please her mother and preserve her heritage. This exploration of identity, love and loss in the context of an interracial relationship feels authentic and bittersweet, yet hopeful all the same.

Christie Ridgway is a lifelong romance reader and a published romance novelist of over 60 books.



## Spine-tingling paperback selections

Sorcery abounds in Pam Grossman's **Waking the Witch: Reflections on Women, Magic, and Power** (Gallery, \$14, 9781982145859). Grossman goes deep into the subject of witchery, digging into imagery, symbolism and—through evaluations of Salem, Massachusetts, and other storied locales—the significance of witches in history. She also looks at depictions of witches in books, movies and television shows. Grossman, a popular podcaster and active witch, writes with authority and wit, spinning a magical narrative that book clubs will find both instructive and playful. This book is a provocative study of an endlessly fascinating figure and a

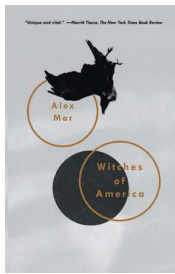
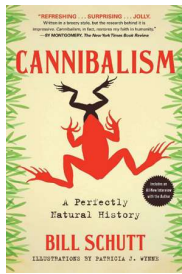
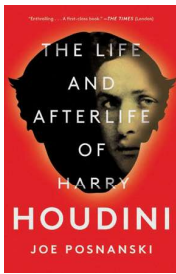
For the spookiest month of the year, reading groups will love this quartet of slightly unsettling titles.

treat for mere mortals in search of a rewarding seasonal read.

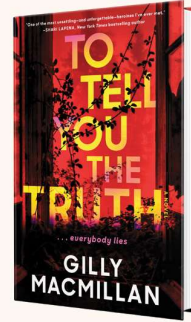
**The Life and Afterlife of Harry Houdini** (Avid Reader, \$17, 9781501137242) by Joe Posnanski unpacks America's fascination with the extraordinary escape artist and magician. Posnanski gives a captivating account of the elusive Houdini (1874–1926), whose real name was Ehrich Weiss and who grew up in an immigrant family in Wisconsin. There are many rich ideas at play in this book, including the power of the media and the ways pop culture icons come into being. A whimsical selection for reading groups, it's a captivating look at one of magic's greatest practitioners and how his influence still lingers today.

A strong stomach is not required for readers to enjoy **Cannibalism: A Perfectly Natural History** (Algonquin, \$16.95, 9781616207434), zoologist Bill Schutt's intriguing study of a dark subject. Schutt traces cannibalism across species and eras, investigating myths and misconceptions while documenting cannibalism's place in the evolutionary process. His narrative is lively and well organized, and it brims with concepts that are ripe for discussion, such as cultural taboos, the survival instinct and genetics.

In **Witches of America** (Sarah Crichton, \$17, 9780374536435), Alex Mar travels across the country to investigate the world of modern covens, mystics and pagans. Mar is an admitted disbeliever, but as she meets with members of the occult in New England and the Midwest, she finds her perspective shifting. She gives readers inside access to these arcane groups and reveals how they find a foothold in contemporary society. Book clubs will appreciate Mar's evenhanded consideration of topics such as faith and the supernatural. Written with intelligence and an eye for eerie detail, her book is a can't-miss Halloween pick.



# BOOK CLUB READS FOR FALL

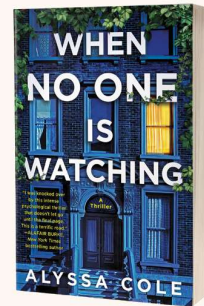
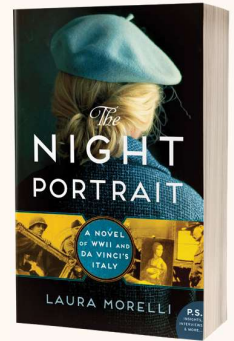


## TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH by Gilly Macmillan

"A spellbinding book about a missing child, and about the life of a writer. Bold, suspenseful, and impossible to put down."  
—SAMANTHA DOWNING,  
internationally bestselling author

## THE NIGHT PORTRAIT by Laura Morelli

A thrilling historical novel about one of Leonardo da Vinci's most famous paintings, and the woman who fought to save it from Nazi destruction in WWII.

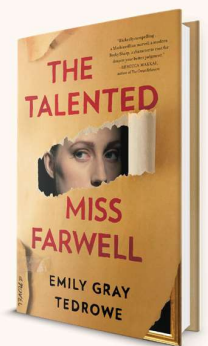


## WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING by Alyssa Cole

"I was knocked over by the momentum of an intense psychological thriller that doesn't let go until the final page. This is a terrific read."  
—ALAFAIR BURKE,  
New York Times bestselling author

## THE TALENTED MISS FARWELL by Emily Gray Tedrowe

"Becky Farwell is one of the most wickedly compelling characters I've read in ages – a Machiavellian marvel."  
—REBECCA MAKKAI,  
author of *The Great Believers*



A BookPage reviewer since 2003, Julie Hale recommends the best paperback books to spark discussion in your reading group.

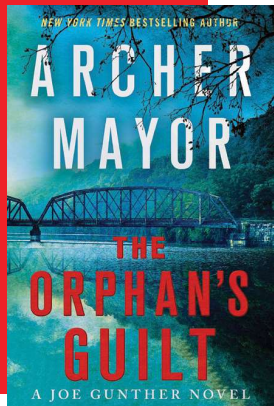


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William Morrow

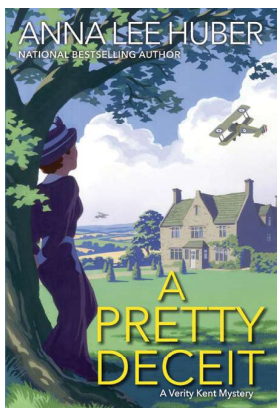
BookClubGirl



### The Orphan's Guilt

John Rust, by all accounts an amiable lush, has just been stopped (yet again) for erratic driving. This could be the ticket that costs him his driver's license, so he hires a shrewd defense attorney. The defense is centered on extenuating circumstances, in that the defendant's brother, who never recovered from a brain injury suffered in childhood, has just died. Rust was his brother's only caregiver and, save for his battle with the bottle, is considered to be a saint by all who know him. The defense of a DUI might not seem like the sort of storyline that would engage a reader for several hundred pages. No worries on that count, though, because Archer Mayor's **The Orphan's Guilt** (Minotaur, \$27.99, 9781250224149), the 31st installment in the popular series featuring Vermont homicide investigator Joe Gunther, explodes into an investigation of a decades-old corporate scam in which millions of dollars

disappeared; the unearthing of a cold case of child abuse with modern-day ramifications; and a murder or two for good measure. All avid mystery readers know the old adage "follow the money." You'll need to be on your toes to follow the money this time, and what it leads to is downright lethal.

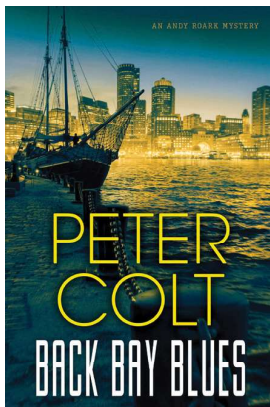


### A Pretty Deceit

Anna Lee Huber's fourth mystery featuring intrepid English intelligence agent Verity Kent, **A Pretty Deceit** (Kensington, \$15.95, 9781496728470), opens near a World War I battlefield in Bailleul, France. Still numb from the news of her husband's death in combat, Verity delivers a message to a field commander and, moments later, the command post is hit by a mortar shell and blown to bits. In the next scene, she is blithely motoring in the Wiltshire countryside a year and a half later, riding shotgun in a new Pierce Arrow roadster expertly driven by her husband. Wait a minute. Um, didn't he die? Turns out not; communications were not always accurate in those times, and thanks to that, Verity has a new lease on life. Her contentment will not last long, though. While visiting a titled auntie who has fallen on postwar hard times, Verity finds herself on hand for the immediate aftermath of what may be a homicide on the estate grounds. Combine that with priceless heirlooms gone missing, a disappeared staff

and a ghost sighting or two, and you have the makings of a historical mystery to delight fans of Agatha Christie or Daphne du Maurier.

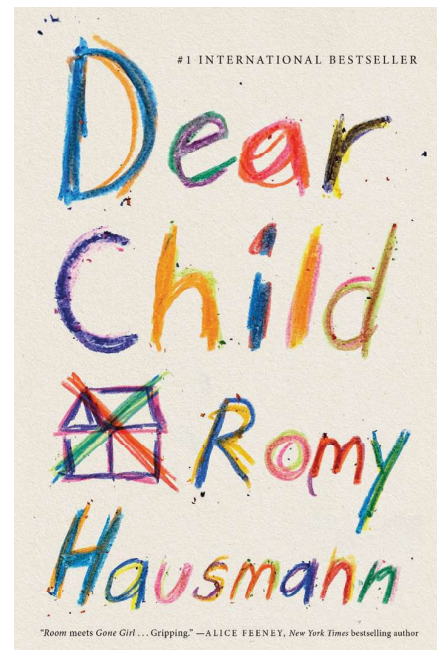
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### Back Bay Blues

The first time readers met Andy Roark, in Peter Colt's 1982-set noir thriller *The Off-Islander*, he was a cop. Not anymore. He is also no longer a soldier deployed to Vietnam, although he carries strong influences from both professions into his new gig as a private investigator. Three years have gone by since the events chronicled in *The Off-Islander*, and now Andy returns for his sophomore appearance in **Back Bay Blues** (Kensington, \$26, 9781496723420). Despite the passage of time, his connection to Vietnam has only grown stronger. He has befriended Vietnamese refugees in Boston who fled their country by sea after the fall of the South Vietnamese government. So it is natural for him to enter into the investigation of the murder of a Vietnamese journalist, Hieu, whose death has been dismissed by police as a mugging gone wrong. But Hieu's associates strongly suspect that he was on the verge of exposing the criminal leanings of the powerful anti-Communist group known simply as the Committee, a move

that is not (and in Hieu's case, was not) conducive to long life. As Andy becomes more and more drawn into the case, he demonstrates to both himself and the reader that although you can take the man out of Vietnam, you cannot take Vietnam out of the man.

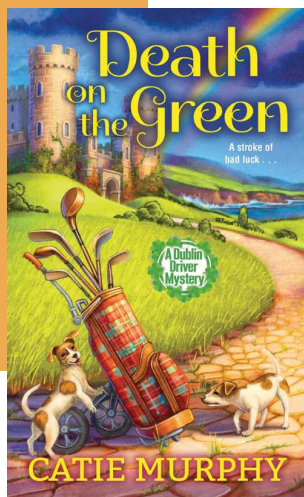


### ★ Dear Child

Fourteen years ago, Munich college student Lena Beck disappeared. Now she has apparently been found, having escaped the newly deceased madman who kept her under lock and key in a remote cabin along the Czech border. When her overjoyed father meets her at the hospital, however, he is shocked to discover that this woman is not his Lena. The woman's young daughter who escaped the woods with her, however, is a dead ringer for Lena, and a hastily administered DNA test confirms that the child is indeed Lena's daughter. So what happened to Lena? The investigation in Romy Hausmann's debut thriller, **Dear Child** (Flatiron, \$26.99, 9781250768537), which is already a sensation in her native Germany, moves along in fits and starts, jumping between the perspectives of the young girl, Hannah; the grieving father, Matthias; and the mysterious woman called Lena, who is not the Lena of happy endings, at least not for the Beck family. And the one person who could tie up these disparate and conflicting narratives is, well, dead on the cabin's living room floor, his head bashed in by a snow globe. I didn't even try to figure out whodunit. I just kept turning pages, wondering what the hell was going to happen until I had finished the book in one sitting, in the small-numbered hours of the late night.

Bruce Tierney lives outside Chiang Mai, Thailand, where he bicycles through the rice paddies daily and reviews the best in mystery and suspense every month.

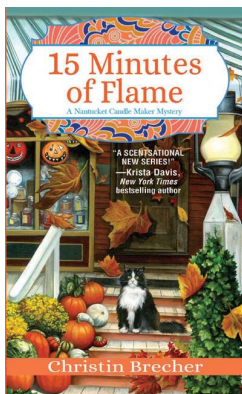




### ★ Death on the Green

Megan Malone's job as a limo driver allows her to explore Dublin with fascinating clients like champion golfer Martin Walsh. But when she spies a man facedown in a water hazard, her U.S. Army medic training has her jumping in straightaway to help. It's Martin's friend and rival, and his death was no accident. There is so much to like about the cozy perfection that is Catie Murphy's **Death on the Green** (Kensington, \$8.99, 9781496724205), from the lush Irish travelogue to the precise balance between comic relief and crime. Megan's friendships and romantic life—dating a woman but also crushing on a male detective—give the

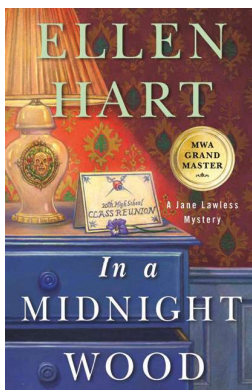
story a lived-in feel. And while murder is nasty business, there are cuddle sessions with the Jack Russell pups that Megan keeps telling herself she's fostering, not adopting. All this plus seeing justice done? Megan (which is to say, Murphy) makes it look easy.



### 15 Minutes of Flame

Nantucket candle-shop owner Stella Wright is transforming a friend's abandoned house into a Halloween wonderland, with help from the local Girl Scouts. A separate building on the property reveals an old chandlery... and a skeleton. Christin Brecher's **15 Minutes of Flame** (Kensington, \$7.99, 9781496721433) combines a historical mystery with present-day murder, all against the spooky backdrop of New England in autumn. The deep bench of suspects includes an ambitious producer who wants to film the skeleton for a Netflix special and a local woman who claims to speak for the

spirits of the dead. The history of candle clocks (and the way they feature in the story's conclusion) is a fascinating bonus.



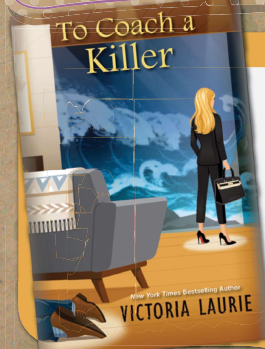
### In a Midnight Wood

Ellen Hart's 27th Jane Lawless mystery finds Jane and BFF Cordelia headed to Castle Lake, Minnesota, to meet up with an old friend. But while they're there, a grave exhumation reveals a second set of remains stashed beneath a coffin, belonging to long-missing local Sam Romilly. **In a Midnight Wood** (Minotaur, \$26.99, 9781250308443) flashes back to when Sam disappeared in 1999 and slowly reveals what actually happened to him. The shifts between storylines let the pressure build, and an impending high school class reunion means many characters are confronting

ing many different ghosts at once. Jane and Cordelia, both lesbians, tread lightly in conservative Castle Lake, but Jane is able to earn the trust of a few suspects... and maybe find love.

Heather Seggel is a longtime bookseller, reviewer and occasional library technician in Ukiah, California.

## CLEVER COZIES, SMART Lady SLEUTHS...

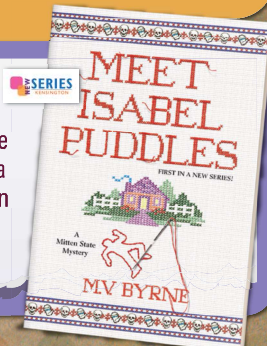


The Cat & Gilley Life Coach Mystery Series

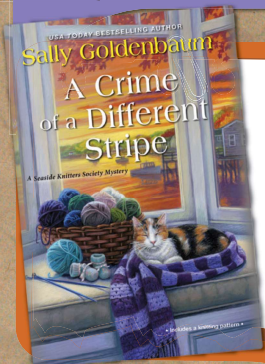
It took guts for Cat to start over as a **life coach** in the **posh Hamptons**, but it will take true **courage to catch a killer** and survive the off-season...

The Mitten State Mystery Series

Veteran television writer M.V. Byrne debuts a **new cozy series** starring a Jill-of-all-trades who solves crimes in her charming **small town** beside **Lake Michigan**.



The Seaside Knitters Society Mystery Series



When murder makes an **unexpected delivery**, the Seaside Knitters Society must stop **stitching baby gear** for their mom-to-be member and **unravel the clues** instead.

The Beyond the Page Bookstore Mystery Series

A rare bookstore owner thumbs through the clues to find a **missing first edition** of *The Secret Garden*.



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## interview | stuart turton

of his blockbuster mystery *The 7 1/2 Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle* (2018), he burned his notes in a backyard bonfire. An exquisite combination of Agatha Christie and *Groundhog Day*, Turton's first book stars a detective who inhabits the bodies of eight different witnesses in an attempt to solve and prevent a murder. Editing Evelyn's necessarily precise timeline nearly drove Turton mad, however, so the bonfire felt like a symbolic way to free himself to write something completely different.

Turton plotted his latest novel using a method he calls, appropriately enough, "lighousing." He explains: "I felt like I was my own little ship sailing in between these different lighthouses and trying to get my characters to safety at the end of the book. It sounds weird to say, but I almost left it up to them to find their way through."

As for this book's dead body, Turton created a trio of Dutch women to investigate. There's "fiercely intelligent" Sara, who is planning to escape her greedy, abusive husband, Jan; her genius young daughter, Lia; and Creesjie, Jan's mistress and Sara's friend. Although Turton read about the daily lives of women at that time, he admits to taking some liberties. "I made mine totally Charlie's Angels," he says. "I wanted them having witty banter, being really engaging characters and not being meek and dour, constantly

humiliated by the men in their lives."

Also on board is a Sherlock Holmes-type detective named Samuel PIPPS, who could

quickly get to the bottom of these bizarre events if he weren't imprisoned, being transported to Amsterdam to await execution for an unknown crime. That leaves PIPPS' detective work to his devoted bodyguard, Arent Hayes, a hulking figure with an enigmatic past.

Despite this Sherlockian setup, Turton says he's not a huge fan of the beloved character. "The miracles of Holmes' talents always seem to happen within the first two pages of the story; then he spends the next 15 pages never using those talents again." Instead, Turton has been an Agatha Christie enthusiast since reading her work at age 8, when he realized that Christie's books were board games to be played against the author. Turton wants his own readers to feel the same invitation. "All the clues are there in front of you," he says. "Just get out a notepad and start making notes. This is something we should be enjoying together."

How about Turton's own detective skills? Has he ever tried an escape room?

No, he says with a laugh. "Everyone expects me to be great at Scrabble because I'm a writer. I'm terrible at Scrabble, and I think I'd be terrible at escape rooms. Pure pride has prevented me from going into one."

—Alice Cary

# Murder on the high seas

Agatha Christie meets Sherlock Holmes in a demonic tale of historical hijinks.

A dead body is "a brilliant jumping-off point," remarks British novelist Stuart Turton, speaking by phone from his home in Hertfordshire, England. "I can't think of a more freeing starting point for a novel."

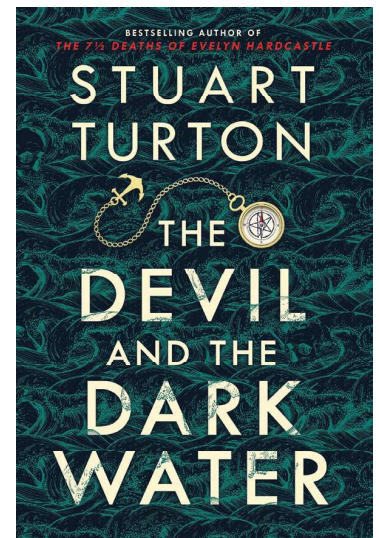
Case in point is Turton's second novel, *The Devil and the Dark Water*, which begins with both a body and a bang. As passengers board a trade ship in the Dutch East Indies in 1634, a person with leprosy wrapped in bloody bandages appears, curses the voyage and then bursts into flames. A demon named Old Tom may be responsible for this person's death. To bring himself up to speed on such matters, Turton took an online course on demons. "If you've got a few hours," he says, "they teach you how to identify and banish demons, which is just bizarre. I don't believe in any of this, but it was fantastic."

An unexpected layover back in 2003 led Turton to the inspiration for this gripping mystery. After missing a flight to Singapore, the author, who readily admits that he is "terrible at sticking to plans," found himself stranded in Perth, Australia. To kill time, he visited a maritime museum, where he learned about the 1629 shipwreck of the *Batavia*. Years later, he decided to fictionalize the ship's saga. The actual story is apparently so horrible that "it wouldn't have been fun to read," Turton says.

Before writing this book, he returned to Perth, visited Indonesia (where his fictional ship, the *Saardam*, leaves port) and studied records in the British Museum and the British Library. He scoured passenger manifests from the 1600s, borrowing names for many of his characters. "Research is my favorite part of writing," he says. "It's just an excuse to travel and go to great places."

*The Devil and the Dark Water* is filled with realistic details about life aboard the *Saardam*, including characters who bathe with buckets of seawater and must lean overboard to go to the bathroom. When asked how people survived such miserable voyages, Turton curtly replies that they "mostly didn't." He is hardly married to the minutiae of history, however. "The moment it interferes with my plot, I throw it away," he admits.

History isn't the only thing this author gets rid of. Upon the publication



**The Devil and the Dark Water**  
Sourcebooks Landmark, \$26.99  
9781728206028

**Historical Mystery**

Visit [BookPage.com](http://BookPage.com) to read our starred review of *The Devil and the Dark Water*.

## Chilling tales for colder nights

Two historical mysteries steeped in autumnal gloom give new meaning to the phrase “curl up and die.”

Perhaps the best way to describe these two historical mysteries bound for bookshelves this October comes from Detective Inspector St. John Strafford, hero of Booker Prize winner John Banville's new novel, *Snow* (Hanover Square, \$27.99, 9781335230003). Musing about finding patterns in crimes and trying to make the pieces fit, Strafford says, “The pieces don’t stay still. They tend to move around, making patterns of their own, or what seem to be patterns. Everything is deceptive.” Both novels are steeped in secrets and intrigue that will keep readers guessing right along with the detectives, perfect for the time of year when shadows grow longer and darker by the day.

In *Snow*, set in 1957 Ireland, Strafford responds to the death of Father Tom Lawless, whose body has been found in the library of Ballyglass House, the estate of wealthy aristocrat Colonel Osborne.

Osborne is convinced the death is the result of a break-in gone awry, while the archbishop of Dublin wants to deem the death an accident, despite obvious evidence to the contrary. A Protestant in predominantly Catholic Ireland, Strafford isn’t convinced either way, and the pursuit of the killer is on. When one of Strafford’s deputies goes missing during their inquiry, the stakes ramp up exponentially.

Centuries earlier, in the chaotic 16th-century Paris of S.J. Parris’ vibrant new mystery,

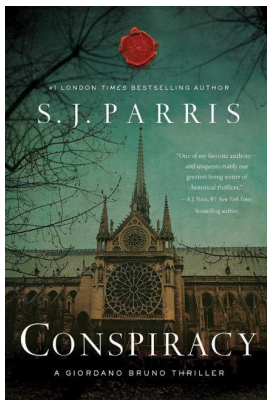
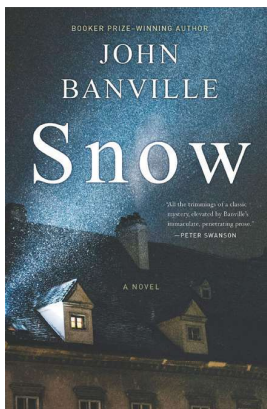
*Conspiracy* (Pegasus Crime, \$26.95, 9781643135441), philosopher Giordano Bruno becomes embroiled in the hunt for the murderer of Father Paul Lefèvre, whom he had hoped would help him get back into the church’s good graces.

Bruno is soon swept into plots and counterplots wrought by King Henry III’s rivals, the Queen Mother Catherine de Medici and the king’s archnemesis, the Duke of Guise. Bruno stumbles onto one murder after another and is on the verge of being blamed for the entire trail of death when help comes from an unanticipated source: Charles Paget, an English Catholic and enemy of Queen Elizabeth I.

*Snow* follows a more traditional approach to its mystery, with Strafford reflecting that the case seems straight out of an Agatha Christie novel. *Conspiracy*, meanwhile, is a much denser, historically rich novel complete with palace intrigue and a vividly rendered setting. Both books offer intricate puzzles, a paucity of clues and an array of potential suspects, all of whom have motive to do the deed. Further complicating things is pressure from outside forces to cover up the crimes from the public.

Ultimately, as Strafford points out, the culprits’ undoing lies in their very plans. “A plan always has something wrong with it,” he reflects. “There’s always a flaw.”

—G. Robert Frazier



## These amateur detectives aren’t so retiring

British quiz show host Richard Osman introduces a hilarious and lovable group of geriatric sleuths.

### Was it difficult to go from working on TV shows to crafting a novel?

I loved the new discipline of novel writing—of sitting by myself, chatting to my characters and throwing all sorts of awful trouble their way. The main thing I missed about television is that in TV there is always someone who can go and get a coffee for you, whereas when you’re writing you have to get your own. I can’t believe novelists have put up with this for so many years.

### The members of the Thursday Murder Club are so smart, witty and resourceful. Do you identify with any of them?

I think I am very similar to Joyce, who always gets her own way, but with absolute British kindness and courtesy. I also share Ibrahim’s love of lists and statistics, and also his total fear of spontaneity. I wish I were sometimes a bit more like Elizabeth and Ron, who are both able to steamroll their way through life, leaving chaos in their wake, but always with a pure heart and good intentions.

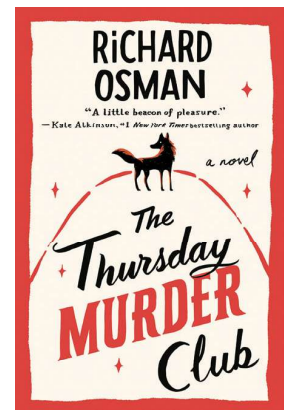
### Joyce’s diary entries offer readers a peek at the inner workings of the club. What made you decide to include them in the book, and to choose Joyce as the diarist?

Joyce is the character who thinks most like me. Her mind constantly wanders off in different directions. She was just a dream to write, talking very earnestly about murder, then veering off into some anecdote about her vacuum cleaner. Her insightful, empathetic nature allows her to spot things the others, particularly Elizabeth, might miss. She likes to sit and think and work things out. I enjoyed listening to her doing that and writing it all down for her. For large periods of writing, I felt I was possessed by the spirit of a 76-year-old woman, and I have to say I recommend it to anyone.

### Many of your characters must reckon with the consequences of their past choices and take personal responsibility. Is that something that is important to you?

We are not defined by our mistakes and failures; we’re defined by how we respond to our mistakes and failures. Some people respond by becoming better human beings, and some respond with anger and self-pity. I’m a believer that the qualities of kindness and hard work should be rewarded. In the real world that’s not always the case, but in books we can create the world we want.

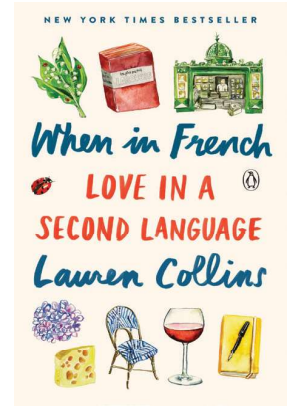
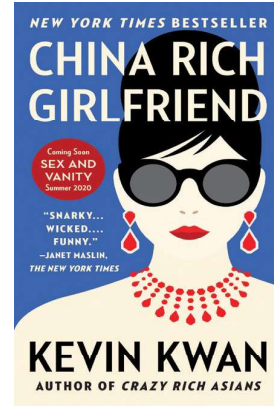
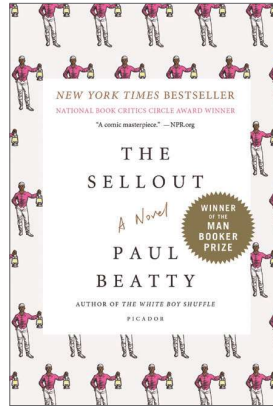
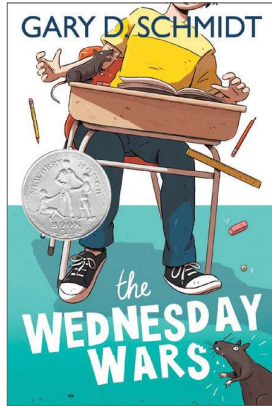
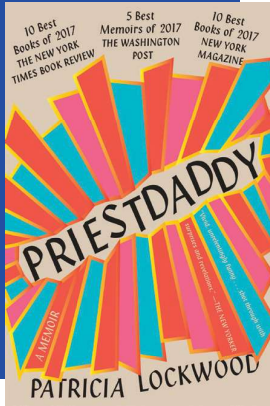
—Linda M. Castellitto



**The Thursday Murder Club**  
 Pamela Dorman, \$26  
 9781984880963

### Cozy Mystery

## the hold list



# Books that legitimately made us laugh out loud

They say it's harder to make people laugh than it is to make them cry. Maybe this is why finding a book that makes you laugh—and we're talking full-on guffaw here—is so difficult. We've done the hard work for you, so sit back and get ready to chuckle.

## Priestdaddy

Usually when a poet pens a memoir, I buckle up for lyrical vignettes, a loose, dreamy structure and descriptions of open fields. But Patricia Lockwood isn't your average poet, and **Priestdaddy** isn't your average memoir. It's as dense with bizarre observations about her father's underwear as it is with beautiful turns of phrase about her father's underwear. When Lockwood's husband needed unexpected eye surgery, the pair returned to the Midwest to live with Lockwood's parents in their rectory. Her father, you see, is a Catholic priest, despite his wife and five children. The rest of the book zigzags between this weird family reunion and Lockwood's even weirder Catholic upbringing, filtered through the mind of someone who is herself breathtakingly weird. The resulting memoir is at once brilliant, irreverent, extraordinarily observed and precisely rendered.

—Christy, Associate Editor

## The Wednesday Wars

I've never laughed harder at a book than I did at **The Wednesday Wars**, Gary D. Schmidt's 2008 Newbery Honor-winning tale of seventh grader Holling Hoodhood, set in the late 1960s. In one chapter, Holling's teacher, Mrs. Baker, assigns *The Tempest*. Holling is so impressed by Caliban's "cuss words" that he decides to memorize them. He employs them in situations ranging from the cafeteria, where he deems his bologna sandwich "strange stuff," to chorus, where he retorts, "Blind mole, a wicked dew from unwholesome fen drop you" after getting teased for singing soprano, to an encounter with his older sister. "A southwest blow on ye and blister you all o'er," he tells her. Holling doesn't mind that he doesn't know exactly what he's saying: "It's all in the delivery anyway."

—Stephanie, Associate Editor

## The Sellout

There's dark humor, and then there's black hole-dark humor, and from that deep, crushing vacuum comes the biggest joke of all, a "post-racial" America. Paul Beatty's Booker Prize winner is perhaps the greatest satirical novel of our lifetime, if not the greatest ever. The absurdity is beyond anything you've ever read; the wordplay is the cleverest, and Beatty's irreverence the farthest star from political correctness. After the death of his father, our farmer hero, whose name is Me, finds himself as a crisis interventionist for the Black residents of Dickens, a town on the outskirts of Los Angeles that has been erased from the map. Despite Me's protestations, an old Dickens resident (and former "Little Rascals" star) begs to be Me's slave, punishments and all, and all he wants for his birthday is resegregation. Laugh to keep from crying, or cry to keep from laughing.

—Cat, Deputy Editor

## China Rich Girlfriend

Kevin Kwan's frothy novels of Asia's ultrarich would just be compendiums of designer labels and other assorted decadences if not for his willingness to lovingly mock the society he invites the reader into. This is perfectly encapsulated by Colette Bing, a bundle of nervous energy swaddled in haute couture who darts through the second book of Kwan's *Crazy Rich Asians* series, **China Rich Girlfriend**. Colette is on a relentless quest to perfect every aspect of her existence. She named her dogs after Kate and Pippa Middleton and has the uniquely chaotic attitude of a person who has never encountered a problem she couldn't buy her way out of. Kwan revels in her precisely orchestrated decadence and lampoons her absurdity in equal measure, creating a character you'll love as much as laugh at.

—Savanna, Associate Editor

## When in French

Think David Sedaris meets Jhumpa Lahiri, and you've got the gist of this smart, hilarious and tender memoir from *New Yorker* writer Lauren Collins. How did a woman from Wilmington, North Carolina, end up married to a Frenchman "who used Chanel deodorant and believed it to be a consensus view that Napoleon had lost at Waterloo because of the rain"? The story of their romance and Collins' journey to fluency in French sits companionably alongside a thoughtful inquiry into the history of language. Pairing these two elements gives Collins' experience universal resonance and intellectual weight, but there's also a laugh on nearly every page as she recounts various linguistic misadventures, like informing her mother-in-law that she has given birth to a Nespresso machine. Lovers of language, romance and fish-out-of-water comedies shouldn't miss it.

—Trisha, Publisher

Each month, BookPage staff share special reading lists—our personal favorites, old and new.

# Better days will come

Finding defiant joy amid unusual times, Victoria Schwab's immortal Addie LaRue is the hero we need in 2020.

**The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue** (Tor, \$26.99, 9780765387561) was set to become the biggest book of Victoria “V. E.” Schwab’s career thus far. She’d spent 10 years imagining Addie, and finally sharing her story with the world would be cause for much celebration. An extensive tour was planned to help ease Schwab, the author of 17 fantasy novels, including the *Shades of Magic* trilogy and multiple YA and middle grade series, out of the fantasy pigeonhole and into the literary space.

But instead, COVID-19 happened. Our conversation takes place over Zoom in late July, while Schwab is still holed up in her parents’ home in France, her quarantine spot of five months. Schwab grew up in the States but now lives in Scotland. She arrived at her parents’ home the day before the French lockdown began with eight articles of clothing, figuring she’d be there a month to six weeks max. “I’m a 33-year-old who did not plan on spending all of 2020 living with my parents,” she says with a laugh.

Instead of an in-person book tour with all the trimmings, Schwab will spend the two weeks after *Addie*’s publication on a nocturnal schedule in Europe, doing virtual events for bookstores in the U.S. Fortunately, she has mostly made peace with her (and Addie’s) lot. “If I have to wait a couple of years to toast her with my publishing team, I think that I could take a lesson in patience from this character that I lived with for 10 years,” she says. And at 324 years young, Addie LaRue is nothing if not patient.

Addie’s story begins in early 18th-century France. About to be married off against her will, Addie prays in supplication to the gods, as her witchy neighbor Estele has taught her. But when Addie mistakenly summons a god of darkness, she makes a deal that will save her from marriage but whose contours take her many years to fully comprehend: Addie can live forever, but the catch is that she won’t be remembered by her friends,

her family or anyone she encounters.

Addie spends the next 300 years learning to navigate—and indeed, enjoy—this strange reality. By the year 2014, she has hit her stride when she meets a boy named Henry who actually remembers her—and her world is turned upside down once again.

To some extent, Schwab says it took a global pandemic to fully appreciate the themes of her own novel. She calls *Addie* “a very strange, hopeful book from an author who usually writes very dark, violent, almost anarchic stories.”

Living an author’s virtual life has had unexpected advantages. In June, Schwab appeared in conversation with one of her heroes, Neil Gaiman, for an audience of 7,000 on Crowdcast during Macmillan’s TorCon, and Gaiman ended up endorsing *Addie*. Virtual events also make

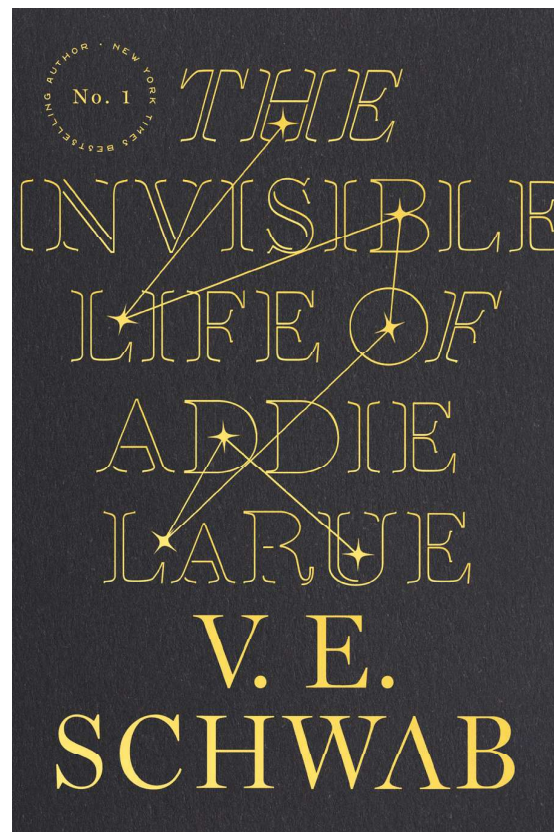
it possible for her international fans to participate.

But virtual events can also be draining and disorienting. When touring IRL, Schwab likes to find a happy face in the audience and test out one-liners to see what gets a good reaction. “I have a personal relationship with my readers, and I miss seeing their faces,” she sighs.

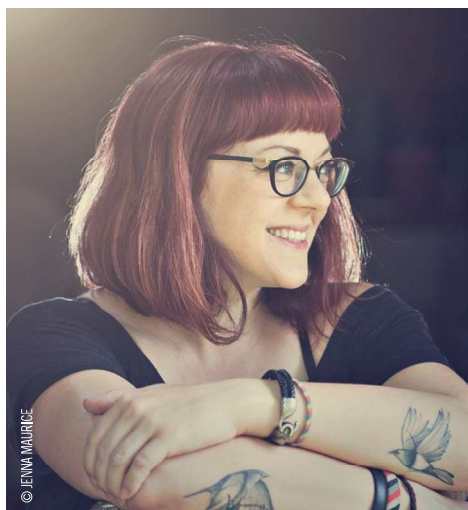
I decide to play the part of an audience member and ask her a question that frequently comes up at book events: What is Addie LaRue’s origin story? “I was living in an ex-prison warden’s backyard in Liverpool,” Schwab begins. (Don’t all great stories start this way?) Without her own

transportation, Schwab relied on her roommate to drop her off in various small towns, where she would spend hours exploring. One day, she visited a Lake District town with a “wild atmosphere” and timeless quality that left her pondering the pros and cons of immortality.

“I think immortality is such a gift,” she explains, “because I’m somebody for whom life



**“It’s about being willing to live through hard times because of the promise of good ones.”**



is always moving too fast. I blink, and 10 years go by.” Addie says nearly the same thing as she stares down her impending marriage.

In 2020, finding small reasons for hope and optimism when too many tedious days stretch ahead is a scenario that people around the world understand in an intimate way. Unlike Addie, we can’t fill our quarantine days with the endless pursuit of fine art or good food or high culture. But we do have stories.

“What I’m discovering through early readers,” Schwab says, “is that Addie’s is a philosophy that many people need to see right now. The book is about defiant joy, it’s about a stubborn hope, it’s about being willing to live through hard times because of the promise of good ones. I think there’s a huge current of loneliness and fear running through things right now. When I was in a really, really dark place in my life, the smallest things kept me going. I thought, I don’t ever want to miss a thunderstorm.” So she created a character who could find joy in small acts.

In the end, Schwab knows that she and Addie will have their moments in the sun, albeit on a timeline nobody can yet predict. “The themes of the book are about patience. I’m trying really hard not to mourn a version [of my book launch] that will never exist. Another beautiful thing about books is that they don’t have an expiration.”

—Kathryn Justice Leache



Visit [BookPage.com](http://BookPage.com) to read our starred review of *The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*.

# Casting spells upon your shelves

Wild and wicked women—long may we praise them. Long may we be them.

Three magical tales mine the rebellion and persecution of willful women in America's past and present to chilling effect. If you have any feminist leanings, these books will inflame them. If you don't, these books may incite them.

There's a fascinating interplay of past and present, and fiction and reality, in **Plain Bad Heroines** (William Morrow, \$27.99, 9780062942852), Emily M. Danforth's debut novel for adults. Two stories unfold in parallel. One begins shortly after the turn of the 20th century, when the scandalous and not-so-subtly titled bestselling book *I Await the Devil's Coming*—an incredible, quotable and, best of all, real piece of queer history—ignites a dangerous fervor at a tony Rhode Island school for girls. The book's author, Mary MacLane, writes about ambition, sensuality and

Alas, the curse doesn't end there. A century later, another rebellious teenager becomes obsessed with MacLane, as well as with Flo and Clara's story, and writes a history that gets optioned for film. This second storyline focuses on the conflicts and passions surrounding the film's production, which is plagued by some of the same omens that bedeviled Clara and Flo.

**Plain Bad Heroines** is smart, feminist and funny (as well as beautifully illustrated by Sara Lautman), and invites more psychological reflection than fright despite its significant body count. A sense of dread builds, then dissipates and builds again, without ever truly finding release. Danforth propels her story not with scary moments but with beautiful writing, indelible characters and complex relationships.



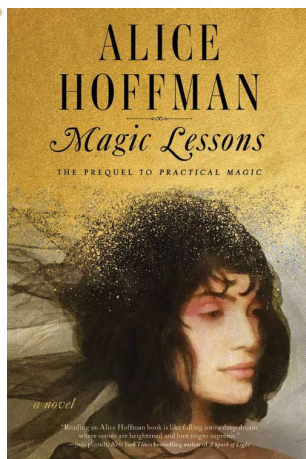
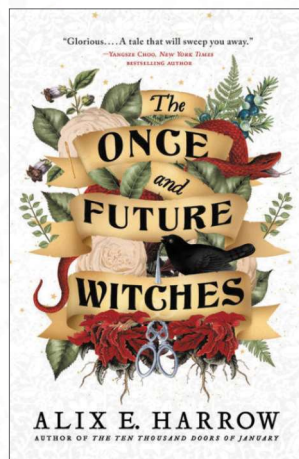
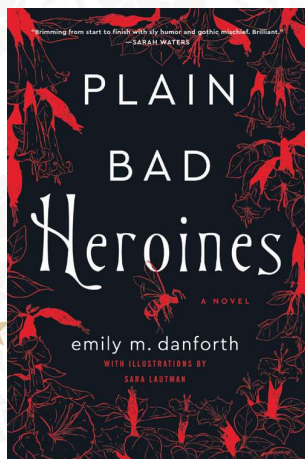
anyone who would give them aid. The only thing the women he targets have in common is their refusal to cooperate with the powers that be. Still, they unite against the common threat, sparking a magical battle royal in the town of New Salem. Fairy-tale elements and the sisters' tentative, tender steps toward forgiving past wounds add depth to the struggle.

**Magic Lessons** (Simon & Schuster, \$27.99, 9781982108847), Alice Hoffman's new prequel to her beloved 1995 bestseller, *Practical Magic*, organizes its strong feminist themes organically. Heartbreaking and heart-healing, this intense and gorgeous novel answers a unique question: How does a bastard and orphan, criminal and daughter of a witch, dropped in the middle of a forgotten spot in the Caribbean, grow up to become a heroine and mother in Massachusetts? Lush and enchanting, **Magic Lessons** reveals the nearly tragic but ultimately triumphant origin story of Maria, matriarch of the illustrious Owens clan introduced in *Practical Magic*.

As an infant, Maria was found abandoned in a field. By the age of 19, she had witnessed ample evidence of love's destructive power in the lives of countless women who were beaten, betrayed, bought and sold by men who should have protected them. Maria's birth mother had to give up her child to protect her from her father, who supposedly loved her too much. Maria's adoptive mother, Hannah, was accused of being an abomination by a man she thought loved her. So when Maria meets the right man, a good man who only wants to love her, she doesn't trust him. Plus, she's already met the wrong one, who cemented her distaste for romantic love.

This is an impressive tale—equal parts love story, history and horror. One of the novel's most terrifying aspects is that, much like Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, this fictional tale is grounded in the well-documented persecution of women in 17th-century New England. Eventually love wins out, but that is only one part of a broader story in which an abused, neglected and discounted woman rises, finding a way to save herself, safeguard her family for generations and make systemic change for others along the way. The whole thing is absolutely riveting and rewarding from start to finish.

—Carole V. Bell



lust, including her attraction to other women. Two girls in particular, Clara and Flo, become gloriously, passionately entangled with the book and with each other. They see themselves in the text in ways they never have before, and they form a club to honor MacLane. When MacLane writes, "Do you think a man is the only creature with whom one may fall in love?" and "I wish someone would write a book about a plain, bad heroine so that I might feel in real sympathy with her," it is easy to see the appeal.

But the book becomes both talisman and curse. Soon Flo, Clara and another classmate end up dead, all three found with the same copy of the infamous red book, leaving the school's principal and her partner to sort through what happened and manage both the guilt and the ongoing threat.

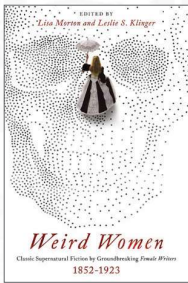
In contrast to Danforth's metafictional take, Alix E. Harrow's second novel, **The Once and Future Witches** (Redhook, \$28, 9780316422048) is a more traditional witches' tale. Magic and history abound in this suspenseful saga, which boasts an impressively rich and notably inclusive cast of secondary characters.

In 1893, put off by the elitism and stodginess of the local suffragists, three long-estranged sisters reunite to form a more inclusive movement for women's rights, one that encourages the embrace of their magical powers. In doing so, the Eastwood sisters make an enemy of a dangerously overzealous politician who is both more and less than he seems. Witchcraft is far from the only activity Gideon Hill wants to suppress. He criminalizes suffragists, unionists and all manner of "unnatural women" and threatens



Visit [BookPage.com](http://BookPage.com) to read a Q&A with Alix E. Harrow, author of *The Once and Future Witches*.

## More Halloween reads



### ★ Weird Women

In **Weird Women: Classic Supernatural Fiction by Groundbreaking Female Writers: 1852–1923** (Pegasus, \$25.95, 9781643134161), editors Lisa Morton and Leslie S. Klinger collect significant pieces of horror and horror-adjacent (but nonetheless frightening) stories by women, including Louisa May Alcott, Emma Frances Dawson and Edith Nesbit (under her E Bland pseudonym). Women throughout history have been the chroniclers and agents of change, and in these stories, their fears about the world are limned with staggering detail. **Weird Women** gives a real glimpse of horror, written by authors who truly experienced it.

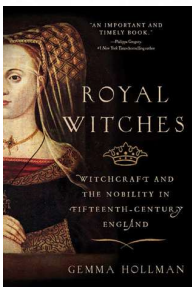
—Eric Ponce



### ★ The Hollow Places

One of the most terrifying novels you'll ever read starts innocently enough. As T. Kingfisher's **The Hollow Places** (Saga, \$16.99, 9781534451124) opens, Kara goes to North Carolina to live with her gentle and eccentric Uncle Earl after her divorce. Settled in the back room of his museum of strange objects, Kara can live rent-free as long as she helps him categorize his oddities. But then a creepy object arrives at the already creepy museum, and strange things start to happen.

—Arlene McKanic

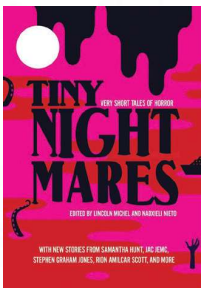


### Royal Witches

Princess Diana and Meghan Markle both struggled with the downsides of marrying into the British royal family, but at least no one arrested them on accusations of treasonous witchcraft. However, this really happened in the 15th century. In Gemma Hollman's **Royal Witches: Witchcraft and the Nobility in Fifteenth-Century England** (Pegasus, \$27.95, 9781643133324), even readers familiar with the

basic history of the War of the Roses will see aristocratic skulduggery in a strikingly fresh way, as we continue to grapple with the treatment of women who rise to important positions.

—Anne Bartlett



### Tiny Nightmares

Horror has been around for a long time, but innovation in the genre is as alive as ever. In **Tiny Nightmares: Very Short Stories of Horror** (Black Balloon, \$16.95, 9781948226622), Lincoln Michel and Nadxieli Nieto prepare a healthy serving of horror to inject straight into your head, heart, limbs and viscera. Each story is less than 1,500 words, and with contributions from the likes of Samantha Hunt, Stephen Graham Jones, Devin Amelcar Scott, and more

Jones and Kevin Brockmeier, this collection is a fusillade of fear.

—Eric Ponce

## Back from the dead

J.S. Barnes takes readers to fog-choked Victorian London in **Dracula's Child**, which imagines what happened after the events of Bram Stoker's iconic *Dracula*.

### What inspired you to revisit *Dracula*?

I've always loved the book, ever since I first read it as a boy. I've enjoyed versions of the story in other mediums, of course, but it's the book to which I've always been drawn back. It's often struck me as odd, however, that Stoker never wrote a sequel, when it seems to me that there are clear seeds planted in plain sight for just such an undertaking. I reread the novel about five years ago, and the scope for continuation seemed to leap out at me. It was almost inevitable, then, that I should start my own homage to it, a real passion project.



### Who is your favorite character in Stoker's original novel?

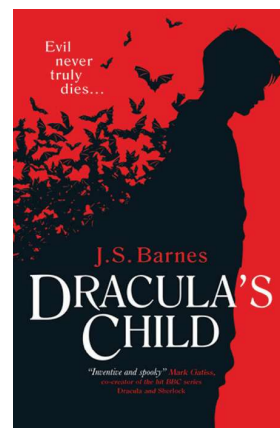
Probably Renfield, the lunatic who acts as a weird kind of barometer for the Count. There was no way to bring him back for this sequel, however, given his fate in the original! Out of the characters whom I've had a chance to write myself, I'd have to go with Mina Harker. Unflappable and determined in Stoker's account, she's grown even tougher and more watchful in the years that have passed before we meet her again in **Dracula's Child**.

### If you were to pick another horror or fantasy classic to revisit, what would it be and why?

Wow, there are so many to choose from! I'm actually working on just such a project at the moment—a sequel to a seminal work of late 19th-century horror. More on this as soon as we can announce it! But I'd also love to revisit many others—*Frankenstein*, *The Invisible Man* and Arthur Conan Doyle's Professor Challenger stories in particular!

### Why do we continue to be fascinated with vampires?

Even as trendier monsters come and go, vampires keep on speaking to us. Both scary and sympathetic, they represent simultaneously what we dread and what we long for. They change according to the times in which they're written—each generation's version of the vampire myth is different—while also, at their core, staying the same.



### When writing *Dracula's Child*, did you aim to address any current-day issues? Or were you more focused on reviving Stoker's original mood and setting?

The aim was very much to channel Stoker's voice. That said, it's impossible not to be influenced by the times in which you're writing, so I'm sure that there are moments of applicability here to our own era. After all, so many of the concerns and dilemmas of Stoker's time are still with us in some form or another.

—Noah Fram

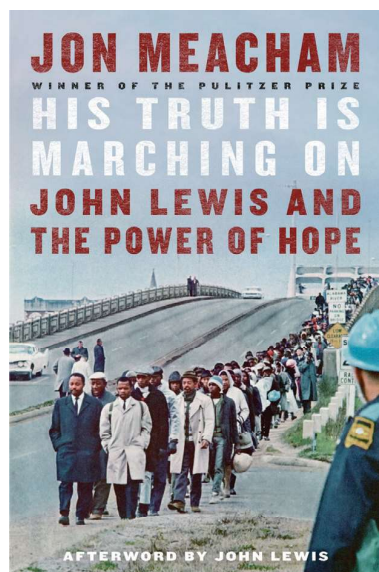
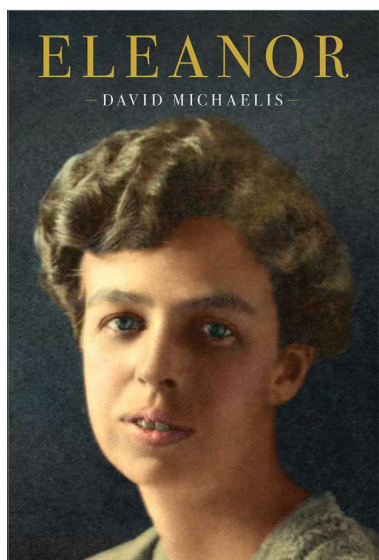
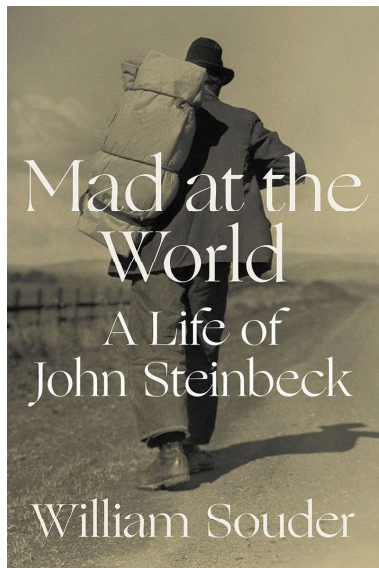
### Dracula's Child

Titan, \$14.95  
9781789093391

### Horror



Visit [BookPage.com](http://BookPage.com) to read our review of *Dracula's Child*.



# L A R G E R

Big names, big personalities and big legacies. The subjects

## Mad at the World

By William Souder

John Steinbeck just might be the novelist for our time. In his sprawling epic *The Grapes of Wrath*, he captured Americans' peculiar yearning for a life not their own, the promise of wealth beyond the veil of desolation and the wretched impossibility of such a promise. Steinbeck's other epic, *East of Eden*, illustrates the ragged desperation of human nature, wreaking destruction rather than carrying hope. William Souder's bracing **Mad at the World: A Life of John Steinbeck** (Norton, \$32, 9780393292268) vividly portrays the brooding and moody writer who could never stop writing and who never fit comfortably into the society in which he lived.

Souder, whose biography of John James Audubon was a Pulitzer finalist, traces Steinbeck's love of stories to his childhood. As a teenager, Steinbeck immersed himself in Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, which he translated later in life, and in adventure tales and classics such as *Treasure Island*, *Madame Bovary* and *Crime and Punishment*. This early reading gave him glimpses into the shadowy corners of the human heart and provided him with models for telling tales of people engaged in heroic struggles against the injustices of their eras.

Steinbeck was a born storyteller who was a bit out of step with his times; many of his social realist novels appeared during the innovations of modernism. But Steinbeck remains widely read and relevant today, as vibrantly illuminated by **Mad at the World**.

—Henry L. Carrigan Jr.

## ★ Eleanor

By David Michaelis

Fueled by 11 years of research, the new biography of Eleanor Roosevelt by David Michaelis (*N. C. Wyeth*) is both compelling and comprehensive, making use of previously untapped archival sources and interviews. Michaelis, who actually met Roosevelt when he was just 4 years old, trains his careful attention on virtually all aspects of her incredible life and times to craft a fast-moving, engrossing narrative.

**Eleanor** (Simon & Schuster, \$35, 9781439192016) follows its subject from birth to her death in 1962. Roosevelt's life journey took her from a shy, often ignored child, whose mother shamed her with the nickname "Granny," to a dynamic first lady and then a "world maker" when, as one of the country's first delegates to the United Nations, she spearheaded the adoption of the first Universal Declaration of

Human Rights in history. Of course, Eleanor Roosevelt's life was also entwined with that of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Eleanor was so intrinsically linked with the New Deal and World War II, it's sometimes easy to forget that she was born in 1884 and was almost 36 years old when the 19th Amendment passed in 1920.

Michaelis never neglects the politics and history that marked the life of this remarkable, fascinating woman. At the same time, his impeccable storytelling and seamless integration of dialogue and quotations allow him to create an intimate, lively and emotional portrait that unfolds like a good novel. As America faces another challenging period in its history, there may be no better time for readers to turn to the life of one of our nation's truly great leaders for inspiration.

—Deborah Hopkinson

## His Truth Is Marching On

By Jon Meacham

It's been only a few months since the death of civil rights giant John Lewis, and though eloquent tributes from leaders like Barack Obama have attempted to sum up his legacy, it will ultimately fall to future generations to fully assess his contributions to the cause of racial equality in America. One of our most prominent contemporary historians, Pulitzer Prize winner Jon Meacham, offers an appreciative early assessment in **His Truth Is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope** (Random House, \$30, 9781984855022).

Meacham frankly admits that his book makes no attempt at a full-scale biography of Lewis. Instead, he focuses on the tumultuous period from 1957 to 1966, when Lewis rose from obscurity in a family of sharecroppers in Troy, Alabama, to national prominence in the civil rights movement. This "quietly charismatic, forever courtly, implacably serene" man was motivated by a fierce commitment to nonviolence and above all by his unswerving attachment to the vision he shared with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. of a "beloved community"—in Lewis' words, "nothing less than the Christian concept of the kingdom of God on earth."

Meacham makes a persuasive case for his claim that "John Robert Lewis embodied the traits of a saint in the classical Christian sense of the term." At a moment when events have once again forced Americans to confront the evils of racism, **His Truth Is Marching On** will inspire both courage and hope.

—Harvey Freedenberg



# THAN LIFE

of fall's most captivating biographies need no introduction.

## ★ The Man Who Ate Too Much

By John Birdsall

American cookery rests squarely on the shoulders of the late, great James Beard. His life and experiences are extremely well known and have been written about extensively. Yet in his new book, **The Man Who Ate Too Much: The Life of James Beard** (Norton, \$35, 9780393635713), John Birdsall—a gastronomic expert in his own right, having twice won a James Beard Award—gives foodies a fresh, intimate look at Beard. He writes with candor, wit and vibrancy, as if Beard himself is speaking through Birdsall's pen, retelling his colorful life and inviting us into his world. And Birdsall doesn't mince words, delivering a raw, revealing look into how and why Beard had to tread cautiously as he navigated the world as a closeted gay man during the often unforgiving 20th century.

Birdsall's strength as a food writer shines, with mouthwateringly descriptive prose about cuisine peppered throughout the book. He also provides touchstones to what was going on globally, including both World Wars, the World's Fair of 1939, the Vietnam War, Watergate and the civil rights movement, giving context for the major events that affected Beard's life.

**The Man Who Ate Too Much** is meticulously researched. Additionally, Birdsall's insightful style allows readers to feel Beard's successes and failures, highs and lows, and revelations and discoveries as they become deeply familiar with the family, friends, colleagues and rivals who impacted his life.

—Becky Libourel Diamond

## ★ The Dead Are Arising

By Les Payne and Tamara Payne

Pulitzer Prize winner Les Payne's monumental and absorbing **The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X** (Liveright, \$35, 9781631491665) peers into the gaps left by Malcolm X's autobiography, taking us more deeply into the intimate details of his life, work and death.

In 1990, investigative reporter Payne began conducting hundreds of interviews with Malcolm X's family members, childhood friends, classmates and bodyguards, as well as with FBI agents, photographers, U.N. representatives, African revolutionaries and presidents and the two men falsely imprisoned for killing Malcolm X. Drawing on these conversations, Payne traces Malcolm X's story from his childhood in Omaha, Nebraska, through his

teenage years in Lansing, Michigan, where Malcolm learned to resist the racial provocations of his white classmates. Payne chronicles Malcolm X's time in prison, where fellow inmate John E. Bembrly challenged Malcolm X by telling the young prisoner, "If I had some brains, I'd use them." This encouraged Malcolm X to read all he could and to not only engage others with words but also support those words with facts from experts. In vivid detail, Payne retells the events leading up to Malcolm X's assassination, offering fresh information about those involved.

**The Dead Are Arising** is essential reading. Completed after the author's death in 2018 by Tamara Payne, Les' daughter and the book's primary researcher, it captures the vibrant voice of a revolutionary whose words resonate powerfully in our own times.

—Henry L. Carrigan Jr.

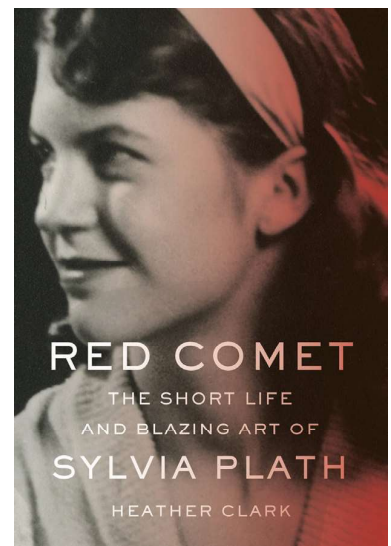
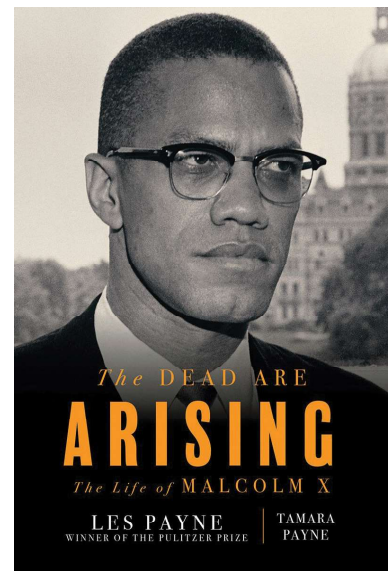
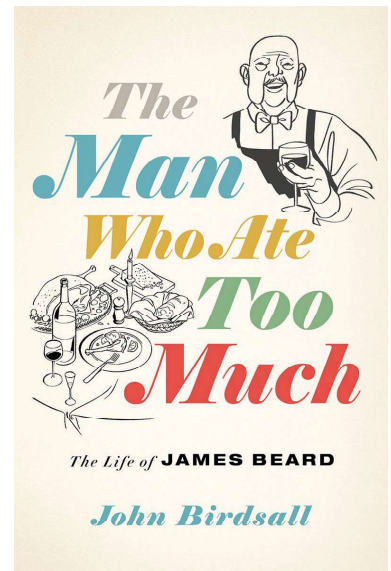
## ★ Red Comet

By Heather Clark

In **Red Comet: The Short Life and Blazing Art of Sylvia Plath** (Knopf, \$40, 9780307961167), biographer and Plath scholar Heather Clark lifts the poet's life from the Persephone myth it has become and examines it in all its complexity. Clark admirably identifies and resists the morbid tendency to look at every moment, every work, as a signpost on the way to Plath's tragic suicide. She also liberates the supporting cast of Plath's life from the damning and one-dimensional roles they often occupy as part of the death-myth of Plath's life. Her husband, Ted Hughes; his lover, Assia Wevill; Plath's mother, Aurelia Plath—they are not villains but people who created art of their own, who loved and fought with Plath, who were not always good or right.

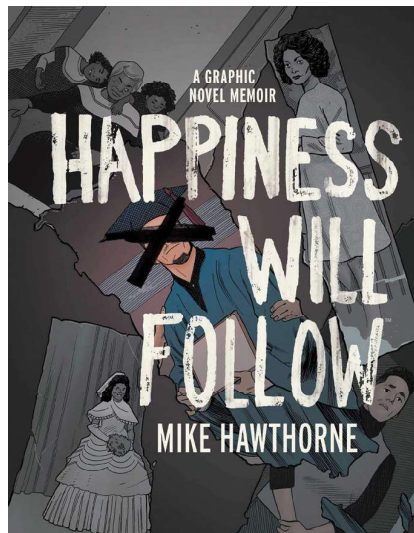
Clark's detailed, multidimensional treatment infuses Plath's life and work with dignity, character and a sense of interiority. We get the full scope of Plath's incredible talent here, rightfully established as complicated, radiant and worthy of deep consideration. Plath was a genius. She was a woman living in a time of great social restriction for women. She had complicated and human relationships. She was mentally ill, and this mental illness both illumined her work and colored her perspective on the world. All of these things are held alongside one another without conflict in Clark's book. **Red Comet** allows Plath to emerge from the shadows, shining in all her intricacy and artistry.

—Anna Spydell



## The sharp lines of storytelling

For readers who enjoy immersing themselves in memoirs and true crime, the comic book format offers even more to devour.



In a world saturated with superhero media, it bears repeating that comic books are a medium, not a genre. There's nothing wrong with capes and tights and giant robots, of course, but to reduce the wide world of comics to such a narrow view does a disservice to the medium's vast possibilities. Through tales of darkness, recovery and self-discovery, three towering works of graphic nonfiction reveal the full breadth of comic books' expressive power.

In **Happiness Will Follow** (Archaia, \$24.99, 9781684155453), longtime superhero comics fixture Mike Hawthorne turns the full force of his talents on his own struggle to understand where he comes from and how he grew into the man and artist he is now. This stunning graphic memoir begins with an old shoe in a doorway, a sign to Hawthorne's Puerto Rican mother that a curse is upon them, and then catapults through years of poverty, violence and psychological and physical trauma, as Hawthorne comes to grips with a heritage from which he feels removed.

Hawthorne's narration is candid, raw and precise, but the memoir soars on the strength of his art as he zooms out to offer us a sense of isolation amid the crush of New York City, then zooms back in to depict haunting, bold close-ups of the key figures in his life. Chief among those figures is his mother; their relationship roots the book in a powerful, unflinching exploration of what it feels like to anchor yourself to another person, especially when that person is a harmful presence in your life. As Hawthorne takes us through the past and present, the cultural and personal, the painful and beautiful, he tells his story with empathy and vulnerability, and that makes **Happiness Will Follow** an essential graphic memoir.

Coming-out narratives are too often depicted in popular culture as a linear decision-making process followed by a single crystallizing moment when all becomes clear and a pure sense of self is achieved. But this is definitely not always the case. Coming-out journeys are just as often bumpy, messy and full of false starts, as British artist Eleanor Crewes reminds us through her beautifully rendered, endlessly witty graphic storytelling in **The Times I Knew I Was Gay** (Scribner, \$25, 9781982147105).

Drawing on memories from childhood, early adulthood and beyond, Crewes tells the story of her own journey to coming out fully and for good. Her memoir defies the conventional forms of graphic storytelling; there are no panel borders here, no defining boundaries to keep Crewes confined to a certain time or place at any given moment. Sometimes her gorgeous pencil drawings pause the narrative altogether so she can break the fourth wall and reflect on the tale as she's telling it.

**The Times I Knew I Was Gay** began as a short zine, and that DIY ethos is still present in these pages, reminding us that our most personal stories are often best told in the simplest and most direct way. There's an elegance to this simplicity that makes it feel like a friend is opening up to you as you read, creating an intimate connection between book and reader.

Of course, graphic nonfiction isn't limited to memoirs. Sometimes the comics medium is also the perfect vehicle for a stylized retelling of a true crime story, as Brooklyn-based cartoonist Katie Skelly proves with her dazzling **Maids** (Fantagraphics, \$19.99, 9781683963684).

Using a simple grid layout that she manipulates to great effect, and with art that blends Eastern

and Western styles, Skelly tells the story of the infamous Papin sisters, who worked as maids for a wealthy French family until they murdered their employer's wife and daughter in 1933. The story of Léa and Christine Papin has been told many times before, but never quite like this. **Maids** draws striking power from the way Skelly fully embraces the potential of her format.

The narrative unfolds slowly and suspensefully, giving ample space to build a visually and emotionally symbiotic relationship between the two sisters. The way they seem to float through the panels together, moving through the world in a way the other characters do not, contributes to a growing sense of dread. Even if you know this story intimately, you'll be itching to know what happens next. That **Maids** pulls off this particular trick is a testament to both Skelly's talent and to the power of graphic narratives.

—Matthew Jackson

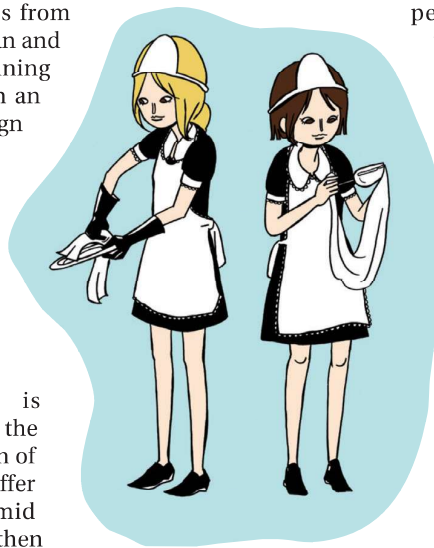
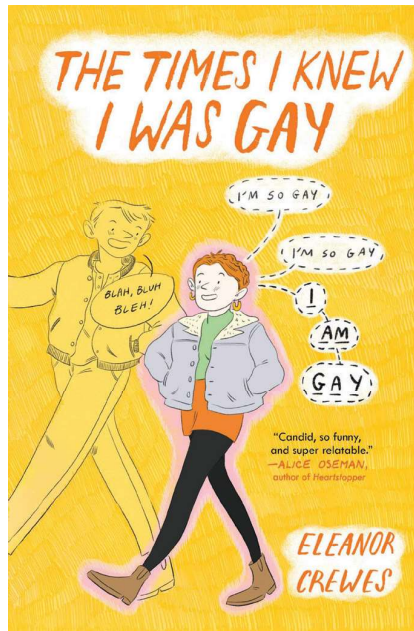
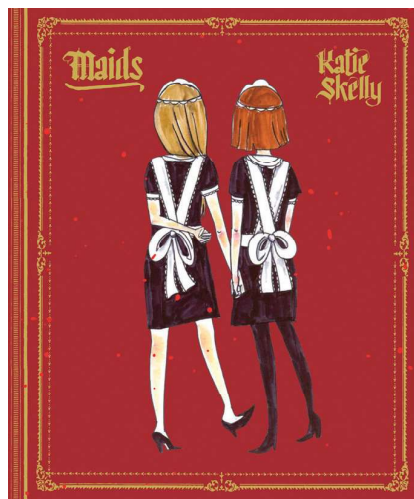


Image from **Maids** by Katie Skelly. Used with permission from Fantagraphics.



# Nothing will save you

Failing technology and an unknown disaster loom over the events in Rumaan Alam's smart and terrifying novel.

*There's a stranger at the door. The phone doesn't work. We're trapped here.*

These are some of the many thriller elements that writer Rumaan Alam incorporates into his new novel, **Leave the World Behind**. Yet despite the familiarity of these tropes, the 43-year-old novelist has written a wholly unique story that feels of the moment for all the darkest reasons.

**Leave the World Behind** features Clay and Amanda, white parents from Brooklyn who have rented a summer home in an isolated part of Long Island. Their vacation has just begun when the house's owners, George and Ruth, a wealthy Black couple, arrive unexpectedly in the middle of the night. George and Ruth apologize for interrupting the family's vacation, but there has been a strange blackout in New York City.

**"That parental fear is really a primal fear."**

A blackout doesn't seem like such a big deal, Amanda thinks. She's not entirely convinced that George and Ruth are who they say they are and wishes they would leave. But the homeowners explain that they sensed they would be safer outside the city. Safer from what, no one can be sure.

Alam wrote the first draft of **Leave the World Behind** in only three weeks, during what he describes as a "fevered state." The novel is a true departure for the author, whose previous books, *Rich and Pretty* and *That Kind of Mother*, stick to the intimate realms of family drama and women's relationships. They certainly aren't quite so creepy.

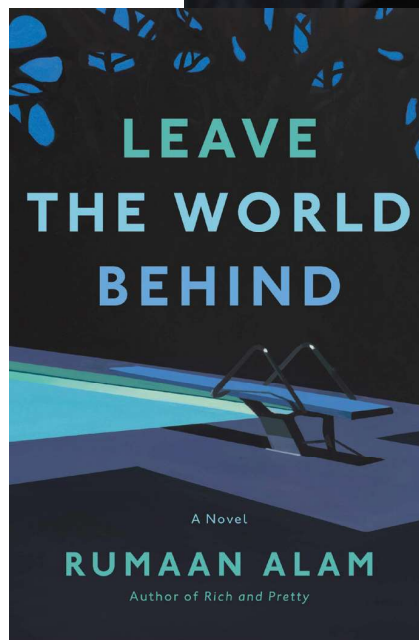
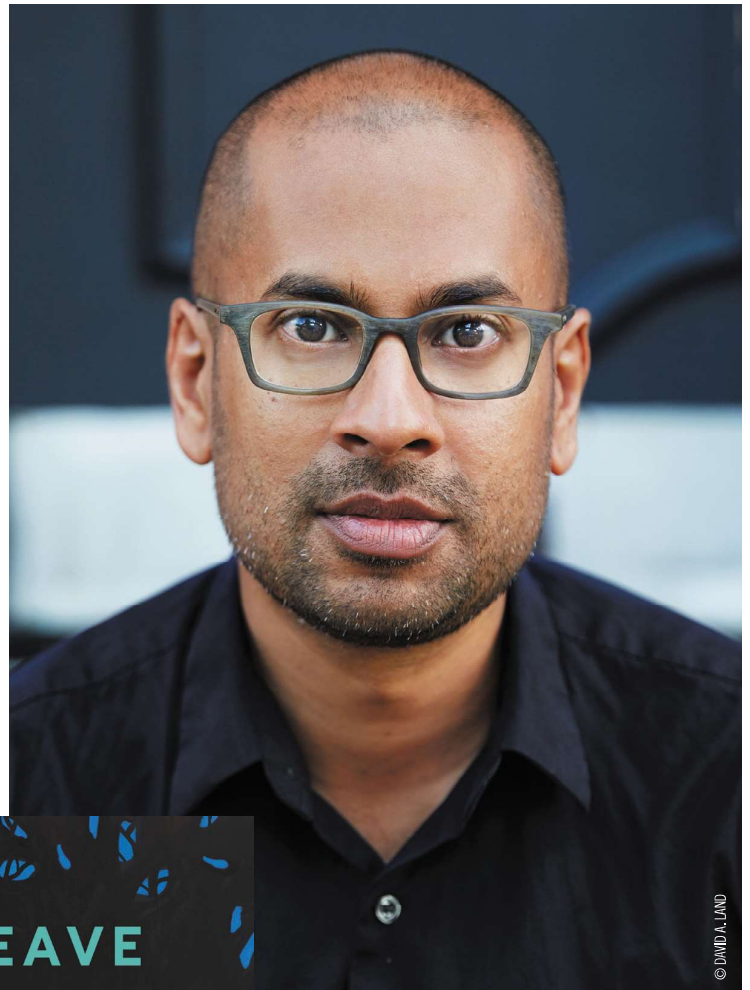
"I wanted to write a book that appeared to be very domestic but actually was talking about the whole world," Alam explains during a call to his home in Brooklyn. The novel's inspiration came from a summer vacation taken by Alam with his husband, the photographer David A. Land, and their 8- and 11-year-old boys. George and Ruth's luxurious second house is based on one the author rented via Airbnb.

**Leave the World Behind** unfolds over just a few days, and the momentum of the increasing dread is masterful. "I hoped that the book would have the sense of a ticking clock," Alam says, "that once you're in the world of the book, time is mirroring your experience of reading it." He describes that kind of page-turning, stay-up-all-night reading experience as "sticky."

In this, Alam undoubtedly succeeds. However, the book isn't trying to be a mystery for the reader to decipher. "There's a lot the book does not answer, in part because I don't know the answers to those things," Alam says. "The book raises 30 questions, and I think it answers, like, 12 of them." Throughout the novel, snippets of explanations provoke more questions—scariest questions—a few pages later. And amid the mounting horror, the book's messages about privilege, safety and comfort—as well as gender and race—slowly but deliberately sharpen into focus.

Unsurprisingly, Alam was influenced by Jordan Peele's 2017 film, *Get Out*, another tale in which a seemingly benign excursion careens into pure terror. Alam also sought to conjure the "psychological menace" of the film adaptation of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, based on the 1962 Edward Albee play. Other influences include Stephen King's 1983 horror novel *Pet Sematary* and Paul Beatty's 2015 novel, *The Sellout*.

Much of the dread, confusion and fear in **Leave the World Behind** comes down to technology: The internet is down, and the radio and TV aren't



**Leave the World Behind**  
Ecco, \$27.99, 9780062667632

**Thriller**

working. Alam knew that readers would relate to the experience of having a bad Wi-Fi connection or their cellphone being out of range. But we also trust these devices to eventually reconnect. What if they didn't? For the characters in **Leave the World Behind**, frustration at the lack of concrete information soon turns to panic. Speculation replaces fact. The terror lies in the unknown.

These fears will resonate with readers, Alam thinks, due to not only the pandemic but also political malaise. "It's clear to me that the book is born of a feeling of dread [that] has been in politics, or in the culture, for a couple of years now," he says.

Like many authors, Alam mined his own fears for his novel, and his concerns come down to a feeling of powerlessness. Writing, he jokes, would be essentially useless toward keeping his children alive during a disaster. "I have nothing to offer my children in the event of a calamity," he says.

After all, there's almost nothing scarier in a book than what you fear will happen to your children. "That parental fear is really a primal fear," Alam says, and **Leave the World Behind** holds nothing back in exploring how far that fear can go.

—Jessica Wakeman

## ★ The Midnight Library

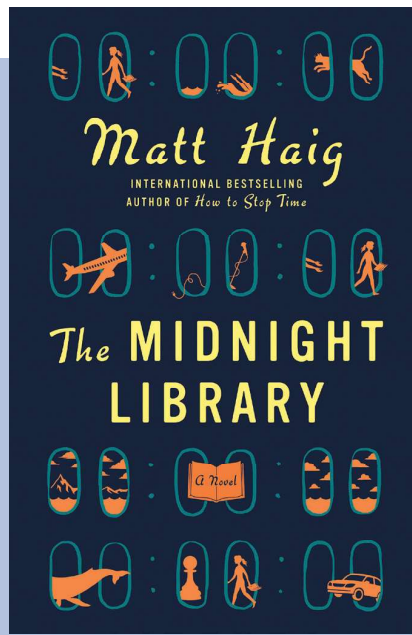
By Matt Haig

### Popular Fiction

If you've never pondered life's contingencies—like what might've happened if you'd skipped the party where you met your spouse—then Matt Haig's novel **The Midnight Library** (Viking, \$26, 9780525559474) will be an eye-opening experience. This gentle but never cloying fable offers us a chance to weigh our regret over missed opportunities against our gratitude for the life we have.

Fresh from the loss of her job in a dreary English town she thinks of as a "conveyor belt of despair" and not far removed from the decision to cancel her wedding two days before the scheduled date, 35-year-old Nora Seed finds herself facing profound depression. When she decides to end her life, she awakes in the eponymous library, managed by Mrs Elm, the kindly school librarian who had befriended her as a lonely teenager.

The shelves of this unique library are crammed with identical-looking volumes, each one giving Nora a chance to see how her life would have turned out if she had made different choices. After first consulting her *Book of Regrets*, and with Mrs Elm's encouragement, Nora plucks one book after another from the shelf, enabling her to shed her dismal "root life"



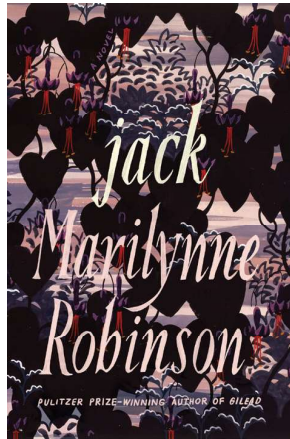
and realize her dreams to live as an Arctic researcher, an international rock star, a philosophy professor, a mother and more. In each case, a sense of dissatisfaction finally propels Nora back to the Midnight Library, looking for another path, as she gradually comes to understand that the restless search itself may ultimately prove to be her undoing.

Haig, who's been frank about his own experiences with depression, is a sympathetic guide for Nora's journey. His allusions to multiverses, string theory and Erwin Schrödinger never detract from the emotional heart of this alluring novel. And when Nora's sojourn allows her to realize that perhaps "even the most seemingly perfectly intense or worthwhile lives ultimately felt the same," and that "life simply gave you a whole new perspective by waiting around long enough to see it," Haig brings her story to a conclusion that's both enlightening and deeply satisfying.

—Harvey Freedenberg

## ★ Jack

By Marilynne Robinson



### Literary Fiction

Pulitzer Prize-winning author Marilynne Robinson's beautiful, profound novel **Jack** (FSG, \$27, 9780374279301) will not be for every reader.

First of all, it's a slow read. It has fewer than 300 pages, and if

it had a vigorous plot, you'd rush through it in less than a week. Instead, you'll find yourself spending much longer in the tangled, contradictory thoughts of John Ames Boughton—the titular Jack. You'll want to stop and consider the foolish and wise things he thinks. You'll wonder why he seems so eager to defeat himself. If you allow yourself the time, you could easily spend a month reading and thinking about **Jack**, about old-time Christian debates regarding grace, redemption and love.

Second, there's the whole moral problem of Jack. You've seen him and felt him in the midst and at the edges of Robinson's previ-

ous novels in the widely hailed Gilead cycle: *Gilead*, *Home* and *Lila*. He is the prodigal son of Reverend Robert Boughton of Gilead, Iowa. Since boyhood, Jack has had a shameful talent and urge for petty theft. Now, much older and out of prison, he flops in a single-occupancy hotel on the white side of segregated St. Louis just after World War II. At the beginning of the novel, he finds himself locked in a whites-only cemetery after hours, where he meets a young Black woman named Della Miles who has come there because Jack once praised the place to her. In the mysterious darkness, they talk about poetry and *Hamlet* and the coincidence that they are both children of ministers. He is aware of the shame that will result from her being discovered there. He wants to protect her. Yet he tells her he is the Prince of Darkness. You wonder if he is joking or really believes it.

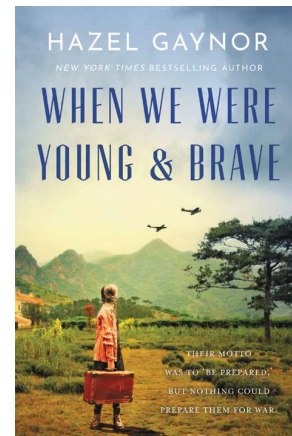
Third is the question of Della. She is young, smart and from a good Christian family. She teaches English at the local Black high school. She is the beloved daughter of an esteemed Baptist bishop in Memphis. The risk to her and her family's reputation in associating with Jack could be devastating. So why in God's name would she fall in love with Jack? What does it even mean that she believes she has seen his holy human soul?

These are just a few of the spirit-boggling questions a reader will encounter by dipping into Robinson's glorious new novel.

—Alden Mudge

## When We Were Young & Brave

By Hazel Gaynor



### Historical Fiction

On the eve of World War II, Elspeth Kent and young Nancy Plummer meet aboard a ship as they travel to Chefoo School, a missionary school in northern China. Nancy is already homesick for her

family, especially her mother, while Elspeth has come to teach and reinvent herself, having lost the man she hoped to marry in a mining accident. A few years later, in 1941, Elspeth is ready to return to England when the Japanese army takes control of the school after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Inspired by true events, **When We Were Young & Brave** (William Morrow, \$17.99, 9780062995261) tells the story of what happens to Elspeth, Nancy and the rest of the school's students and staff for the duration of the war.

The latest novel from bestselling English author Hazel Gaynor (*The Girl Who Came Home*) is reminiscent of J.G. Ballard's powerful classic *Empire of the Sun*, based on his own experienc-

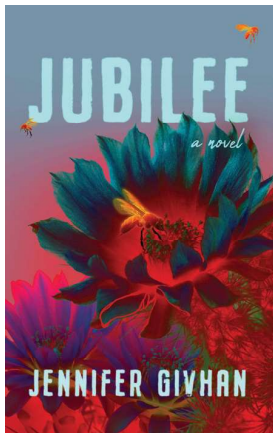
es as a boy in China after World War II. **When We Were Young & Brave** is told in alternating chapters by Elspeth and Nancy, as each tries valiantly to maintain an attitude of stoic optimism. Once the school group is moved to a large internment camp, they suffer malnutrition, disease and more. In the face of all this, Elspeth and the rest of the staff provide heroic solace to their charges, continuing with lessons, activities and Girl Guide meetings, trying to impart as much structure, normalcy and distraction as possible. The narration flows smoothly, full of big and small moments: an adopted kitten, sunflower seeds planted as an act of memory and hope, the worsening illness of Nancy's best friend and a Chinese newborn who needs care. Years pass until eventual liberation, and Gaynor excels at describing the rhythms of this difficult daily life.

Readers will quickly find themselves immersed in **When We Were Young & Brave**, which, despite its subject matter, is an uplifting, hopeful tale of camaraderie in the face of hardship and danger.

—Alice Cary

## Jubilee

By Jennifer Givhan



### Literary Fiction

Let's face it: We're all a little delusional. We may think that we are more (or less) attractive or talented than we are. We may imagine past exploits as more epic than they really were. For the most part, though, these

self-deceptions are harmless and don't interfere with our real-world functioning. Bianca, the protagonist of Jennifer Givhan's second novel, **Jubilee** (Blackstone, \$25.99, 9781538556771), on the other hand, has amped up her fantasy to Calvin and Hobbes proportions. She believes that her lifelike, yet quite inanimate, doll named Jubilee is her baby. Her *living* baby.

Many people with PTSD color outside the lines of typical social behavior, and Bianca packs quite a bit of trauma in her trunk, as we see in chapters that pingpong between the eras "Before Jubilee" and "With Jubilee." Bianca's first love, Gabe, is abusive, and over the course of the novel, we see their relationship swing back and forth, with transgressions being met with forgiveness in ever-amplifying cycles until the relationship becomes unsustainable.

Fortunately, Bianca escapes and meets

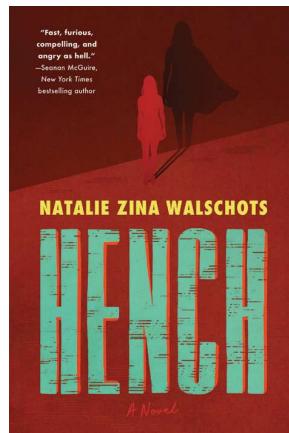
Joshua, a made-to-order Really Nice Guy who is willing to indulge her illusion (as does most of her family) in the hopes that she will reintegrate her somewhat split personality. It doesn't hurt that he is working on his master's degree in family counseling. But the real world intrudes on their fragile truce between reality and fantasy, ushering in potentially devastating consequences not only for their relationship but also for the family they have so tentatively forged.

Givhan, who, like her protagonist, is a poet, paints a surrealist canvas with vivid colors, even invoking images from artists such as Frida Kahlo and Remedios Varo. The richness of her language and her eye for nuance animate her depictions of both the bleak exterior landscape of California's Imperial Valley and the bleak interior landscape of Bianca's damaged soul. Through it all, Givhan has forged a compelling tension between psychological drama and romance that makes for a riveting read.

—Thane Tierney

## ★ Hench

By Natalie Zina Walschots



### Science Fiction

Fresh and funny, **Hench** (William Morrow, \$27.99, 9780062978578) exposes the inner lives of superheroes, villains and sidekicks with all their mundane vulnerabilities.

Anna Tromedlov is a struggling, hapless temp who "henches" for evil villains. When she is badly injured during a battle between the forces of good and evil, she finds herself broke, broken and unemployed. So she does what she does best: runs the numbers to discover the extent of damage caused by those supposed do-gooders. Anna's database goes viral, and she is soon employed by Leviathan, a mysterious and powerful villain who uses Anna's expert skills in collecting and collating data to bring down superheroes by the numbers. They're targeting one superhero in particular: Supercollider, who caused Anna's downfall and, ultimately, her rise.

Familiar tropes are turned upside down in this fast-paced caper, and no one is perfect. Superheroes carelessly cause damage while fighting for justice. The villains are more efficient and professional than the so-called "good guys." Even the downtrodden Anna, who

becomes a dangerous asset when she wields her database skills, continues to wrestle with self-doubt despite her success.

Toronto writer and journalist Natalie Zina Walschots deftly choreographs the dynamic skirmishes between superheroes and villains, who sport suitably fabulous names like the Electric Eel, Glassblower, Quantum and Auditor. (Guess who gets the latter title.) While there is some bloodshed and gore, the attention falls mostly on the often humorous dialogue and commentary by Anna and her cohorts. Wry observations about the corporate world, our litigious society and how our chaotic lives are ruled by dry-cleaning tickets and family obligations are sprinkled throughout.

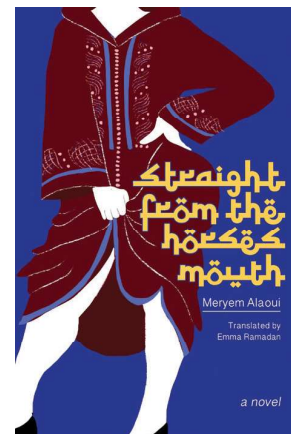
Rousing and irreverent, **Hench** is an entertaining adventure that challenges the stereotypes of heroes, villains and the humble temp.

—Maya Fleischmann

## Straight From the Horse's Mouth

By Meryem Alaoui

Translated by Emma Ramadan



### Literary Fiction

The voice of North African novelist Meryem Alaoui is a welcome one. Her debut, **Straight From the Horse's Mouth** (Other Press, \$16.99, 9781892746795), is a powerful character study of a lively young

sex worker who meets a filmmaker seeking her expertise.

The fast-moving novel is told by quick-witted and resilient Jmiaa, who reflects on her life in a bustling working-class Casablanca neighborhood, including the small bars, the open-air markets and the women who spend their evenings alongside her, drinking and chatting as they wait for potential clients. As a prostitute, Jmiaa keeps her mother in the dark about her occupation while earning enough money to support both herself and her 7-year-old daughter. Jmiaa also pays her pimp, Houcine, for protection and helps her dead-beat ex-husband, Hamid, who forced her into sex work after his business failed.

Aspiring Dutch filmmaker Chadlia is visiting Casablanca to research a movie about Moroccan urban life, and she hires Jmiaa as a consultant to keep the plot and dialogue

authentic. But when Chadlia has trouble casting the film, Jmiaa steps in to help, opening doors into a life that neither woman could have predicted.

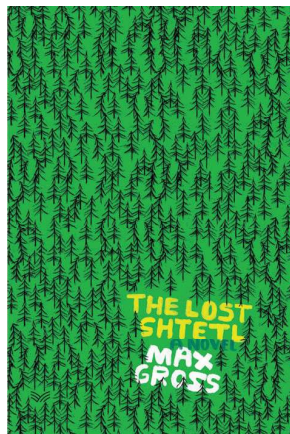
**Straight From the Horse's Mouth** follows a familiar rag-to-riches storyline, but Jmiaa's unfaltering optimism will keep readers hooked. She is matter-of-fact about the day-to-day details of her profession, boasting of her ability to provide for her family and proudly defending the women who share the streets with her.

Alaoui is ably served by her translator, Emma Ramadan, who captures Jmiaa's irreverent spirit and sass. A simple glossary at the end adds context to the shop names, local personalities and food that contribute to the richness of everyday details.

—Lauren Bufferd

### ★ **The Lost Shtetl**

By Max Gross



#### Literary Fiction

A long time ago, amid circumstances that no one seems so sure about anymore, a small Jewish village in Poland fell off the map of the world. Surrounded by thick forests, Kreskol has existed in a

self-sustained bubble of peaceful isolation for decades, thereby missing the best of human civilization—like electricity, indoor plumbing and the internet—as well as the worst, namely the Holocaust and the Cold War. It is surprising, then, that what brings this peace crashing down isn't an epic catastrophe but rather something as mundane as a marital dispute.

When young Peshia Lindauer disappears, everyone suspects foul play by her husband, Ishmael, who is also nowhere to be found. Having no means to further investigate the scandal, the rabbis convince young Yankel Lewinkopf, an outcast and an orphan, to find his way to the nearest town and inform the authorities of the suspected crime. Yankel leaves reluctantly, only to return three months later in a helicopter with gentiles who are less interested in solving the crime than in immediately thrusting Kreskol into the 21st century.

First-time novelist Max Gross is funny, insightful and mysterious in sharing what is essentially a coming-of-age story not only for Peshia, Ishmael and Yankel, each of whom

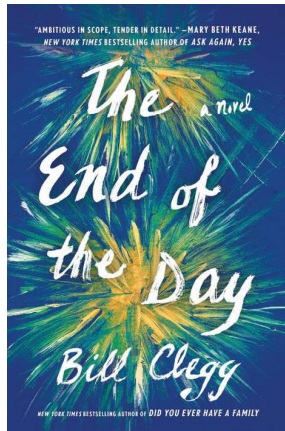
realizes that they can choose to lead a different life, but also for an entire village that's at once suspicious of and fascinated by the inundation of money and modern conveniences.

**The Lost Shtetl** (HarperVia, \$27.99, 9780062991126) is a fascinating combination of adventure, laughs and heartache, perfect for fans of Michael Chabon.

—Chika Gujarathi

### **The End of the Day**

By Bill Clegg



#### Literary Fiction

The pain of long-held secrets and the lies necessary to preserve them are the subject of Bill Clegg's intricately plotted second novel, **The End of the Day** (Scout, \$28, 9781476798202). Narrated from

six points of view, the novel spans the late 1960s to the present day for a group of characters disparate in social class but united by their connections to the circumstances by which one of them entered the world.

After newspaper journalist Hap Foster becomes a new father, his joy quickly turns to grief when the man he believes is his own father dies in an accidental fall. Christopher Foster's sudden demise precipitates the unlocking of a vault concealing the trove of secrets that is the story of Hap's birth and upbringing.

That story links three women: Dana Goss, an upper-class New Yorker whose family once inhabited an estate in rural Connecticut; Jackie, a working-class girl who was Dana's close childhood friend before settling down to raise her family in the same small town; and Lupita Lopez, now living in Hawaii, who emigrated from Mexico as a 4-year-old and whose family has served Dana's for many years.

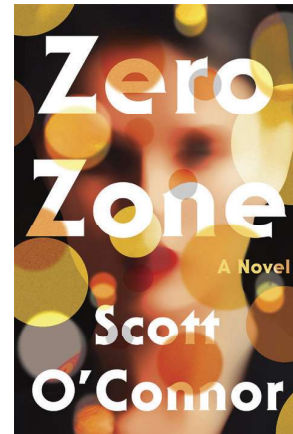
The events that shadow the rest of their lives occur at a picnic on the night of July 4, 1969, a date Dana comes to think of as "the last day of what she would imprecisely call her youth, a period where her actions didn't yet have consequences, or if they had, they hadn't mattered very much." Clegg discloses those consequences, and Dana's flawed perception, at a measured pace, slipping smoothly from the life of one character to another and from present to past, revealing how entire lives have been marked indelibly by teenage impulses and mistakes. Though Lupita believes at one

point that she is "safe from the truth," **The End of the Day** explains with painful clarity why, in some lives, that can never be.

—Harvey Freedenberg

### ★ **Zero Zone**

By Scott O'Connor



#### Literary Fiction

The liminal space between art, artist and audience takes an unexpected, beautiful and haunting form in Scott O'Connor's masterful **Zero Zone** (Counterpoint, \$26, 9781640093737), which brings

to light the intangible thoughts and feelings swirling around an interactive art installation in the desert.

Jess wasn't always the artist in her family; her brother, Zack, was. But after their parents' deaths, their California aunt teaches Jess to use art as a way to navigate and contain her emotions. Jess goes to art school and falls in love with a fellow student, while Zack retreats into an underground film scene. Jess' art explores light and space, and as she attempts to create an ambiance for her internal struggles, she discovers room to empathize with others' troubles, too.

Then one of Jess' installations, titled "Zero Zone," becomes the setting for a showdown between viewers who refuse to leave. Police are called to the scene. Similar circumstances threaten to repeat themselves two years later, and Jess must decide whether to act as a distant artist or in a new, more involved manner.

The chapters shift like a camera lens focusing for the shot. Early chapters take a panoramic view of Jess' troubled past. Middle chapters zero in on her artworks and follow the stories of the young people involved in the standoff at Zero Zone. Final chapters click past, rapid-fire, as Jess' story collides with those of the Zero Zone audience.

**Zero Zone** celebrates burgeoning female relationships, such as the ones between Jess and her aunt and between the women who see Zero Zone as a haven. In contrast, dangerous relationships with charismatic men tint the story with an eerie hue. An intimate experience of art from the inside out, **Zero Zone** raises questions about to whom art belongs: its creator or its recipients. Untangling the web of answers makes for a tantalizing inquiry.

—Mari Carlson

## ★ Conditional Citizens

By Laila Lalami

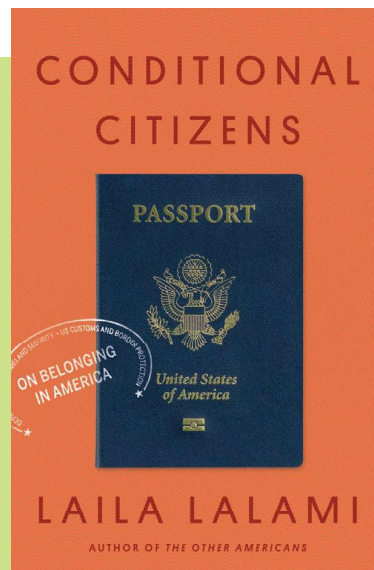
### Memoir

“Being a citizen of the United States, I had thought, meant being an equal member of the American family, a spirited group of people of different races, origins, and creeds, bound together by common ideals,” writes Laila Lalami. “As time went by, however, the contradictions between doctrine and reality became harder to ignore. While my life in this country is in most ways happy and fulfilling, it has never been entirely secure or comfortable.”

Lalami is an American citizen. She earned that title in 2000, eight years after she came to this country to earn her doctorate at the University of Southern California. She is also a Muslim woman and a native of North Africa. She may have passed the United States’ citizenship test with ease, but because of the markers

that identify her as an immigrant, Lalami’s citizenship is often treated as conditional.

In **Conditional Citizens: On Belonging in America** (Pantheon, \$25.95, 9781524747169), Lalami examines the ways in which people of color and people who live in poverty are often treated as less than. It’s the first work of nonfiction for Lalami, a novelist who won an American Book Award and became a Pulitzer finalist for *The Moor’s Account*. In this new work, Lalami



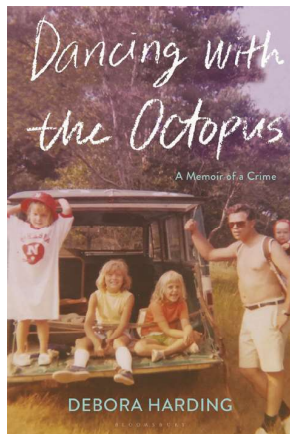
blends analysis of national and international events with her own personal narrative. For example, a woman at one of the author’s book events asks Lalami to explain ISIS. Would a white writer of a novel set in an earlier time be asked to explain the Ku Klux Klan, she wonders. Conditional citizenship means being seen as representative of a monolithic group, rather than as an individual. These citizens are often asked to explain their entire ethnic groups to white people, Lalami writes.

**Conditional Citizens** is thoroughly researched, as evidenced by its detailed source notes and bibliography, but in this gifted storyteller’s hands, it never feels like homework. Lalami braids statistics and historical context with her lived experiences to illustrate how unjust policies and the biases that feed them can affect individual lives.

—Carla Jean Whitley

## ★ Dancing With the Octopus

By Debora Harding



### Memoir

Some memoirs recount riveting stories. Others are notable for their masterful storytelling. Debora Harding’s **Dancing With the Octopus: A Memoir of a Crime** (Bloomsbury, \$27, 9781635576122)

accomplishes both. She has not one but two mesmerizing stories to tell, and the emotional honesty of her razor-sharp prose will hook readers on page one.

In 1978, when Harding was 14, she was abducted at knifepoint from her church parking lot in Omaha, Nebraska, raped, held for ransom and left to die during an ice storm. The young teenager displayed astonishing resilience in the face of such a brutal assault. Ironically, her calm, measured reaction may have been bolstered by the ongoing physical and emotional abuse she and her sisters endured at home from their mother. Harding had already developed strong survival instincts in the face of violence.

Decades after her assault, Harding decided

to visit the prison where her attacker, Charles Goodwin, a repeat violent offender, was incarcerated. “I wanted to rid my brain of the image of that ski mask and see the human with the eyes,” she writes. In the years leading up to this face-to-face moment, she also tried to reconcile her relationship with her parents—her own forgiving, intellectual nature aided by a supportive husband, therapists and medicine. Ultimately, however, “trying to emotionally connect with Mom . . . was like trying to fix a broken cup with an empty glue stick.” Meanwhile, she wrestled with how much she adored her father but couldn’t ignore the fact that he had buried his head in the sand while his wife abused Harding and her siblings.

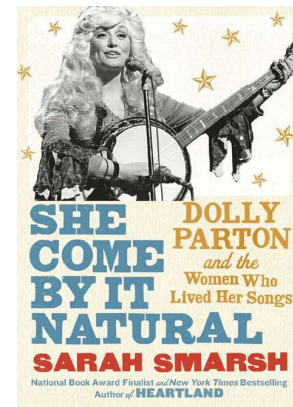
With remarkable perception, **Dancing With the Octopus** shows how, day by day, year by year, both her criminal assault and family dysfunction left Harding with a lifetime of consequences, including seizures, PTSD and depression. One of the book’s great strengths is how artfully Harding lays out the details of her multifaceted story, weaving in and out of time rather than relying on a chronological timetable.

**Dancing With the Octopus** begs to be compared to other exemplary bad-mother books, such as Jeannette Walls’ *The Glass Castle*. It’s completely different from Dani Shapiro’s *Inheritance* but is equally compelling. Ultimately, though, Harding’s memoir is unique and unforgettable, offering a multitude of insights that are as harrowing as they are uplifting and wise.

—Alice Cary

## She Come by It Natural

By Sarah Smarsh



### Music

Dolly Parton doesn’t call herself a feminist. She’s made that clear in interviews over her six-decade career. But it doesn’t matter what label she embraces: Parton is an icon, and she’s a hero

to many women who hear their lives reflected in her extensive song catalog.

Sarah Smarsh knows Parton’s influence well. Smarsh is the author of the bestselling *Heartland*, a National Book Award finalist that details her Kansas family’s life in poverty. She was raised by passionate, hardworking women who stood up against the men and systems that often held them down. These women paved the way for Smarsh to pursue her education and then a renowned writing career, though not without challenges.

Along the way, the soundtrack of her life has been populated with songs by Dolly Parton and other female country singers. Smarsh’s mother urged her daughter to listen to the words, and in those lyrics Smarsh heard women speak about survival and making their own way.

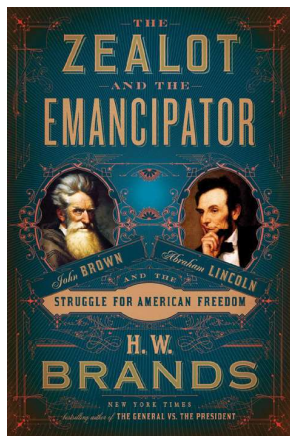
**She Come by It Natural: Dolly Parton and the Women Who Lived Her Songs** (Scribner, \$22, 9781982157289) is a feminist analysis of not just Parton's words but also her physicality and business decisions. The essays were originally published in 2017 as a four-part series in *No Depression* magazine. It was the first year of Donald Trump's presidency, just before the #MeToo movement took hold on a national scale. But the essays still retain their relevance, as this book enters the world in a tumultuous year just before another presidential election.

Smarsh seamlessly weaves her family's experiences with Parton's biography—triumphs and shortcomings alike—and cultural context. **She Come by It Natural** is, as a result, a relatable examination of one of country music's brightest stars and an inspiring tale of what women can learn from one another.

—Carla Jean Whitley

## ★ The Zealot and the Emancipator

By H.W. Brands



### American History

You might be forgiven for thinking that a book about a firebrand who pushes a centrist politician to take a more just position on race was written about current events. However, **The Zealot and the Emancipator**

(Doubleday, \$30, 9780385544009) by H.W. Brands examines the relationship between two men who never met but played pivotal roles in 19th-century American history: John Brown (the zealot) and Abraham Lincoln (the emancipator).

Pulitzer Prize finalist Brands is a master storyteller whose previous books have covered topics as diverse as Andrew Jackson, the Gilded Age and post-World War II America. In **The Zealot and the Emancipator**, Brands uses his lucid writing to explore the rich ironies that surrounded Lincoln and Brown. Brown, a lifelong abolitionist who hated slavery more than he loved his life, raided the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in an ill-fated attempt to spark a revolt among enslaved people. Lincoln, a cautious lawyer who loved the Union more than he hated slavery, ignited a civil war

two years after Brown was hanged for treason.

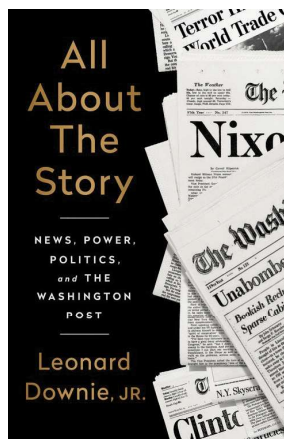
Brown, who had little time for politics or politicians, gave the new antislavery Republican party the energy it needed to defeat the pro-slavery Democratic party in the 1860 election. Lincoln, who would have happily given up on the idea of abolition if it would have saved the Union, became the Great Emancipator and the main proponent of the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery. In the greatest irony of all, the very thing that Lincoln feared would destroy the country—the recognition that slavery was at the crux of the war and must be abolished—actually gave the North the impetus it needed to defeat the Confederacy and reestablish the Union.

Brands uses original sources and narrative flair to illuminate how Brown's fierce moral clarity eventually forced Lincoln to confront the sins of slavery. The result is an informative, absorbing and heartbreaking American story, the reverberations of which are still felt today.

—Deborah Mason

## All About the Story

By Leonard Downie Jr.



### Memoir

In his extraordinary 44-year career as a reporter and top editor at the *Washington Post*, Leonard Downie Jr. was deeply engaged in making critical decisions about what was considered newsworthy. He writes about the

key roles he played in the superb **All About the Story: News, Power, Politics, and the Washington Post** (PublicAffairs, \$30, 9781541742284).

Downie writes, “Newsrooms are not democracies. Someone must make final decisions about what goes into the newspaper, on the air, or online.” He delegated some decisions, but he was a hands-on managing editor and executive editor, personally dealing with what went on the front page, the accuracy and fairness of potentially controversial stories and concerns about libel or language and photographs that might offend readers.

Downie contributed to the coverage of dozens of historical events, including the 9/11 terrorist attacks; the Unabomber's threat and the decision to publish his manifesto; the Iraq War and related national security issues, such as the decision to reveal the secret “black

sites” where prisoners were sent for interrogation; and the impeachment of President Clinton. He was the deputy metro editor in June 1972 when the Watergate scandal broke, and he recalls his relationship with “what became the most famous reporting partnership in American journalism,” Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward. They were an “odd couple” but perfectly complemented each other. When they wrote competing versions of a story, Downie would sometimes rewrite the opening paragraph after determining which direction the piece should go.

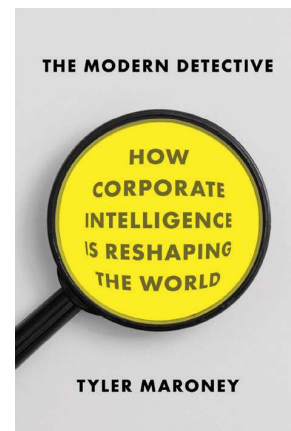
When it came to revealing the private lives of public figures, Downie concedes that he made mistakes in this area, and that his newsroom staff and readers strongly disagreed with him about, for example, reporting on the personal lives of the Clintons. He says he was wrong, too, not to have run more stories on the front page about the Bush administration's rhetoric in the run-up to the Iraq War. He insisted on complete nonpartisanship in his paper's news coverage, and he even stopped voting when he became managing editor in 1984.

Downie shows the vital role a free press plays in our democracy. His splendid recounting should be of interest to everyone.

—Roger Bishop

## The Modern Detective

By Tyler Maroney



### True Crime

Tyler Maroney, a former journalist and co-founder of the private investigation firm QRI, loves his job. And in his debut book, **The Modern Detective: How Corporate Intelligence Is Reshaping the World** (River-

head, \$27, 9781594632594), he explains why he thinks the work of corporate investigators is not only fascinating and fulfilling but also vitally important to the public.

Today's private investigators aren't just the stereotypical lone gumshoes we see in books and movies—although classic methods like surveillance and creative deception are still crucial. Modern-day corporate investigators' work for “large companies, government agencies, A-list movie stars, professional athletes, non-profits, sovereign countries,” et al., is often performed by large firms that either em-



ploy or contract out people with a broad range of skills, from FBI agents to tech whizzes and former librarians.

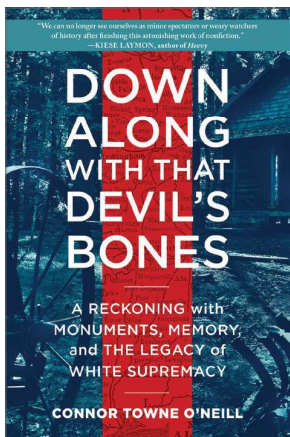
In 10 quirkily titled chapters (“Bare Feet”; “A Cigar, a Cookie, and a Canoe”), Maroney introduces just such people and recounts memorable assignments he and his colleagues have undertaken, including recovering stolen money and exposing political corruption. The characters Maroney describes are plentiful and varied. There’s the former cop and confidential informant who recanted his paid-for-by-police testimony to help a wrongly convicted man regain his freedom, a wealthy couple on the lam with their beloved dogs, and a BBC reporter who falsified a portion of his TV expose about the garment manufacturer Primark.

Maroney’s thoroughness renders **The Modern Detective** a textbook of sorts, with blow-by-blow descriptions of each job, extensive details about investigators’ favored tools, specifics about licensing exams and more. It’s also a helpful resource for those concerned about their personal or professional security. Learning what information investigators look for and the methods they use to obtain it is sure to be instructive for anyone who wants to increase their privacy, protect their assets . . . or perhaps make a clean getaway.

—Linda M. Castellitto

## Down Along With That Devil’s Bones

By Connor Towne O’Neill



### American History

The Civil War ended in 1865. Nathan Bedford Forrest, Confederate army general and the first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, died in 1877. But a bust made in his likeness was installed in a park in Selma,

Alabama, in 2000, days after the inauguration of the first Black mayor of a city known for its critical role in the civil rights movement.

**Down Along With That Devil’s Bones: A Reckoning With Monuments, Memory, and the Legacy of White Supremacy** (Algonquin, \$26.95, 9781616209100) by Connor Towne O’Neill examines Forrest’s life and how people still seek to preserve his legacy through monuments, buildings and markers bearing his

name. When Pennsylvania-raised O’Neill first arrived in Alabama, he didn’t think he had any connection to the Confederacy. But as he began to examine not only Forrest’s life but also his lasting influence, O’Neill acknowledged, “I can reject every tenet of the Confederacy and yet the fact remains that, in fighting to maintain white supremacy, Forrest sought to perpetuate a system tilted in my favor. Forrest fought for me.”

Though O’Neill doesn’t go too deep into his own experience, sharing his inner monologue serves as an invitation for white readers to likewise examine the ways they have benefited from systems built by and in the interest of white people. Along the way, O’Neill offers all readers a lens through which to examine their relationship to the past.

The monuments O’Neill writes about were erected long after Forrest’s death. In this way, the Confederacy isn’t just history. It’s a foundation for how our present-day society functions. In recounting the ways Nathan Bedford Forrest’s legacy shows up in contemporary life, **Down Along With That Devil’s Bones** points to the oppression these monuments seek to preserve. This book is a well-researched history and a call for reformation in America.

—Carla Jean Whitley

## ★ Can’t Even

By Anne Helen Petersen



### Social Science

It is my sincere hope that millennials will read **Can’t Even: How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation** (HMH, \$26, 9780358315070), Anne Helen Petersen’s new book about the professional

zeitgeist—that is, if they’re not too burned out to do so.

In nine well-researched chapters, **Can’t Even** feistily fleshes out Petersen’s viral 2019 BuzzFeed article about millennial burnout. Interviews with a diverse array of millennials and deep analyses of labor history, class and sociology illustrate just how bad life has gotten for many members of this age group. What was called “workaholism” in the 1980s is called “hustle” in the 2020s—and if you can’t hack it, that’s on you. The result for too many Americans is insurmountable student debt, an

erosion of job security, the rise of the gig economy, the fetishization of freelance work, a lack of leisure time and a trend toward “competitive martyrdom” in parenting.

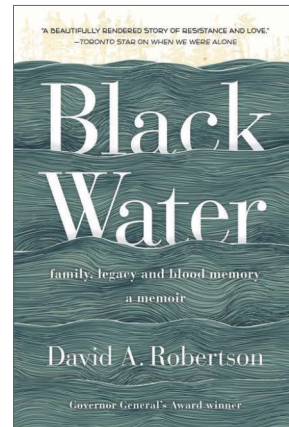
Woven throughout **Can’t Even** is a sharp critique of boomer parents and employers. White, middle-class boomers in particular inculcated high expectations for the future in their children while tearing down the safety net beneath them. Petersen drives home the point that our current problems are not personal but societal—and yet, when a millennial cannot afford health insurance or a down payment on a house, it’s judged as laziness. No wonder so many people experience life as constant busyness and feel guilt for relaxing. “Burnout . . . is more than just an addiction to work,” she writes. “It’s an alienation from the self, and from desire. If you subtract your ability to work, who are you?”

However, readers don’t need to be personally burnt out for **Can’t Even** to resonate. If social media or the gig economy touch your life in any way, there’s something to chew on here. Fortunately, Petersen doesn’t offer any “hacks” or “tips” to pare back our busy lives. Instead, she advocates for societal self-reflection and an assessment of our values to spur change: Do we *really* want to live this way?

—Jessica Wakeman

## Black Water

By David A. Robertson



### Memoir

“His story. My story. . . . It’s our story,” writes David A. Robertson about his father, Don. And so it is in **Black Water: Family, Legacy, and Blood Memory** (HarperCollins, \$26.99, 9781443457767), a family history embedded in a

memoir that shimmers with love and pain.

As a child born in 1935, Don didn’t have official Indigenous status, despite his heritage. He spent nine months of the year camping with his family on their trapline in the far north of Manitoba, Canada. Then the Family Allowances Act of 1945 changed their way of life. The act provided financial support for every child with a permanent address, so Don’s family was forced to give up their trapline, except for brief spring runs. Don went to a public school, where he had to abandon his native language, Swampy Cree. He later devoted his educational career

to ensuring that Indigenous people's languages and culture were respected and preserved, earning the government's support as he established programs across Canada. **Black Water** begins and ends with the story of the Black Water traplines that meant sustenance, survival and community for generations of Swampy Cree.

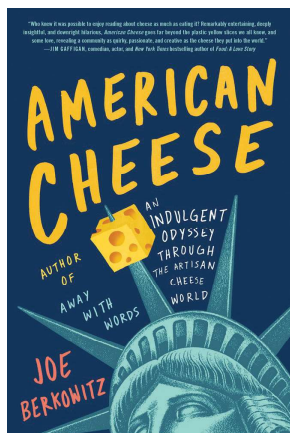
Yet Don and his European Canadian wife decided not to tell their three children that they were "First Nations kids," believing that knowledge of their Swampy Cree roots would be a burden for them. This decision left their son David feeling like a puzzle with a missing piece. As a teenager with dark skin, Robertson grew up far from a trapline, in a mostly white neighborhood in Winnipeg, Manitoba, denying he was "Indian" and laughing along with racist jokes. When his parents separated, he spent 10 years without his father, except for weekends and golf games. Hurt, angry and increasingly anxious about everything, Robertson eventually confronted and reconciled with Don. With that came the revelation of his Cree heritage. Many journeys to Norway House along Lake Winnipeg followed, revealing his family's roots, his "blood memory" and stories to be passed down to his own children.

Claiming one's heritage, learning where "home" truly is, is an oft-told tale, but Robertson infuses his story with a wisdom that binds his own discoveries to the common experience of sharing family legacies with future generations. Memory is a gift we owe our children, he says. Listen to your own storytellers and hold them close while you can.

—Priscilla Kipp

## American Cheese

By Joe Berkowitz



### Food

Warning: Reading this book will make you very, very hungry.

Author Joe Berkowitz, an editor and staff writer at *Fast Company* magazine, wanted to get his wife an amazing Valentine's Day gift.

He booked two seats for a tasting at Murray's, a Manhattan cheese shop. As Berkowitz sampled cheeses that ranged in flavor from milky to dank (his word), his eyes were opened. "It wasn't just the taste of one spectacular cheese though," he writes. "It was the dawning realization that cheese was a miracle food, an edible

unicorn. So many things needed to go just right in order for each one we'd tried that night to reach us and taste the way it did."

In the entertaining and informative **American Cheese: An Indulgent Odyssey Through the Artisan Cheese World** (Harper Perennial, \$16.99, 9780062934895), Berkowitz dives deep into the fascinating world of American cheesemaking. Although our country is fairly late to the centuries-old cheese party, some of the best cheeses in the world come from places like Vermont and Northern California. Berkowitz travels to festivals, competitions and a Parisian cheese cave to understand this delicious and varied food and the people who make it.

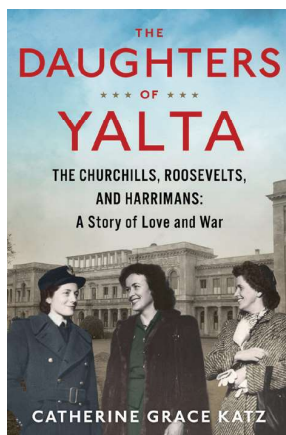
"The cheese world is made up of misfits, rebels, rogues, and romantics; venturing forth from all corners of the country, leaving their old lives behind, to work with something tactile and tasty that they truly love," he writes. "In the year and a half that followed my cheese awakening, I would meet former accountants, psychologists, literary agents, and many others whose professions had involved open offices, Slack channels, and stand-up meetings first thing in the morning." Berkowitz also meets food scientists, restaurateurs and Erika Kubick, a blogger who put on a cheese-themed burlesque show called (what else?) Strip Cheese.

Berkowitz writes with unbridled glee about the subject of "cakey blues and bloomy rinds and marbly cheddars." The result is a thorough, fascinating and hunger-inducing (but never cheesy) examination of the culture of cheesemaking.

—Amy Scribner

## The Daughters of Yalta

By Catherine Grace Katz



### WWII History

Much is known about the Yalta Conference of February 1945 and the "big three" (Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin) who met to decide on a fair distribution of power as World War

II teetered toward an end in Europe. Churchill, Roosevelt and American ambassador W. Averell Harriman also brought their adult daughters, Sarah, Anna and Kathleen, respectively. Their fathers needed their help with

matters big and small, from Kathy's Russian language skills, to Sarah's astute observations, to Anna's daily efforts to protect Roosevelt's rapidly failing health. The "little three," as they became known, wrote letters to family and friends about their time at the edge of the Black Sea, and Catherine Grace Katz draws from them to great effect. **The Daughters of Yalta: The Churchills, Roosevelts, and Harrimans: A Story of Love and War** (HMH, \$28, 9780358117858) is a splendid, colorful tapestry of details, as witnessed by three smart young women making the most of their extraordinary moment in history.

*The Daughters of Yalta is a splendid, colorful tapestry of details, as witnessed by three smart young women making the most of their extraordinary moment in history.*

For Churchill, the sovereignty of Poland was a promise he intended to keep. For Stalin, retribution for his country's crippling losses was critical. Roosevelt needed Soviet help in the Pacific as the war with Japan waged on, but his hope for a United Nations mattered even more. Together, these men would set the world's balance of power for decades to come, for better or worse.

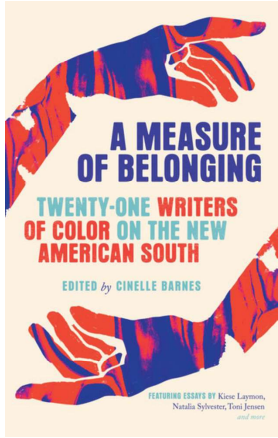
For the women, excluded from the daily discussions and monitored closely by Soviet security guards, there was much to observe on their own, including caviar- and vodka-infused meals, the vagaries of Russian hospitality and the conference delegates' quirks. Kathy, a journalist, was a seasoned diplomat in her own right, having joined her father at his posts in London and Moscow. The U.S. president had grown to depend on Anna, who kept his secrets so well that few knew how ill he was. Sarah was allowed to leave her post with the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in Britain to accompany the prime minister. For each, it was a lifetime's dream come true.

Through their sharp eyes and Katz's talented retelling, the Nazi and Soviet ravages of the Crimean countryside become a vivid backdrop to the Allies' hope for lasting peace. Yalta would become synonymous with diplomacy that dangerously disappointed, opening the door to Soviet expansion and revealing its ruthless power. Yet, in a more positive light, it may also have presaged women's contributions to international diplomacy.

—Priscilla Kipp

## ★ A Measure of Belonging

Edited by Cinelle Barnes



## Essays

In this penetrating new essay collection, 21 writers of color explore the joys and heartbreak of living in the contemporary American South, a vast and diverse region heavy with history, possibilities and contradictions. Edited by author Cinelle

Barnes, a resident of Charleston, South Carolina, **A Measure of Belonging** (Hub City, \$16.95, 9781938235719) aims to answer the question: Who belongs here?

Written by a mix of established and emerging writers, these piercing essays present a refreshing and nuanced view of the South by never engaging in flat Southern stereotypes or assuming a veneer of homogeneity. Instead the collection subverts the cultural dominance of whiteness by engaging with topics as varied as Black college majorettes, the DMV and apartment hunting. Kiese Laymon, writer of the critically acclaimed memoir *Heavy*, looks into the difficulties of living in Oxford, Mississippi, as a Black professor. In his essay “That’s Not Actually True,” he explores the layered tension of race and class in trying to record his own audiobook. In the essay “Foreign and Domestic,” Jaswinder Bolina talks about the unique sensation of being mugged in Miami and feeling a kinship to his muggers because of their similarities. He feels at home in a neighborhood with people who look like him, in a city that is technically part of the South but also a world away. In “My Sixty-Five-Year-Old Roommate,” Jennifer Hope Choi delightfully describes the unexpected comfort of moving in with her mother in South Carolina after a veritable lifetime of living precariously in New York City. Latria Graham painfully deals with the never-ending flooding on her family’s farm, while Minda Honey relishes in her newfound auntie status.

Not all of the writers are originally from the South, but they all contribute to a well-rounded view of the Southern United States as a place that isn’t a monolith. Sharp and witty, this collection shows that there are many different ways to live, breathe, thrive and be a person who belongs in the South.

—Sarojini Seupersad

## American marriage under the microscope

Two nonfiction books investigate the historical forces that have either helped lovebirds get together or kept them apart.

Although we’re now living through a time of all-access Zoom weddings, marriage throughout history wasn’t always so easily achieved. For some, it was celebrated; for others, it was withheld. These books explore the complicated history of marriage in two very distinct ways.

Access to marriage means access to equality.

Dianne M. Stewart, professor of African American studies at Emory University, investigates the complex conditions that have led to low marriage rates among Black heterosexual women in the United States in **Black Women, Black Love: America’s War on African American Marriage** (Seal, \$30, 9781580058186).

Stewart notes that 70% of Black American women are not married—many not by choice but because of centuries of injustices that continue into the present day. She begins this powerful and wholly original work by discussing how slavery made it impossible for Black women to control their own bodies, much less their families and relationships. Even after emancipation, lynching, terror and the stress of poverty continued to threaten the stability of Black communities. In the 20th century, the scars of Reconstruction still controlled Black women’s upward mobility through systemic restrictions like federal “man-in-the-house” policies, which stripped Black women of public assistance if they lived with a boyfriend or husband. Combined with a lack of access to well-paid jobs, these policies caused marriage rates to decline in Black communities. But the most devastating barrier to Black marriage is modern-day mass incarceration, which continues to pull families apart.

Scholarly and moving, with deeply personal notes and references to pop culture, Stewart’s eye-opening analysis reveals how marriage is an enduring civil rights issue for Black women in the United States.

**Matrimony, Inc.: From Personal Ads to Swiping Right, a Story of America Looking for Love** (Pegasus, \$27.95, 9781643135786) explores a very different type of relationship history. In this book, Francesca Beauman delves into the quirky history of the romantic personal advertisement and reveals how it has aided Americans’ never-ending search for love and companionship throughout the centuries.

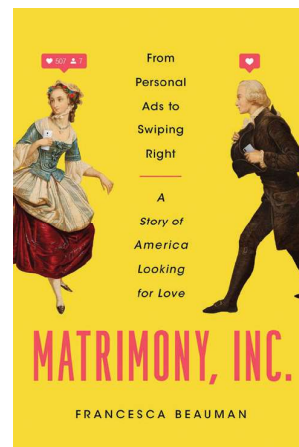
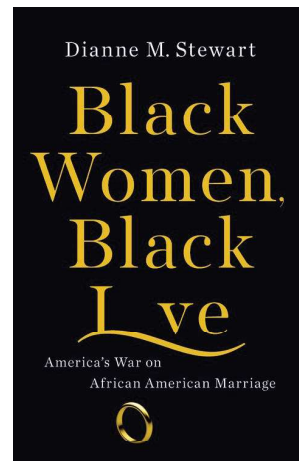
This entertaining and well-researched account begins with the very first known personal ad, placed in a Boston newspaper in 1759. Beauman, a bookseller and historian, curates the archival materials in a witty and accessible way, and both history buffs and readers of romance will find her to be a dependable yet amusing guide. She writes authoritatively on American courtship through a historical lens, touching on different examples of the personal ad over the past 250 years.

Advertisements written by soldiers in the middle of the Civil War were circulated through “penny presses” designed for a middle-class public who was becoming more literate and refined. As the popularity of personal ads flourished in the 19th century, so did scams, deceptions and danger. Behind the ads were faceless strangers who might be bigamists, or worse. At the turn of the 20th century, Belle Gunness, one of the most prolific serial killers of all time, lured

more than 40 men to her farm in Indiana by promising marriage through personal ads in newspapers. The threat of meeting a similar end, however, has never stopped the public from searching for love through the personals.

Primary source materials play a prominent role in **Matrimony, Inc.** As readers see antiquated, sexist language in action, they will laugh at how far we’ve come, and sigh at how far we still have to go.

—Sarojini Seupersad



## ★ Legendborn

By Tracy Deonn

### Fantasy

Bree Matthews has everything she ever wanted. She's starting an early college program at her dream school, and her best friend is her roommate. But she's also reeling from her mother's death in a hit-and-run accident and finding that achieving her dreams isn't as sweet as she thought it would be. Then Bree stumbles onto a secret society of people who claim to be descendants of King Arthur and his court. She also learns that her mother's death may not have been an accident. As Bree immerses herself in the society to uncover the truth, she begins to exhibit a power that could save her loved ones from a looming darkness—but could also threaten both her heart and her happiness.

**Legendborn** (Margaret K. McElderry, \$18.99,

9781534441606), Tracy Deonn's debut novel, upends fantasy tropes with skill and style. Within a classical "chosen one" narrative, Bree becomes the only Black member of a society that she knows never intended to include her. Deonn balances moments of levity with heavier scenes, such as when Bree is mistaken for a servant and experiences unequal treatment due to her race and gender. Through depictions of subtle microaggressions and blatant racism, Deonn places Bree's identity front



and center, down to the silk scarf she sleeps in, and demonstrates a young woman coming into her power in a world designed to smother it.

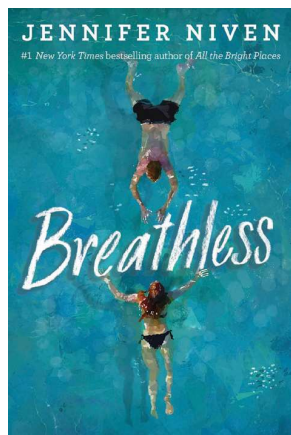
Both Bree's personal grief for her mother and her collective grief for her forebears play key roles in how she understands the world. What does it mean to grieve for your history as a Black American after it is rewritten by your oppressors? Deonn's exploration of ancestry and our feelings of connection to those who came before is beautiful and moving. She allows Bree to be angry, to be loved, to be a nerd and, most crucially, to be powerful.

**Legendborn** establishes Deonn as an important new voice in YA. Its gorgeous prose and heart-splitting honesty compel an eye-wide-open reading experience.

—Lane Clarke

## Breathless

By Jennifer Niven



### Fiction

Days before her high school graduation, Claudine's parents announce that they're divorcing. She and her mom will spend Claude's last summer before college on an island in Georgia with spotty Wi-Fi and

relentless mosquitoes. Claude feels like the floor's been pulled out from under her until she meets Jeremiah, the enigmatic islander who sees through every wall she puts up. Slowly but surely, Claude and Jeremiah rebuild her foundations, taking risks with their hearts and control of their lives.

As in Jennifer Niven's previous YA novels, **Breathless** (Knopf, \$18.99, 9781524701963) introduces its protagonist at a moment when her world feels upside down, confronting her struggles head-on. For Claude, these include the emotional fallout from her parents' divorce and her growing desire to have sex before she heads off to college. (Though she knows virginity is a patriarchal construct, Claude is ready to lose hers ASAP.)

Although Claude's parents and the novel's

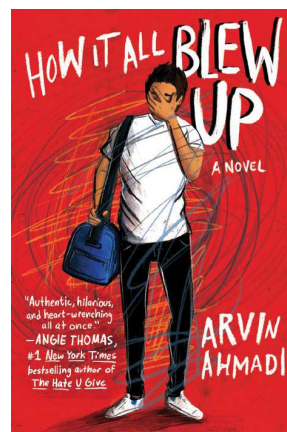
other adult characters lack dimensionality, the teens—including Claude, Jeremiah and Claude's best friend, Saz—are all richly developed, deep flaws and all. Claude and Jeremiah's romance has just the right amount of sweetness as they grapple with the line between love and lust, what it means to feel grounded and what they might mean to each other once the summer comes to a close.

**Breathless** is a frank and tender novel of self-discovery that fans of Sarah Dessen's transformational summer romances and John Green's stories of poignant self-discovery and difficult growth will enjoy.

—Sarah Welch

## How It All Blew Up

By Arvin Ahmadi



### Fiction

The trope of a bully blackmailing a closeted queer person is well established in YA. Arvin Ahmadi's **How It All Blew Up** (Viking, \$17.99, 9780593202876) makes an intriguing addition to the canon of such stories.

We're introduced to recent high school graduate Amir in an airport interrogation room, as he

recounts the last year of his life to *very* patient Customs and Border Protection agents.

During senior year, two of Amir's long-time bullies discover his secret relationship with Jackson, a sensitive football player, and demand that he pay them off with money he earns online. When they get greedy, Amir feels trapped, afraid of revealing his sexuality to his conservative Muslim family. With logic that only a desperate teenager could make sense of, he makes a run for it and finds himself in scenic Rome.

Ahmadi blows through the entirety of *Love, Simon* in this setup, and thank goodness, because once the familiar signposts of the trope fall away, the story really shines. Amir explores his identity and desires along with his new surroundings. He makes older queer friends who teach him about Nina Simone and "RuPaul's Drag Race," takes Italian lessons and parties into the wee hours of the morning. His new friends become a chosen family of mentors whose help any young outsider would be happy to have on their journey to self-discovery. The relationships Amir builds with these characters are truly the highlight of the novel.

Amir can be a frustrating protagonist, but Ahmadi authentically depicts the growing pains of a young queer person reconciling his sexual orientation with the expectations of two communities—LGBTQ and Muslim. The result is occasionally awkward but always brimming with sincerity. "It's such a privilege, you know?" Amir reflects. "To get to be yourself, all of yourself, in this great big world."

—Luis G. Rendon

## Living with ghosts

Printz Medalist Nina LaCour explores haunting, healing and feeling at home in ourselves.

In **Watch Over Me**, Nina LaCour's first novel since her 2018 Michael L. Printz Medal-winning *We Are Okay*, 18-year-old Mila is placed as an intern on an idyllic farm after aging out of the foster care system. Mila becomes unsettled when she discovers that the farm is haunted by ghostly figures and tokens from her old life begin to appear.

**Mila's story stands in stark contrast to tropes about the foster system as neglectful or abusive. Why did you choose to tell a different story?**

I wanted to write a loose retelling of *The Turn of the Screw* with Mila as the character of the governess. I ended up straying far from that original idea, but at the time I asked myself what it would look like to move Henry James' novella into a contemporary setting and to add more expansiveness to the story. I remembered reading a *San Francisco Chronicle* article about a couple who had adopted a large number of children out of the foster system over a period of many years; it sparked the inspiration for that part of the story. I wanted a lot of love in the story because there was a lot of darkness, too. My aim was to write the story of people who had endured horrible things but who had arrived at a place where they would be cared for while they worked through their individual traumas.

**Mila's growing confidence during her life on the farm is interwoven with increasingly intense memories of why she was placed in foster care in the first place. How did you arrive at this structure?**

The structure was very difficult to get right. I wanted to write a frame novel. I've always loved that structure; some of my favorite Gothic novels are written this way. *Frankenstein* is a frame novel, and *The Turn of the Screw* is, too. I thought we'd start with Mila's life as it is now, then we'd enter her past and stay there for the duration of that part of her story, then we'd finally return to the farm for the rest of her journey. But I just couldn't make it work that way. While

I loved the concept of the tidy frame, I think the messier, more tangled version is better suited to Mila's story. Memory is messy. Trauma is messy. So it makes sense that they didn't fit neatly into the center of the story and would instead need to rise up over and over, surprising Mila, challenging her, making her take notice even when she'd rather forget.

**I loved the book's very mysterious, ambiguous ghosts. Were they inspired by any particular ghost stories?**

The moments in ghost stories I always like best are when the ghosts first appear and cause a reaction in the character. I rarely care as much about what they do next. The 2017 film *A Ghost Story* was really powerful in that way for me. It was a movie about grief in which a ghost in a white sheet—borderline comical—shows up as a visual representation of Rooney Mara's character's grief. I wanted **Watch Over Me's** ghosts to be very real, but I also knew they'd be metaphorical as well. It was tricky to get them right, but I feel like we're all surrounded by ghosts all the time, whether or not we want to look at them. Ghosts of who we once were, ghosts of the people we've lost or lost touch with, ghosts of what might have been if our lives had moved in different directions . . . I was drawn to the idea of these ghosts swarming around, living their own ghost-lives and what impact they would have on the living residents of the farm. Who would be afraid of them, who would be at peace with them. What all of it might mean.

**Mila is at a pivotal place in her life, and you depict moments when she poignantly longs to be either older or younger than she is. What do you hope readers take away from Mila's feelings in these moments?**

I think growing up is really beautiful and really hard,



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and we do it over and over again all our lives. It can be painful, and it's only natural to wish for a time when things felt simple or to look into the future and imagine how it will be when this particular phase of growth is over. Mila longs for both, and seeing herself in contrast to the younger residents of the farm makes the fact that she isn't a child anymore—that she's responsible for healing herself—starker. But what a gift it is to have people by your side, loving you and caring about you while you do that hard work with yourself. Growing to trust these people is part of Mila's journey, too.

**At one point, Mila says, "Maybe the fear doesn't ever actually go away. Maybe we have to keep on working." What advice or encouragement would you give to teens doing that kind of work?**

I would say that as much as I'd like to tell them otherwise, for most of us our wounds won't ever heal completely. But also, that it's OK. That we own it—whatever it is—and we can use it in all sorts of ways. We can use it for art. It can be a source of empathy and strength. We all have wounds. We all carry damage. It makes us fully human. The sooner we realize that we're responsible for ourselves, that we're strong enough to look at the things we've lost, the things we've done or that have been done to us, the mistakes or missteps we've made, the sooner we'll begin feel at home in ourselves.

—Norah Piehl



**Watch Over Me**  
Dutton, \$17.99, 9780593108970

**Young Adult**



Visit [BookPage.com](http://BookPage.com) to read an expanded version of this Q&A and our starred review of *Watch Over Me*.

## In the city, wonder awaits

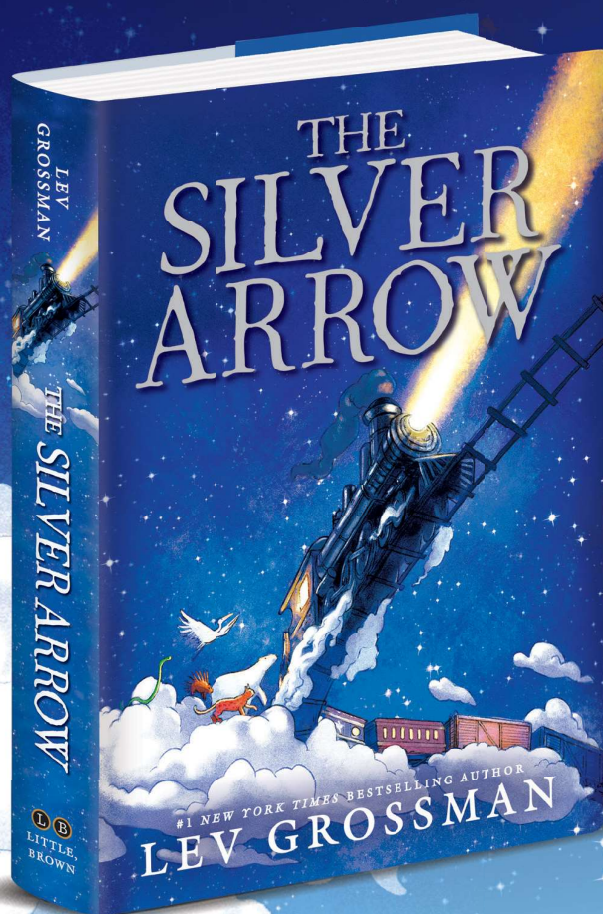
Two picture books offer odes to urban life.

# ALL ABOARD!



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BOOK GROUP

Ordinary city life is made extraordinary when seen through the eyes of talented author-illustrators Chris Raschka and Christy Hale.

Two-time Caldecott Medalist Chris Raschka's *In the City* (Richard Jackson, \$17.99, 9781481486279, ages 4 to 8) celebrates the joys of newfound friendship. Two girls, one Black and one white, make their way separately through a city while pigeons circle overhead. “Could a friend be waiting for me?” they each wonder.

As the girls walk, pigeons soar above and settle down to roost on a statue in a park. The girls sit on the same park bench and watch the birds. “Now we see them one for one,” the text says, highlighting differences among the birds, including gleaming rainbows of colored feathers. A turn of the page finds the girls facing each other, reaching out to hold hands as the flock takes flight around them. Raschka asks, “How do two friends find each other?”

Raschka's watercolor city teems with color and movement. Reddish buildings give way to park trees in myriad shades of green. He unites the girls and the birds through a similar shade of blue, seen on one girl's glasses, the other girl's hair scrunchie and the pigeons' neck feathers. Raschka's plain-spoken prose forms rhyming couplets that never feel forced, and his refrain evokes the coos of pigeons and is sure to be echoed by engaged young readers.

Combining all the ingredients for a perfect read-aloud picture book, *In the City* is a visual feast and an introspective meditation

on the rewards of noticing what's right in front of us.

The streets of Brooklyn snap into focus on the very first page of Christy Hale's *Out the Door* (Neal Porter, \$18.99, 9780823446445, ages 3 to 6), a salute to the daily routines that define our lives. A girl walks down the front steps of her home, heads down the sidewalk with her father and rides the bustling subway to school. Minimal text and bright, cheerful illustrations

reveal every step of the journey. Tree branches arc overhead as she walks down her street. She crosses beneath a traffic light, walks down

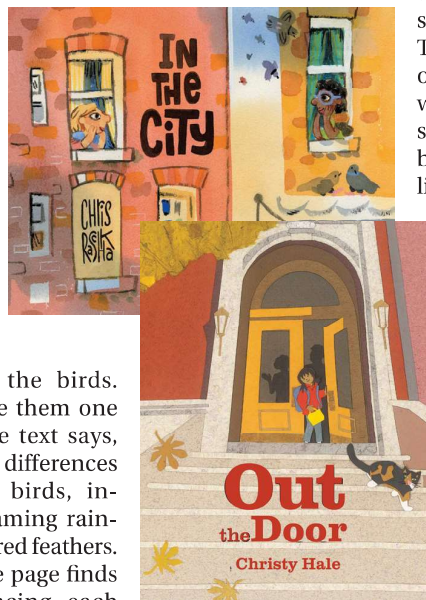
the subway station stairs, waits on a crowded platform and strolls past shops and skyscrapers.

The book's prose is spare. “Through a tunnel in the dark” is the only text on a page with a cross section

of the city, depicting the girl's train as it travels beneath the streets. Hale styles prepositions in bold and uses different colors to set them off from the rest of the words, emphasizing the motion of the girl's journey. Her collage illustrations initially appear as deceptively sparse as her prose, but a closer look reveals skillful use of pattern, texture and detail that brings the city to life as the girl travels through it to school and back home again.

There's great comfort to be found in such routines, and youngsters will be riveted by the sights and sounds of Hale's city. *Out the Door* is a charming read that will prompt readers to reflect on their own daily rituals.

—Alice Cary

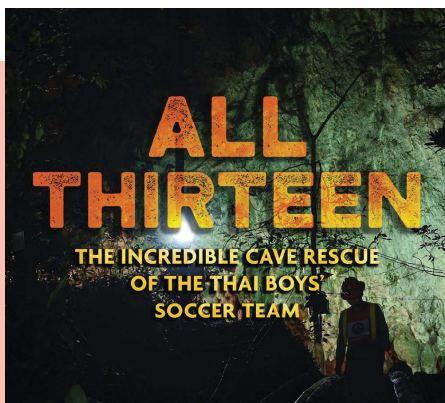


## ★ All Thirteen

By Christina Soontornvat

Middle Grade

Caves are sacred in Thailand, writes Thai American author Christina Soontornvat in her outstanding *All Thirteen: The Incredible Cave Rescue of the Thai Boys' Soccer Team* (Candlewick, \$24.99, 9781536209457, ages 8 to 12). "A mountain holds power, and a cave provides a way to tap into that power." Tourists and locals have long been drawn to the mysterious tunnels in Tham Luang-Khun Nam Nang Non Forest Park. So it's no surprise that in June 2018, the 12 members of the Wild Boars soccer team and their coach decided to explore the caves. By nighttime, their families knew something was



CHRISTINA SOONTORNVAT

were joined by a group of rescuers ready to risk their lives to save the cold and hungry boys who waited and meditated below.

Soontornvat masterfully chronicles this

wrong. The boys weren't home, and the rainy season had arrived early.

It soon became clear that the team was trapped far from the entrance by rising waters. For the next 18 days, the boys' families and thousands of volunteers kept a vigil on the mountain. They

amazing undertaking, in which incredible ad hoc feats of engineering became commonplace. Her narration and the testimonies of the numerous figures she interviewed are suspenseful and deeply felt. Interspersed with *All Thirteen's* gripping account are fascinating, accessible analyses—supplemented by photos, diagrams, maps and more—of the cultural, technological, scientific and spiritual considerations that affected the rescue effort, from Buddhism to climate change to political protocol.

The harrowing rescue required divers to navigate murky water and capricious currents while carrying the children through narrow passages. *All Thirteen* is an inspiring testament to those 18 fateful days of communal empathy, determination and hope. In Soontornvat's talented hands, it's at once a nail-biter and a revelation: "This rescue was impossible, and they did it anyway."

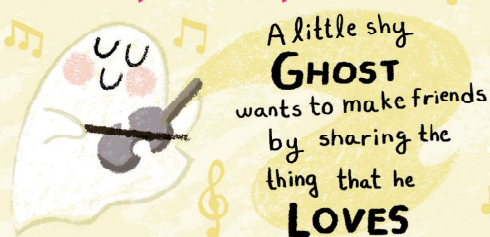
—Linda M. Castellitto



Visit [BookPage.com](http://BookPage.com) to read a Behind the Book essay by Christina Soontornvat.

## meet FLAVIA Z. DRAGO

How would you describe your book?



What books did you enjoy as a child?



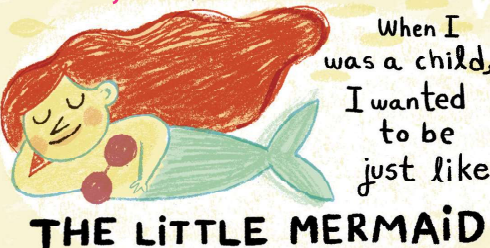
Who has been the biggest influence on your work?



What one thing would you like to learn to do?



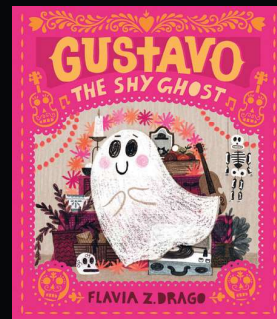
Who was your childhood hero?



What message would you like to send to young readers?

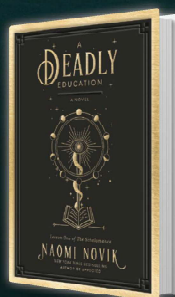


A sweet spirit longs to make friends with the other monsters in Flavia Z. Drago's charming debut picture book, *Gustavo the Shy Ghost* (Candlewick, \$16.99, 9781536211146, ages 3 to 7), a celebration of the joy that awaits when we find the courage to let others see us for who we really are. Drago, who is based in Mexico, studied children's book illustration in Cambridge, England, and has also worked as a graphic designer.



# Returning

## FAVORITES



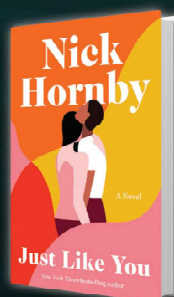
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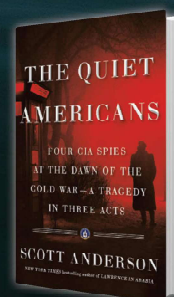
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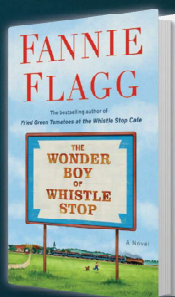


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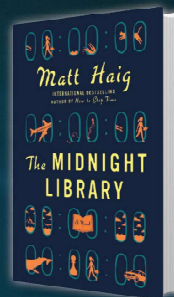
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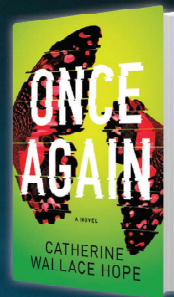
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