

BookPage®

DISCOVER YOUR NEXT GREAT BOOK

MAR 2021

MEMOIR

MARCH

*Elizabeth Miki Brina • Louis Chude-Sokei • Menachem Kaiser
Georgina Lawton • Theo Padnos • Courtney Zoffness*

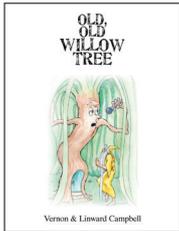
PLUS INTERVIEWS WITH

HARLAN COBEN

JENNIFER RYAN

TALIA HIBBERT

Great Books for Every Reader



Old, Old Willow Tree

Vernon & Linward Campbell

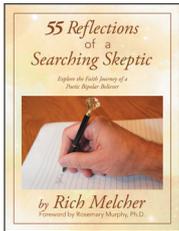
In this book, authors Vernon and Linward Campbell combine beautiful illustrations and lyrical verses to tell the charming story of the *Old, Old Willow Tree*. Join the adventure!

\$18.73 paperback

978-1-9845-9036-7

also available in hardcover, ebook & audiobook

www.xlibrispublishing.co.uk



55 Reflections of a Searching Skeptic

Explore the Faith Journey of a Poetic Bipolar Believer

Rich Melcher

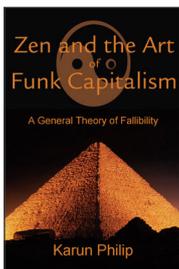
Enjoy the eclectic offerings of hope and enlightenment in *55 Reflections of a Searching Skeptic* and experience many moments of stunning openness and helpful insight.

\$29.95 paperback

978-1-7283-1234-7

also available in hardcover, ebook & audiobook

www.authorhouse.com



Zen and the Art of Funk Capitalism

A General Theory of Fallibility

Karun Philip

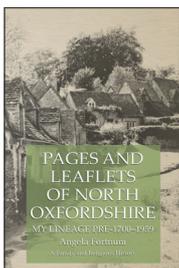
Why does poverty endure? This book provides a new explanation of why capitalism succeeds where it does, yet fails to achieve universal welfare as its most vocal proponents claim it ought to.

\$11.95 paperback

978-0-5952-0514-1

also available in ebook

www.iuniverse.com



Pages and Leaflets of North Oxfordshire

My Lineage Pre-1700-1959

Angela Fortnum

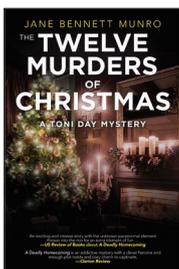
This family genealogy and history chronicles the story of the Page family and the changes in work and religion that the family experienced over three centuries living in England.

\$12.90 paperback

978-1-5462-9795-6

also available in hardcover, ebook & audiobook

www.authorhouse.co.uk



The Twelve Murders of Christmas

A Toni Day Mystery

Jane Bennett Munro

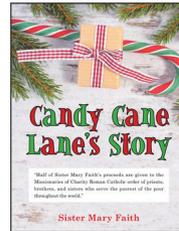
Pathologist Toni Day and the Twin Falls Police race to catch a parolee before he kills the entire jury that put him in prison, and then comes after Toni.

\$20.99 paperback

978-1-6632-0271-0

also available in ebook

www.iuniverse.com



Candy Cane Lane's Story

Sister Mary Faith

Candy Cane Lane's Story is a heartwarming tale about Candy Cane Lane and a woman's convictions. Why not bring this to your family this holiday?

\$15.99 paperback

978-1-5320-8939-8

also available in hardcover & ebook

www.iuniverse.com



Lick Like a Lesbian

Wise Cracks

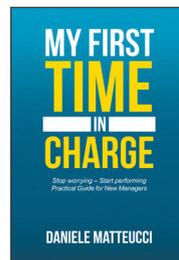
Lick Like a Lesbian is a fun but informative guide to perfecting oral sex. It provides useful and informative techniques to help you along with your sex lives.

\$13.02 paperback

978-1-9845-9452-5

also available in hardcover & ebook

www.xlibrispublishing.co.uk



My First Time In Charge

Stop worrying - Start performing Practical Guide for New Managers

Daniele Matteucci

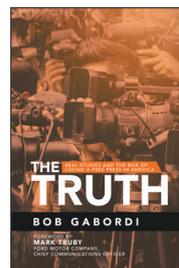
Daniele Matteucci discusses the rational and emotional areas of being a manager. This practical guide offers pragmatic tools and frameworks to help new managers as they take on their new role.

\$17.23 paperback

978-1-5462-9934-9

also available in ebook

www.authorhouse.co.uk



The Truth

Real Stories and the Risk of Losing a Free Press in America

Bob Gabordi

It's time we again stand up for freedom. That's the call to action in *The Truth: Real Stories and the Risk of Losing a Free Press in America*.

\$13.99 paperback

978-1-7283-6604-3

also available in hardcover & ebook

www.authorhouse.com



Burning Desire

The Psychopath And The Girl In Black Prada Shoes Part I

M. L. Stark

Mary is dating her Doctor, Drake Bates, a sneaky sociopath who swindled himself through life. Her life will never be the same. Will she learn from his evilness?

\$20.17 paperback

978-1-9845-9359-7

also available in hardcover & ebook

www.xlibrispublishing.co.uk

authorHOUSE®

iUniverse®

Xlibris



BookPage®

MARCH 2021

features

q&a talia hibbert	4
The acclaimed romance author closes out her Brown Sisters trilogy	
interview harlan coben	11
A perennial scene-stealer finally stars in a book of his very own	
feature self-help	12
Overcome fear, set boundaries and take control of your life	
feature writers to watch	13
These female authors are going places, and we can't wait to follow them	
feature inspirational fiction	14
Endearing novels explore faith amid both romantic and familial love	
behind the book tori telfer	16
The author of Confident Women wonders whether she's ever been conned	
feature women's history	17
Three riveting books honor international soldiers, journalists and style icons	
cover story memoir march	18
Six memoirists transform memory and truth, joy and pain, into captivating stories	
interview jennifer ryan	20
Drama abounds in a fictional British baking contest during World War II	
feature women's history for children	28
Fascinating stories to empower and inspire young readers	
feature dav pilkey	29
WANTED: bestselling author accused of leading young people to a life of reading	
q&a laura amy schlitz	30
A Newbery Medalist mines the treasures and troubles of ancient history	
meet cat min	31
Meet the author-illustrator of Shy Willow	

reviews

fiction	21
nonfiction	24
young adult	27
children's	31

columns

romance	5
well read	6
audio	7
the hold list	8
book clubs	9
whodunit	10
lifestyles	12

Cover art inspired by the jacket of **Speak, Okinawa**, designed by Janet Hansen and published by Knopf.

PRESIDENT & FOUNDER
Michael A. Zibart

VICE PRESIDENT &
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
Elizabeth Grace Herbert

CONTROLLER
Sharon Kozy

MARKETING MANAGER
Mary Claire Zibart

PUBLISHER &
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Trisha Ping

DEPUTY EDITOR
Cat Acree

ASSOCIATE EDITORS
Stephanie Appell
Christy Lynch
Savanna Walker

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Katherine Klockenkemper

BRAND & PRODUCTION
DESIGNER
Meagan Vanderhill

CHILDREN'S BOOKS
Allison Hammond

CONTRIBUTOR
Roger Bishop

EDITORIAL POLICY

BookPage is a selection guide for new books. Our editors select for review the best books published in a variety of categories. BookPage is editorially independent; only books we highly recommend are featured. Stars are assigned by BookPage editors to indicate titles that are exceptionally executed in their genre or category.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

BookPage offers bulk subscriptions for public libraries and bookstores to distribute to their patrons. Single-copy subscriptions for individuals are also available. For more information or to subscribe, go to subscriptions.bookpage.com.

Digital subscriptions are available through Kindle, Nook and Flipster.

ADVERTISING

For print or digital advertising inquiries, email elizabeth@bookpage.com.

All material © 2021 ProMotion, inc.

LET THE SUNSHINE IN

Acclaimed romance author Talia Hibbert closes out her Brown Sisters trilogy with *Act Your Age, Eve Brown*.



© ED CHAPPELL UK

Talia Hibbert has a finely tuned sense of how to balance social observation and swoon. With *Act Your Age, Eve Brown* (Avon, \$15.99, 9780062941275), she outdoes herself with a hilarious slow-burn romance between Eve, a chaotic ray of sunshine, and orderly grump Jacob, both of whom are on the autism spectrum.

The Brown sisters come from a close-knit family and have a lot in common: All three are attractive, witty and smart. What distinguishes Eve from her sisters? What was different about writing from her perspective?

Chloe and Dani Brown are successful, professional women. Their insecurities are mainly social—can they have richer lives, can they deal with romance? They never doubt their ability to take the world by storm in other ways.

Eve, unlike her sisters, did poorly at school, and it's always made her feel like a failure. Her talents don't lie in traditionally respected areas, so she feels silly and useless. She questions her worth in every way possible. Of course, she'd never admit that, not even to herself. Her sisters are grumpy and cynical, but Eve keeps things light—because she's the baby of the family, and because she doesn't see herself as a "proper adult." I had to balance her determinedly upbeat attitude with her inner monsters, and that's a very vulnerable thing to write.

Can you tell us a bit about Eve's love interest, Jacob? What draws Eve to him, and why will readers love him?

Jacob is used to being rejected for his differences. He knows people will read him as cold or alien no matter what he does or how he feels, so he's learned to reject them first. And possibly my favorite thing about him: He refuses to soften. He's proud. That's an important shield for someone moving through a world that devalues them—but it bites him in the butt when he meets someone who's willing to see him as he really is.

He's also very bitchy and sarcastic as hell, so his perspective was hilarious to

write. He's the kind of man who will judge you for your choice in curtains but not for your mental health, and I think readers will enjoy that. For her part, Eve reluctantly appreciates his humor. Even when they clash, she likes his rigidity because it's true to who he is. So she kind of admires him against her will.

There's an interesting duality between Eve's confidence and her awareness that the world doesn't value her as she does herself. As a fat, dark-skinned Black woman, Eve doesn't fit society's preconceptions about beauty and was pigeonholed in villainous or comedic side-character roles when she attended a performing arts school. Why did you choose to confront these issues more directly than you have in other books?

The Brown sisters have a really loving, supportive family, so they've been raised in this microenvironment of absolute acceptance. (Also, they have a lot of money, which helps.) But obviously, they also live in the real world, so they're very aware of all the ways they're marginalized. Chloe and Dani find it relatively easy to ignore because, whenever they're hurting, they can remember that loving world they have back home. It's like a thin layer of insulation that makes all the difference. But Eve doesn't have the same experience of home that they do. She knows her family loves her, but she also knows that she confuses and exasperates and sometimes disappoints them. Her insulation has holes.

On top of that, her life goals were, at one point, built around an industry that's very image-conscious. When I was a kid, I was involved in performing arts, and they will tell you to your face, "You're too fat for this, you're too ugly for that." So Eve's hyperaware of how she's perceived in a way her sisters aren't. It makes sense that she'd think and talk about those issues more directly.

You've been open about the fact that, like Eve and Jacob, you are on the autism spectrum, but you're representing different variations and aspects of autism with these two characters. Did you prepare in any special way to write this book?

"Warm and funny and hot, that's my goal."

Alongside my own experience of ASD, most of my friends are autistic or they have ADHD. (I personally believe there's a lot of overlap.) And then there's the fact that my mother is a teacher who specializes in behavioral needs. So when I was preparing to write this book and I was mentally building these characters, I sat down and wrote everything I already knew about being autistic and about the ways autistic people are treated. Then I tried to ask myself questions that kind of . . . exposed the things I didn't know, the things I'd never had to think about.

After that, I spoke with my friends about the characters. It was great getting insight from other people, because I knew I wanted my main characters to be different from each other—or rather, to experience autism differently. And once the book was done, I worked with a sensitivity reader, too. Because like I said, autism is different for everyone, and I'd written characters who weren't necessarily like me, so I wanted to make sure I wasn't being a dick about it.

How do the books you want to read differ from the books you want to write? Or is there no difference for you?

It's 50-50. I do try to write the kinds of books I love to read. Warm and funny and hot, that's my goal, so I feel inspired when I read authors like Danielle Allen or Mia Sosa. But I also enjoy super complicated stories with very high stakes. I love mysteries like the ones K.J. Charles weaves into her books, or adventures like the ones in a lot of Beverly Jenkins' novels.

Get a Life, Chloe Brown was many readers' first introduction to your writing, but you have a whole body of work you self-published. How does this work compare to the Brown Sisters trilogy, and where do you recommend readers start who want to dive into your backlist?

The Brown Sisters series was the first time I consciously set out to write a rom-com, so I suppose the main difference is that my other books aren't as hooky or light. There's still a ton of banter and sarcasm, but the stories don't have those classic rom-com tropes. They do, however, have tons of classic romance tropes, like friends-to-lovers or only-one-bed. They also have a lot of mental health representation, a lot of family dynamics and a lot of sex. For readers who like more domestic, cozy stories, I would recommend starting with the Ravenswood series. For readers who like a bit more angst, try *Work for It*.

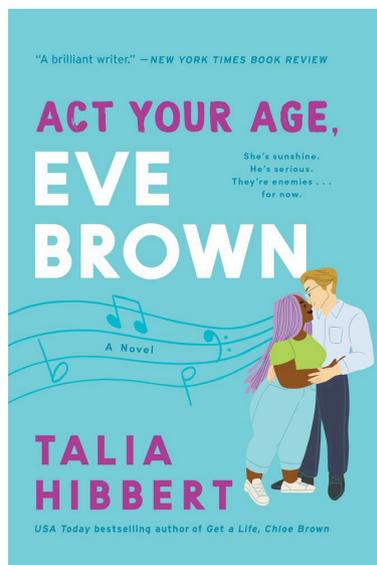
Eve and Jacob are the embodiment of chaos and order. What brings Eve and Jacob together, and what makes them work?

Jacob is uncompromising because he's very high-strung. His thoughts won't slow down. He notices everything. He physically cannot stop caring. Eve, on the other hand, knows how to be flexible, how to relax, how to forgive. That makes her someone Jacob can learn from, and at the same time, she learns how to stand up for herself by watching him refuse to bend.

But beneath those differences, they're actually quite similar. They're both respectful and sensitive where it matters; they'll piss each other off, but they won't cross certain lines. They both try really hard at everything they do. They both know the value of a home and a family, even if they learned those values in very different ways.

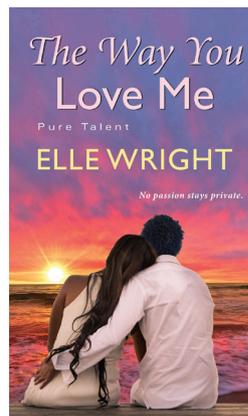
Most of all, they fascinate each other. Eve could never be as subtly cutting as Jacob. Jacob doesn't know how Eve can bear to be so bold. Neither of them can look away.

—Carole V. Bell



★ Hero Wanted

A broken engagement leads to an unexpected love affair in **Hero Wanted** (Zebra, \$8.99, 9781420151954) by Betina Krahn. In Victorian England, Lauren Alcott ends her betrothal to Rafe Townsend when he hesitates to rescue two women from drowning. Lauren saves them herself and decides she's seen her affianced's true colors. But their fathers, who hoped to merge their companies via this marriage, exhort them to try again, and they agree to more outings. From there, Lauren and Rafe truly get to know each other as they stumble into danger and find themselves teaming up to survive. This heated kisses-only story is fast-paced and delightful fun, grounded in authentic historical detail as Rafe learns to throw off society's rules and applaud Lauren's impulsive, daring nature.



The Way You Love Me

Readers get a behind-the-scenes glimpse of a glamorous life in **The Way You Love Me** (Dafina, \$8.99, 9781496725813), the third installment of the Pure Talent series by Elle Wright. Actress Paige Mills treasures her reputation as Black America's sweetheart, but it's been tarnished by an ugly divorce. Also tarnished is her relationship with her long-time talent agent, Andrew Weathers, who seems to have backed away when she needs him most. But then he tracks her down at her family's lake house, hoping to reestablish trust—and maybe something more. Between the paparazzi, the tabloids and the interference of family and friends, Paige and Andrew wonder if taking their relationship to the next level is worth it. Fans of contemporary romance will certainly think so, thanks to the smokin' love scenes and the pair's tender care for one another. Wright's smooth, modern voice is suited to this sophisticated story, making her larger-than-life characters feel like real people.



The Heiress Hunt

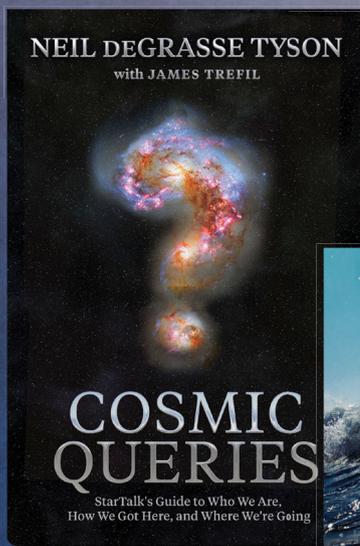
A dynamic heroine stars in **The Heiress Hunt** (Avon, \$7.99, 9780063045040) by Joanna Shupe. Though Gilded Age heiress Maddie Webster wants to marry—and has an English duke on the brink of proposing—she's just as committed to becoming a top U.S. tennis player. But then an old friend enters the picture. Harrison Archer claims he needs help finding an heiress to wed, and Maddie volunteers to host festivities to aid in his pursuit. What Maddie doesn't know is that Harrison wants her as his bride—and he has another ulterior agenda as well. Shupe takes readers into the world of wealthy New Yorkers in the late 19th century: tennis, picnics and parties among people who judge a woman by the prestige of the match she makes. This is the first in a series about four rebellious sons of society families, but Maddie still holds her own. Readers won't forget her or the lushly detailed love scenes between these two deserving characters.



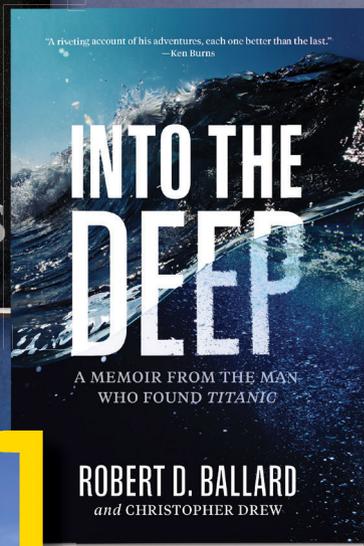
Visit BookPage.com to read an extended version of this Q&A and our starred review of *Act Your Age, Eve Brown*.

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

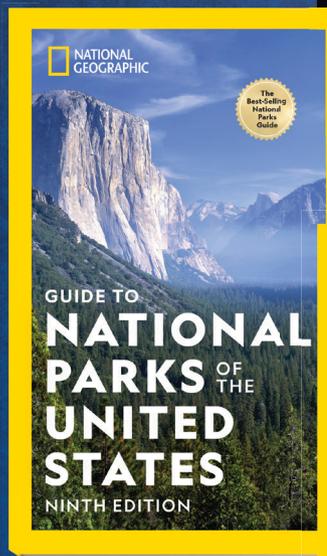
NEW THIS SPRING!



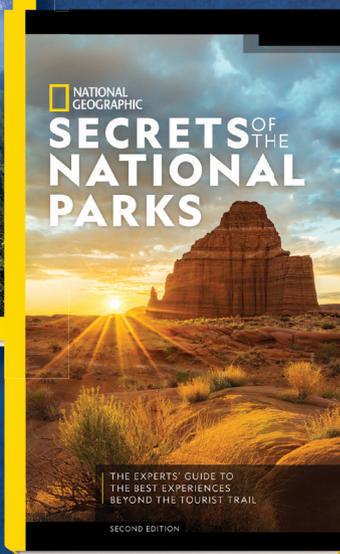
978-1-4262-2177-4 HC
978-1-4262-2178-1 Ebook



978-1-4262-2099-9 HC
978-1-4262-2100-2 Ebook



978-1-4262-2166-8 PB



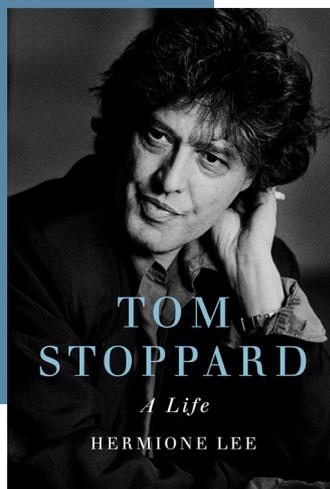
978-1-4262-2085-2 PB

AVAILABLE WHEREVER BOOKS ARE SOLD

 NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC

 NatGeoBooks
 @NatGeoBooks

well read by robert weibezahl



Tom Stoppard

Tom Stoppard is one of the greatest English-language playwrights of the last half-century. He's known for such canonical plays as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, *The Real Thing* and *Arcadia*, and he also won an Oscar for his *Shakespeare in Love* screenplay. Stoppard is now 83 and still creating (his play *Leopoldstadt* was the hottest ticket in London before theaters were shut down by the COVID-19 pandemic), so an authoritative biography of this celebrated writer may seem a bit premature. But the highly accomplished biographer Hermione Lee, at

Stoppard's behest, has produced just that. **Tom Stoppard: A Life** (Knopf, \$37.50, 9780451493224) is a capacious and exhaustive book that attempts to infiltrate his art while chronicling his life's journey—and what a journey it has been.

Stoppard, viewed as quintessentially English and unquestionably one of the most brilliant manipulators of the English language, was not born British. Before he was 2, his family fled the Nazis from what is now the Czech Republic. First settling in Singapore, where his father was killed in a Japanese air attack, the family then sought refuge in India, where young Tom began his education in "Englishness."

This authorized biography of one of the world's great playwrights sheds new light on his brilliant work and charmed life.

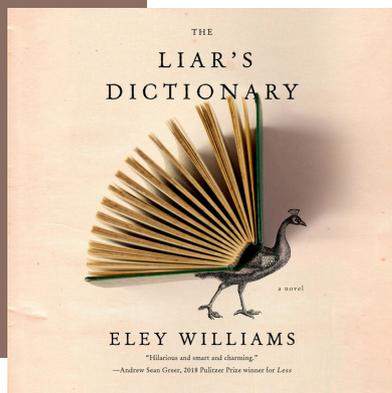
After World War II ended, the future playwright bypassed university and started a hard-knock climb in the field of journalism. Hanging with the local theater crowd in provincial Bristol, England—including an up-and-coming actor named Peter O'Toole—Stoppard found his true home. As the swinging '60s unfurled, Stoppard launched his theatrical career through a singular talent for infusing esoteric ideas and experimental concepts into plays with commercial viability.

Lee, who conducted more than 100 interviews and enjoyed unrestricted access to her subject, painstakingly details Stoppard's personal life—his troubled first marriage, his personal and working friendships, his relationships with his mother and children. By her account, Stoppard is generally congenial and well liked, so there is little in the way of scandal or fraught behind-the-scenes show business drama in these pages. Stoppard himself admits to having a charmed life.

The most absorbing parts of Stoppard's story involve his rediscovery of his Jewish roots and the ways he has indirectly mined his own family's experiences in his work—not to produce autobiographical plays but rather to explore the political turmoil and tragedy of the 20th century. Stoppard has often been accused of being an overly clever or cerebral playwright who avoids the personal and the emotional in his work. But in her careful assessment of his opus, Lee makes a solid case for the true depth, as well as the surface brilliance, of Stoppard's enduring plays.

Mike Nichols, another émigré genius of the theatre, called Stoppard "the most expressive playwright of our time . . . the only writer I know who is completely happy." **Tom Stoppard: A Life** affirms that appraisal.

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.

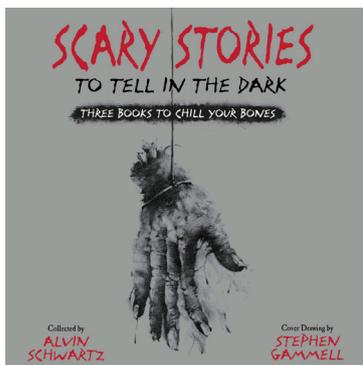


The Liar's Dictionary

Eley Williams' debut novel, **The Liar's Dictionary** (Random House Audio, 8 hours), is a word lover's dream. The story jumps between two British lexicographers' storylines. Over a century ago, Peter Winceworth (narrated by Jon Glover) fakes a lisp, bemoans his employment at dictionary publisher Swansby's and falls in love with

a co-worker's fiancée. In modern-day London, Mallory (portrayed by Kristin Atherton) is an intern who's updating Swansby's dictionary entries for digitization. She's also been tasked with routing out the dictionary's false entries, known as mountweazels. Neither Glover nor Atherton is weighed down by the prose's unusual, rare and sometimes made-up words; rather, their delight in the wordplay is infectious.

—Anna Zeitlin

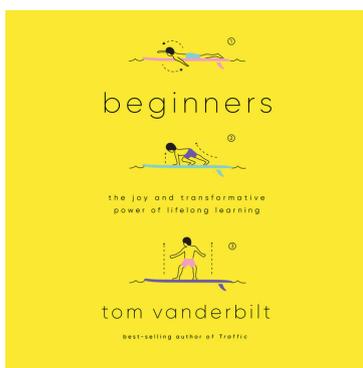


Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark

Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark: Three Books to Chill Your Bones (HarperAudio, 4 hours) combines all three of Alvin Schwartz's iconic story collections (*Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark*, *More Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* and *Scary Stories 3*), mixing European folk legends with mysteries, "jump" tales and ghost stories. Each of the volumes is read by a comedy or

horror actor: Patton Oswalt, Melissa McBride and Alex Brightman. The production is clean and pared down, with no extra sound effects—and we don't need them, as these stories are still creepy after all these years. All three actors follow Mark Twain's suggestion for telling scary stories—to speak slowly and in a low voice to draw listeners in—though the actors' accents and screams add to the entertainment.

—Mari Carlson



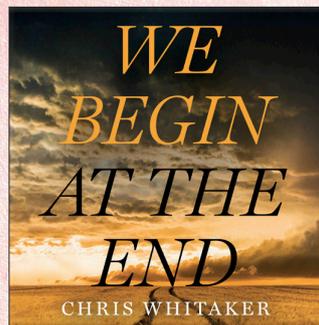
Beginners

Acquiring a new skill is often daunting, and as an adult it can be downright embarrassing to struggle with an unfamiliar process. In **Beginners: The Joy and Transformative Power of Lifelong Learning** (Random House Audio, 7.5 hours), author and narrator Tom Vanderbilt invites us to work through our fears and embrace the joy of learning something new. As Vanderbilt chronicles his own experiences of studying

how to sing, surf, draw, weld and juggle, he encourages listeners to embrace a "beginner's mind" that facilitates lifelong learning. He's also subtly radical in his unabashed rejection of futurism. There may be instructional videos galore on YouTube, he argues, but it's still better to learn with a class and a teacher. Throughout, Vanderbilt maintains an upbeat and optimistic tone, like an encouraging friend.

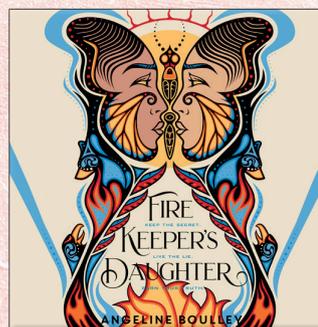
—Jill Ratzan

★ A New Audiobook ★ FOR EVERY MOOD



READ BY GEORGE NEWBERN

"If, like me, you love stories that kidnap your intended schedule... then I wholeheartedly recommend Chris Whitaker's *We Begin at the End*."
—Wally Lamb, *New York Times* bestselling author of *I Know This Much Is True*

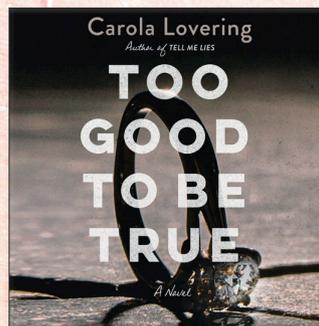
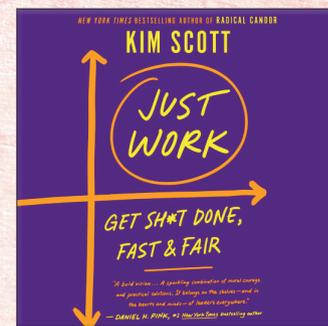


READ BY ISABELLA STAR LABLANC

"This is one bold, uncompromising, and elegantly crafted debut."
—Courtney Summers, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Sadie*

READ BY GABRA ZACKMAN

From the author of the bestseller *Radical Candor*, a blueprint for how we can recognize and eliminate workplace injustice.

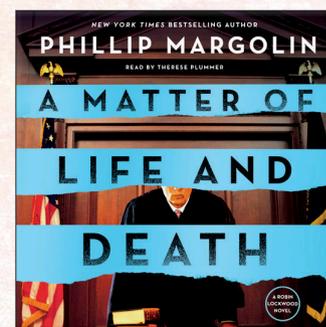


READ BY ANDI ARNDT, AMY MCFADDEN, & STEPHEN DEXTER

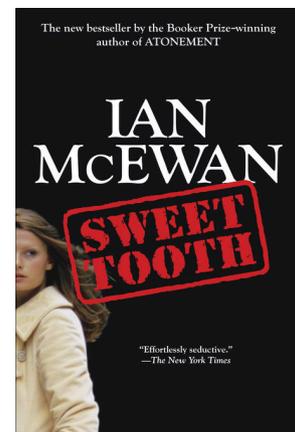
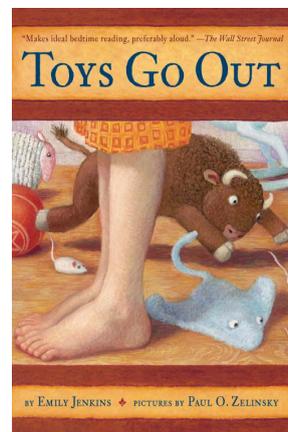
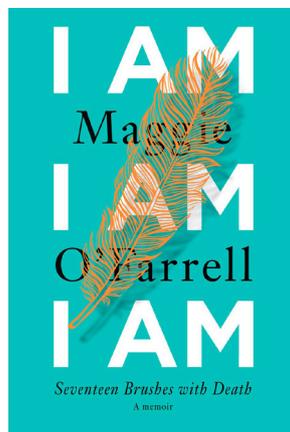
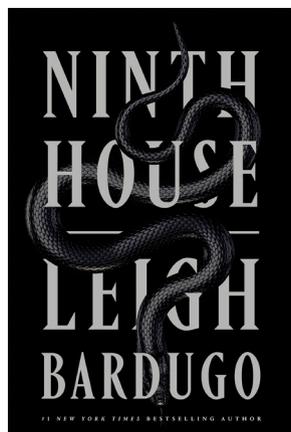
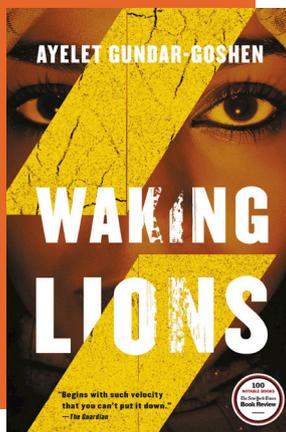
An obsessive, addictive love story from the beloved author of *Tell Me Lies*.

READ BY THERESE PLUMMER

The master of the courtroom thriller returns with a classic mind-bending puzzle.



AVAILABLE FROM  MACMILLAN AUDIO



Books served with a twist

Life is full of surprises, but for avid readers, a genuinely unexpected twist is rare. After a while, the startling becomes predictable, the out-of-left-field ho-hum. We recommend these books for readers who are in desperate need of a shock—and these aren't spoilers, because there's no way you'll see them coming.

Waking Lions

I'm not much for "gotchas." Often when a book takes a long time to reveal its twist, I feel a little let down—either with myself for not seeing it coming, or with the author for trying to trick me. But when a story *starts* with a twist—or in the case of **Waking Lions**, two twists—I'm on the hook, as every page after such a destabilizing opening could shake things up even more. Israeli author Ayelet Gundar-Goshen's novel opens with the accidental death of an Eritrean immigrant, run over by an Israeli neurosurgeon's SUV during an after-hours joyride in the desert. The next day, the dead man's wife arrives at the doctor's doorstep, having found his wallet beside the body, and blackmails him into tending the wounds of Eritrean refugees in a hidden desert location. The twists roll on and on in this provocative blend of thriller and social novel, its velocity never dropping, its controlled tension mirroring the ups and downs of a heart monitor.

—Cat, Deputy Editor

Ninth House

Being BookPage's mystery and suspense editor is a blessing and a curse. I can spot a disappointing ending a mile away, but I've also developed an unfortunately strong sense of pattern recognition. Why, hello there, superfluous character who is frequently mentioned and tangentially involved in the plot. J'accuse! All this to say, I thought I had Leigh Bardugo figured out. I thought **Ninth House**, a wintry fantasy-mystery set among Yale's secret societies, would be one of those books where I correctly guess the killer but enjoy regardless. After all, Bardugo's heroine, Alex Stern, is appealingly no-nonsense, and the book overflows with all the dark academia vibes my heart could desire. But as it turned out, Bardugo is smarter than I am. She planned for readers like me, and I fell for it hook, line and sinker. The rapt, breathless joy I felt upon realizing what her real game had been all along was one of my favorite reading experiences of last year.

—Savanna, Associate Editor

I Am, I Am, I Am

Nonfiction books don't usually have twist endings—at least not in the conventional sense. When I finished Maggie O'Farrell's memoir **I Am, I Am, I Am**, however, I reacted as I might have to a particularly startling mystery—gripping the page, mind reeling, trying to grasp the unexpectedness of its conclusion. The book is composed of 17 snapshots from the author's life of all the times she's had brushes with death: meeting a murderer on a trail in the woods, a childhood illness, a speeding car that clipped her side, dysentery, three near-drownings, the perils of childbirth and more. These encounters ebb and flow over the course of the book as mortality approaches and recedes again in the rearview mirror. By the penultimate chapter, O'Farrell's relationship with death reaches a crescendo, and I thought to myself, *How could a close call get any closer?* But keep reading. As it turns out, death has been just out of frame the whole time.

—Christy, Associate Editor

Toys Go Out

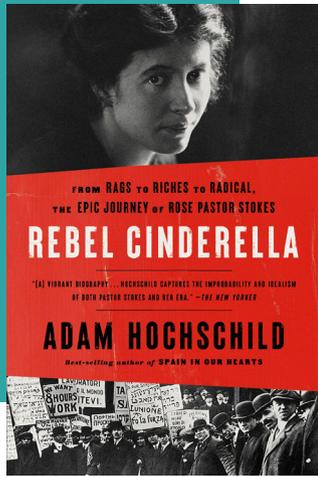
The subtitle of Emily Jenkins' unbelievably charming collection of stories about a little girl's toys is "Being the Adventures of a Knowledgeable Stingray, a Toughy Little Buffalo, and Someone Called Plastic." Plastic takes center stage in the story "The Serious Problem of Plastic-ness," in which she is dismayed by a book left lying open on the girl's bedroom floor. Plastic is unable to find herself among the animals depicted in the book. Her distress increases when she reads in the dictionary that plastics are "artificial," which "doesn't sound nice at all." Only after a long talk with TukTuk the yellow bath towel (who has seen "a lot of strange behavior in her life as a towel") does Plastic realize her identity. Jenkins and illustrator Paul O. Zelinsky have marvelously concealed crucial details about Plastic before this point, so the revelation of Plastic's true form feels like a delightful surprise for both Plastic and the reader.

—Stephanie, Associate Editor

Sweet Tooth

Any reader of *Atonement* knows that British writer Ian McEwan is not afraid of a story-shaking ending. For admirers of that book, or any novel that sticks a difficult landing, his 2012 novel, **Sweet Tooth**, is a treat. In the early 1970s, fresh out of Cambridge, Serena Frome is recruited for the British secret service. An indiscriminate speed-reader who believes "novels without female characters were a lifeless desert," Serena is assigned to recruit writers for a cultural propaganda campaign. This rather low-stakes spy game (which unfolds against an equally mundane, grounded portrayal of 1970s Britain, with its energy and labor crises) rolls out as planned—until Serena falls for one of the novelists. If you think you know where this is going, well, you're not exactly wrong. But McEwan leverages the fungible line between fact and fiction and the power of stories, steering us toward a surprise ending that casts in a different light all that came before.

—Trisha, Publisher



Foremothers and firebrands

Adam Hochschild's spirited biography **Rebel Cinderella: From Rags to Riches to Radical, the Epic Journey of Rose Pastor Stokes** (Mariner, \$17.99, 9780358522461) chronicles the life of Rose Pastor Stokes (1879–1933), a Russian refugee of Jewish descent who married millionairess James Graham Phelps Stokes. The two became members of the Socialist Party and mixed with figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois and anarchist Emma Goldman. Hochschild's enthralling narrative shines a light on

Pastor Stokes' work as a champion of the working class and of the feminist cause. Pick this one if your group is ready for a dynamic discussion of

Celebrate Women's History Month with terrific nonfiction titles spotlighting female pioneers and groundbreakers.

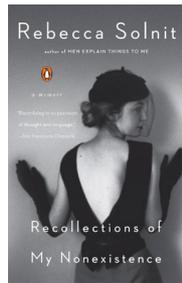
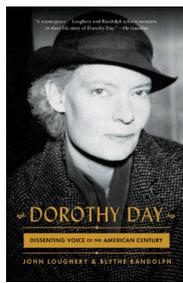
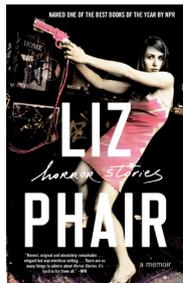
social justice, women's rights and the often overlooked history of American activism during the early 20th century.

In **Horror Stories** (Random House, \$18, 9780525512004), musician Liz Phair—perhaps best known for her 1993 release *Exile in Guyville*—looks back at some painfully formative moments in her life. She writes with vibrancy and honesty about being unfaithful to her first husband, getting into a street brawl in Shanghai and giving birth to her son after 32 hours of labor. She's refreshingly upfront about her own personal shortcomings, but she's also compassionate about them, allowing her to connect with readers who've experienced their own missteps. Book groups will appreciate Phair's skills as a memoirist and find rich topics for conversation, including the female experience in the music industry and riot grrrl-era feminism.

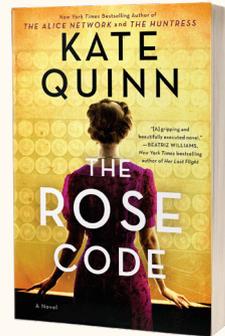
Dorothy Day: Dissenting Voice of the American Century (Simon & Schuster, \$18, 9781982103507) by John Loughery and Blythe Randolph provides an in-depth look at a legendary lady. Dorothy Day (1897–1980) was a noted journalist, pacifist and advocate for labor and women's rights. A Brooklyn native, she was also part of the Greenwich Village scene that included poet Hart Crane and playwright Eugene O'Neill.

This lively biography documents her personal and political evolution in wonderful detail. Brimming with history and discussion topics related to religion and progressivism, it's an inspired choice for Women's History Month.

In her brave, probing memoir **Recollections of My Nonexistence** (Penguin, \$16, 9780593083345), essayist and activist Rebecca Solnit recounts her coming-of-age as a writer. Solnit settled in San Francisco as a teenager during the 1980s. While in grad school, she entered the writing world—an arena dominated by men—and worked to overcome gender barriers and find her place as an artist. Solnit's astute observations of the literary life and the San Francisco art scene make for fascinating reading, and her evolving sense of her own identity and empowerment will prompt lively conversation among readers.



BOOK CLUB READS FOR WINTER



THE ROSE CODE

by Kate Quinn

"The hidden history of Bletchley Park has been waiting for a master storyteller to bring it to life... gripping and beautifully executed."

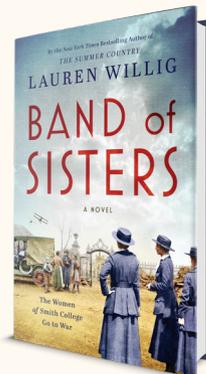
—BEATRIZ WILLIAMS, *New York Times* bestselling author

THE KINDEST LIE

by Nancy Johnson

"A deep dive into how we define family, what it means to be a mother, and what it means to grow up Black. A beautifully crafted debut."

—JODI PICOULT, *New York Times* bestselling author



BAND OF SISTERS

by Lauren Willig

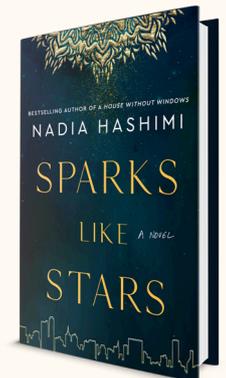
"A crackling portrayal of everyday American heroines...A triumph."

—FIONA DAVIS, *New York Times* bestselling author

SPARKS LIKE STARS

by Nadia Hashimi

The bestselling author of *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* returns with the bold and illuminating story of home— of America and Afghanistan, tragedy and survival, reinvention and remembrance.



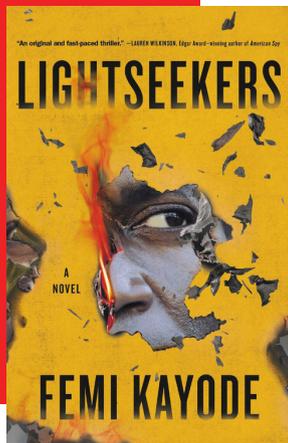
@Morrow_PB

@bookclubgirl

William Morrow

BookClubGirl

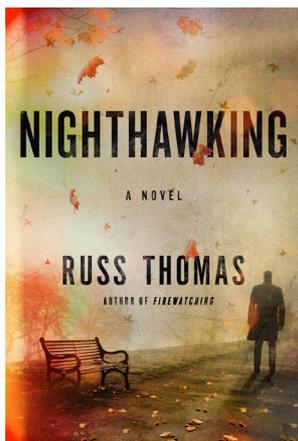
A BookPage reviewer since 2003, Julie Hale recommends the best paperback books to spark discussion in your reading group.



Lightseekers

Many Nigerian-set suspense novels have riffed on the money scams perpetrated on gullible retirees abroad. Not so for Femi Kayode's thriller **Lightseekers** (Mulholland, \$28, 9780316536615), which centers the religious and class violence of Africa's wealthiest country. Investigative psychologist Dr. Philip Taiwo, who has recently returned to his homeland after a stint in the United States, is hired to find out who murdered three university students, one of whom was the son of a prominent local businessman, in the remote border town of Port Harcourt. The assignment is a bit out of his wheelhouse, as he is much more comfortable theorizing about crime than taking part in a hands-on investigation. Plus, arrests have been made, and there is evidence galore, so Philip doesn't see what he can add to the investigation. That said, he is under a certain amount of pressure from the wealthy victim's family, and there is a paycheck involved, so he unenthusiastically signs on. He is aided in his efforts by some unlikely sidekicks: a driver who is much savvier than

one might expect, a vampishly beautiful attorney who causes Philip to question his marital vows and a harried police chief. The milieu is drawn especially well, which is unsurprising given that Kayode trained as a clinical psychologist in Nigeria. Steam-bath humidity, sizzling yams, road dust in every breath, danger lurking around every corner—welcome to Kayode's Nigeria.

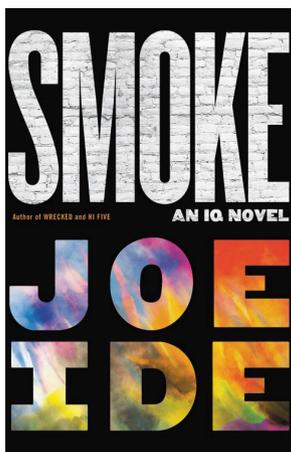


Nighthawking

The title of Russ Thomas' latest mystery, **Nighthawking** (Putnam, \$27, 9780525542056), refers to a practice not dissimilar to grave-robbing—clandestine late-night metal detecting and potential plundering at archaeological sites, cemeteries or other locations of historical interest. One particular nighthawker got a bit more than he bargained for this time around: A foray into the Sheffield Botanical Garden in search of buried treasure instead turned up the body of a young woman, a stabbing victim, her eyes covered with a pair of coins from ancient Rome. It falls to Detective Sergeant Adam Tyler and his protégé, Detective Constable Mina Rabbani, to investigate. The case gains international implications when it is discovered that the victim was a botany student from a prominent Chinese family, and that her life in the U.K. was not what it seemed to be. Tyler and Rabbani are an interesting pair. He is gay, she is Muslim, both are relative outsiders with respect to the insular world of Yorkshire policing, and both routinely suffer the slings and arrows of innuendo.

Nighthawking is their second adventure together, after last year's *Firewatching* (also a terrific read), and I hope there will be many more to come.

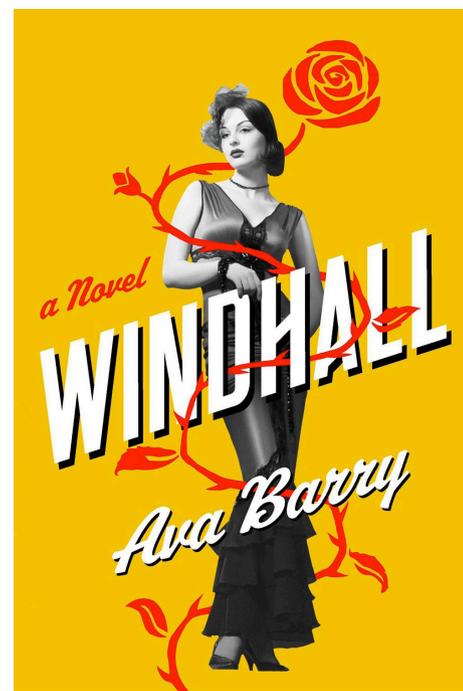
Sign up for our mystery newsletter at BookPage.com/enews.



Smoke

Smoke (Mulholland, \$28, 9780316531061), Joe Ide's latest mystery featuring quixotic brainiac and unlicensed detective Isaiah Quintabe, finds our hero far afield from his Long Beach, California, home. He has disappeared into the unfamiliar wilds of the Golden State's mountainous north, on the lam from more than one person who would like to see him dead. At other points in his career, he probably would have stayed to duke it out with the bad guys, but he has fallen in love and doesn't want to risk putting his sweetheart in harm's way. Isaiah's once-sidekick, Juanell Dodson, assumes a larger role in **Smoke** than in earlier novels as he tries to leave his dangerous former career behind in a bid to save his marriage. Dodson holds down the SoCal part of the narrative as the street hustler reluctantly morphs into an ad agency account exec, while Isaiah becomes embroiled in the more perilous pursuit of a serial killer, drawn into the case by a none-too-stable escapee from a psychiatric hospital. Isaiah is something of a sucker for a person in need who presents him with a good story,

and this story is perhaps the most intriguing he has come across to date.



★ Windhall

Windhall (Pegasus, \$25.95, 9781643136264) by Ava Barry spins the tale of a modern-day copycat murder that echoes the high-profile slaying of a Hollywood movie star in 1948. The star in question, Eleanor Hayes, was found badly disfigured and quite dead in the garden of Windhall, the estate of film director Theo Langley, after a party that would have been regarded as legendary even if it hadn't featured such a macabre coda. Initially, Theo looked pretty good for the murder—Eleanor had stopped showing up to work on his latest movie and seemed terrified of something—but as the investigation wore on, the so-called evidence became less compelling, and finally the charges were dropped. Theo disappeared from view for decades. Although from time to time there were reported sightings from far afield, there was never much in the way of corroboration, and his story took its rightful place in Hollywood lore, one of the great unsolved mysteries of the golden age. The present-day murder piques the interest of investigative journalist Max Hailey, who is somewhat obsessed with Windhall and its closely guarded secrets. For years he has suspected that Theo was guilty, and when it turns out that the director has mysteriously returned to Windhall just in time for the new murder, it all seems a bit too preposterous to be simple coincidence. **Windhall** is Barry's first novel, and it is one heck of a debut. She nails her protagonist's first-person voice and vividly channels the Hollywood vernacular and vibe both past and present.

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.

Out of the shadows and into the spotlight

A perennial scene-stealer in Harlan Coben's Myron Bolitar series finally stars in a book of his very own.

There's a line in Harlan Coben's new novel, **Win**, that's sure to evoke anticipatory delight in the hearts of thriller readers: "We always knew this day would come."

That sentence's stark simplicity and resigned tone perfectly convey a truth at the heart of Coben's body of work, which consists of 33 novels and counting. The author says it best during a call to his New Jersey home: "The past is never quite buried. You may try to bury it, you may throw a lot of dirt over it . . . but it will claw its way back out."

And claw it does, whether in Coben's 18 stand-alone novels or the Myron Bolitar series, in which Win—short for Windsor Horne Lockwood III—has served as a mysterious, witty, violence-prone sidekick to the affable Myron, a sports agent with a sideline in off-the-books criminal investigation, since the 1990s.

Coben has fans worldwide: He's got 75 million books in print in 45 languages, a critically acclaimed French film adaptation of his 2001 book, *Tell No One*, and still more projects in the works (including a sequel to 2020's *The Boy From the Woods*). He's also won the Edgar Award, Shamus Award and Anthony Award.

Through it all, there was one thing he didn't want to do: write a book about Win. "People have been asking me about it for a long time, but I've been resisting it," he says. "I usually come up with an idea and then ask myself who will tell the story." Often the answer was Myron or a range of other characters. And then: "I had an idea involving an art heist and a hermit in a fancy Upper West Side apartment, and I thought, 'That's Win's world. I wonder if he could tell the story.'"

In the novel, a Vermeer painting, stolen from Win's family decades earlier, has been found at the homicide scene of a man Win had never met, along with a suitcase monogrammed with Win's initials. The victim, a wealthy hoarder, seems to be connected to the years-ago kidnapping of Win's cousin Patricia, which itself is tied to domestic terrorists who are still on the run after

committing a deadly crime in the 1970s. The police and FBI are looking askance at Win, to say the least.

Although it feels right that Win's day has come, writing his star turn was not without its challenges for Coben. For one thing, "My leads, like Myron Bolitar, David Beck in *Tell No One* or Grace Lawson in *Just One Look*, are usually fairly nice people. Win is a bit darker. He's more of an antihero."

Win is exceptionally handsome and exceedingly wealthy, with an insouciant attitude toward laws, feelings, authority, etc. While he's devoted to his longtime friend Myron and feels affection for his own father, Win is also quite comfortable with vigilantism, consequences be damned. "I confess I'm not good about considering long-term repercussions," Win wryly confides.

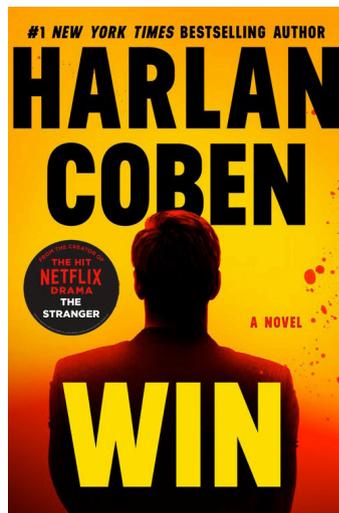
What Win is good at is understanding his tremendous advantages. "He would be insufferable if he didn't get that," says Coben. "And that's also sort of fun for me, because a lot of people in that world don't get it."

To wit, while Win is on the hunt for the painting's thief, he muses, "There is an odd psychology amongst those who inherit great wealth, because deep down inside, they realize that they did nothing to earn it, that it really was just a matter of luck, and yet how can it be that they are not special? . . . It haunts us. It makes us compensate. It poisons."

When asked if he likes Win, Coben pauses and then laughs. "Who cares? I find him great company. He's a guy I'd love to sit with at a bar and listen to, which is always what your hero should be. . . . Sometimes nice guys are boring to hang out with. Win's never boring."

And neither is Win's story. As it plumbs the character's complicated origins, it offers insight into what's behind his obsession with martial arts training and his transactional approach to sex. There are also urgent visits to Lockwood Manor in Pennsylvania, where his father and Patricia begrudgingly

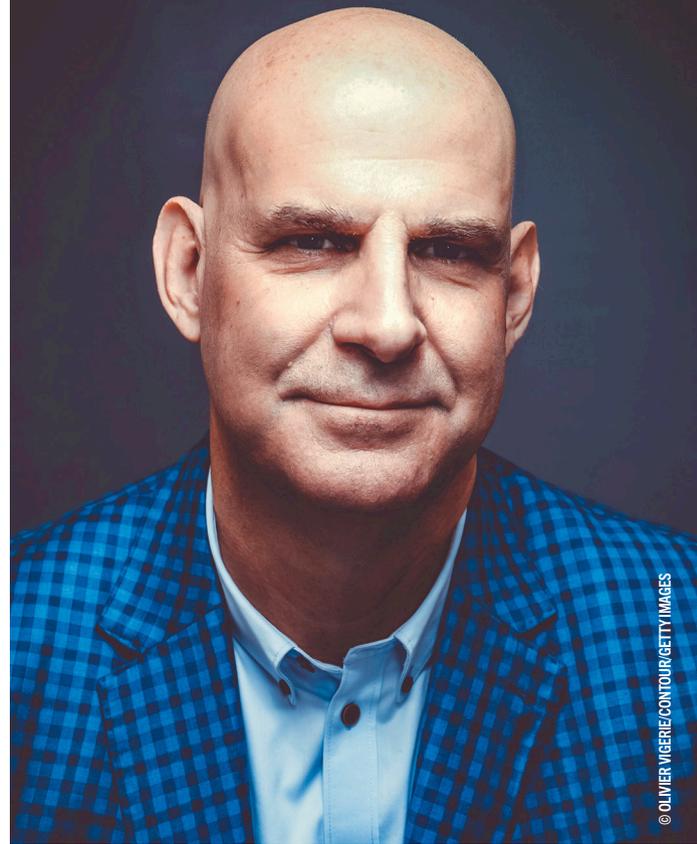
"Sometimes nice guys are boring to hang out with. Win's never boring."



Win

Grand Central, \$29
9781538748213

Suspense



© OLIVIER VIGIERE/CONTOUR/GETTY IMAGES

reveal some family secrets and decline to address others.

And yes, **Win** includes Coben's trademark nerve-wracking action scenes as well. Coben does research the tactical nature of brawls, he explains, but "most of the time it's just my imagination. I'll put myself in that position . . . and figure out what is the best move. How would I get out of it?"

As Win races to unravel the case, Coben reveals layers of deception among family members, criminals who will do anything to avoid capture and perhaps even Win's own psyche. His attractiveness and wealth gain him leverage and access but cannot protect him from harsh truths and hard decisions. It's an intriguing exercise in "What would I do?" This, Coben says, "is the main joy of Win. You may not agree with his decisions, they may not be ethical or legal, but you get it."

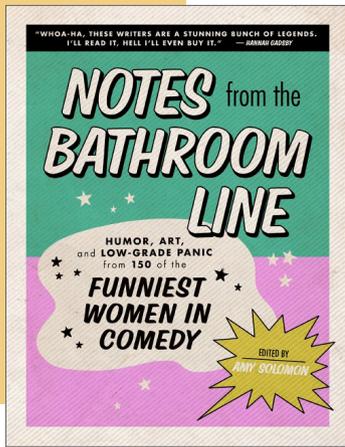
That, too, is an important element of the appeal of Coben's work: the moral conundrums, the fights that are vicious but sometimes kinda fun, the shocking twists and surprising dispatches from long ago. "I've always wanted to be the guy whose book you took on vacation," Coben says, "but you don't want to leave your hotel room because you have to know what's going to happen next."

This has become something of a mission, a calling even, for Coben. "I've been very, very lucky, and I take that very seriously. I work as hard as I've ever worked on every project, because if you're going to walk into a bookstore and there's a zillion books for you to buy and you're choosing mine, that's a heck of a responsibility."

—Linda M. Castellitto



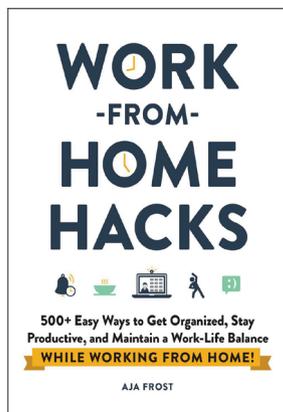
Visit BookPage.com to read our starred review of *Win*.



★ Notes From the Bathroom Line

The beautiful thing about some books is their time-capsule quality, how they perfectly preserve a cultural moment between two covers. Amy Solomon has created just such a book with **Notes From the Bathroom Line** (Harper Design, \$29.99, 9780062973641), an eclectic mix of writing, art and “low-grade panic,” to quote the subtitle, from a large and rowdy cast of very funny women who are here to entertain you on the subjects of: Goop vaginal eggs,

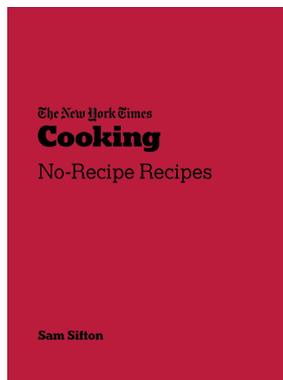
missent text mortification, lies told to get out of things, dads’ girlfriends, advice not taken, instructions for the cat sitter, groveling and . . . well, a lot more. Comics and art nudge up against short essays and, maybe my favorite content category, collections of short answers to prompts such as “Slang That You Made Up That Will Never Catch On But It Should.” A consistent theme across it all: the ways in which we all squirm and sweat within our minds. I feel seen.



Work-From-Home Hacks

As a seasoned WFH-er, I’ll be the first to admit my habits aren’t always high performing or sustainable. If that sounds familiar, a weekly visit with Aja Frost’s **Work-From-Home Hacks** (Adams, \$15.99, 9781507215593) can set you on a smarter course, whether you’ve been couch (slouch) typing for years or are still configuring your (bedroom) corner office. The book is sectioned into more than 500 bite-size, numbered nuggets. While some will no doubt be familiar, these tips—from ergonomics to what to wear, from battling distraction to unlocking the holy grail of work-life balance—constitute a treasure

trove for anyone riding the WFH wave. But the lasting value of this book is its broad usefulness no matter where you clock in. After all, email hygiene, scheduling boundaries and regular exercise are proven hacks for any work habitat.



The New York Times Cooking No-Recipe Recipes

So, the title is clever but not quite accurate, at least to my mind. What Sam Sifton dishes up in **The New York Times Cooking No-Recipe Recipes** (Ten Speed, \$28, 9781984858474) are flexible recipes in a nonchalant narrative format with no numeric measurements. (Nope, not a one.) The improvisational approach will prove quite pleasing if you, like my husband, have little use for the specificity of most recipes and enough kitchen acumen to feel comfortable with glugs and splashes and dashes. And I love

reading these recipes almost as much as I love eating the finished products. For kaya toast and eggs, you “add a healthy shake of white pepper” to the eggs and then “get to ’em with the toast.” Of split pea soup: “When you’re done eating you’ll be bowing like Hugh Jackman at curtain call.”

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

Help yourself to more peace of mind

Overcome fear, set boundaries and take control of your life with these wise and witty books.

The self-help genre has a long history of providing advice to readers seeking change, guidance and empowerment. These two highly anticipated books, while wildly different, are positive, entertaining additions to the bunch.

In **Professional Troublemaker: The Fear-Fighter Manual** (Penguin Life, \$26, 9781984881908), bestselling author Luvvie Ajayi Jones uses her trademark humor and insight to show readers how to break down—and break through—the fears that hold them back from their professional and personal goals. Her principles are explained in three sections: Be, Say and Do.

In the Be section, Jones emphasizes how important it is to first know who you are and what you want. As you determine these things, remember that being audacious and dreaming big aren’t just for other people; they’re for you, too. In the Say section, Jones explores how speaking up and setting boundaries are steps worth taking toward fighting your fears. Finally, in Do, she explains that there is no progress without action.

Throughout the book, Jones provides helpful examples of fear-fighting from her own life, such as the time she almost turned down the opportunity to give a TED Talk because she was scared of failure. She also provides useful exercises like writing a mission statement and listing your values and goals. Readers will connect with her funny personal stories and flair for language, which make reading this book feel like talking to an old friend.

Nedra Glover Tawwab, a therapist with a hugely popular Instagram

account, debuts with **Set Boundaries, Find Peace: A Guide to Reclaiming Yourself** (TarcherPerigee, \$26, 9780593192092). Her book aims to address frequently asked questions from people who may not even know they have boundary issues, since they’re often disguised as other problems such as time mismanagement, anxiety and burnout. Once someone

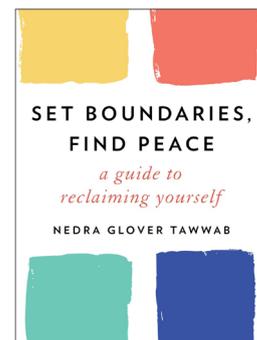
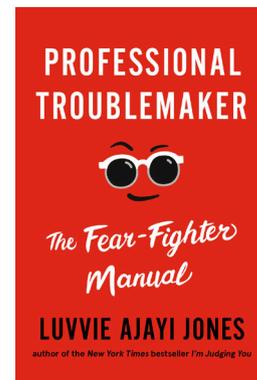
understands boundaries better, Tawwab explains, they can begin to improve their relationships through open communication.

The book establishes six types of boundaries—physical, sexual, intellectual, emotional, material and time—and gives examples of how these issues might play out in real-life scenarios. Although **Set Boundaries, Find Peace** is written with authority, Tawwab’s voice is friendly and sincere as she presents her ideas in a clear, no-nonsense fashion. For example, when explaining time boundaries, she gives a brief description of the issue; follows it up with examples of time bound-

ary violations, such as overcommitting or accepting favor requests from people who won’t reciprocate; then tells the reader what time boundaries might sound like (“I won’t be able to make it to your event on Tuesday”) and ends with an exercise to reinforce the information.

Tawwab, who specializes in relationships, excels at presenting complicated ideas in an accessible, nonjudgmental manner, helping the reader feel at ease and understood. Anyone looking to regain control over their time, energy and needs will appreciate her book’s wisdom and practical advice.

—Sarojini Seupersad





Women on the rise

This month, we honor the contributions of women who have gone before, but we also celebrate the work that women are creating now. These female authors are going places, and we can't wait to follow them.

Dawnie Walton, author of *The Final Revival of Opal & Nev*

37 Ink, March 30

Walton splits the difference between Taylor Jenkins Reid and James McBride with her debut novel, an oral history about a 1970s rock 'n' roll duo. With stints at *Essence*, *Entertainment Weekly* and Getty Images on her resumé, as well as a handful of fellowships and an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where her thesis adviser was Ayana Mathis, Walton's going to be big, no question.

Lauren Hough, author of *Leaving Isn't the Hardest Thing*

Vintage, April 13

Before her HuffPost essay "I Was a Cable Guy. I Saw the Worst of America." went viral in 2019, Hough was an Air Force airman, a bouncer, a member of a cult and many other things. In April, she'll add another identity to her roster—author—with a debut book that combines all of her fragmented lives into one impossible-to-ignore volume.

Michelle Zauner, author of *Crying in H Mart*

Knopf, April 20

Fans of the band Japanese Breakfast know Zauner, its frontwoman, for her frank and tender lyrics. In 2018, Zauner revealed herself to be a skilled prose writer, too, when *The New Yorker* published an essay about Zauner's relationship to her Korean heritage following her mother's death. Zauner's debut memoir, which expands on this premise, will showcase her talents to an even wider audience, and we can promise that this is excellent news.

Elissa Washuta, author of *White Magic*

Tin House, April 27

As the author of two previous memoirs and co-

editor of *Shapes of Native Nonfiction*, a critically acclaimed anthology of contemporary Native essayists, Washuta has already made a name for herself as a cultural critic and artist. Her third book, **White Magic**, about rediscovering the power and magic of Indigenous spiritual traditions, confirms this reputation. It's unlike any other book out there and will certainly launch Washuta's meteoric rise.

Lilly Dancyger, author of *Negative Space*

Santa Fe Writer's Project, May 1

A contributing editor and creative writing instructor at Catapult, the editor of the 2019 anthology *Burn It Down* and a prolific essayist, Dancyger has been a fixture within the narrative nonfiction scene for years. With **Negative Space**, chosen by Carmen Maria Machado as a winner of the 2019 Santa Fe Writer's Project Literary Awards, Dancyger will burst onto the scene as a memoirist for the first time, no doubt to a resounding round of applause.

Claire Fuller, author of *Unsettled Ground*

Tin House, May 18

Sometimes it's the slowest growers that have the strongest roots. A former sculptor who began writing at the age of 40, Fuller's been quietly cultivating a devoted following through three previous psychologically sharp novels. Her fourth novel is the tale of two 50-something twins in contemporary rural England whose lives spiral after their mother dies. It's dark, no doubt—but if you're a reader who lives for contemplative storytelling and perfectly wrought characters, this author is for you.

Kristen Arnett, author of *With Teeth*

Riverhead, June 1

If you love a bit of irreverence with your heartbreak, now is the time to join our fan club for academic librarian and writer Arnett, whose bestselling debut

novel, *Mostly Dead Things*, swooped in with its uniquely dark comedy to explore grief with tenderness and courage. Queer family dynamics are at the heart of Arnett's follow-up, and the buzz is building.

Ashley C. Ford, author of *Somebody's Daughter*

Flatiron, June 1

Y'all know Ashley C. Ford? If not, you're about to. She's already been on *Forbes'* 30 under 30 list, *Brooklyn Magazine's* Brooklyn 100 list and *Time Out New York's* New Yorkers of the Year list—and that was all before she'd even published a book. Once Ford's debut memoir about reconnecting with her incarcerated father enters the world at last, her list of accolades—not to mention her fanbase—is sure to grow.

Tasha Suri, author of *The Jasmine Throne*

Orbit, June 8

Suri's beautifully written, absorbing debut, *Empire of Sand*, won rave reviews, and its Mughal India-inspired setting gratified fans hungry for non-Eurocentric fantasy. This summer Suri will start a new trilogy with **The Jasmine Throne**, in which a captive princess and a maidservant who is secretly a powerful priestess team up to take down a dictator.

Honorée Fanonne Jeffers, author of *The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois*

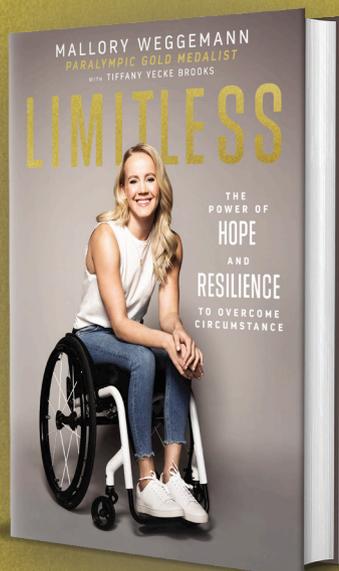
Harper, July 27

History and poetry met at the table of Jeffers' *The Age of Phillis*, where, after 15 years of research, the writer played host to the story of Phillis Wheatley, America's first published Black female poet. Jeffers, who has five poetry collections to her name, is turning to prose in perhaps the most exciting poet-becomes-novelist shift of the year, with a family saga that stretches from the Colonial slave trade to contemporary times.

Love and redemption

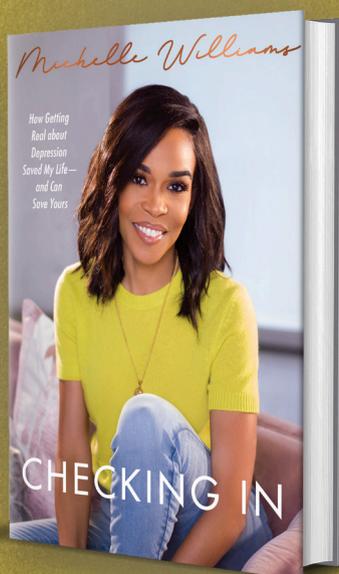
From Ireland to Texas, these endearing novels explore Christian faith amid both romantic and familial love.

GREAT
READS
FOR A
RESILIENT
SPIRIT!



MALLORY WEGGEMANN

ISBN: 9781400223466 • \$26.99



MICHELLE WILLIAMS

ISBN: 9781400223336 • \$26.99

 NELSON BOOKS

Three heroines weather tremendously difficult circumstances, uncovering and navigating unsettling details about their families' histories with admirable grace.

In Jennifer Deibel's debut novel, **A Dance in Donegal** (Revell, \$15.99, 9780800738419), Moira Doherty travels from Boston to Donegal, Ireland, fulfilling her late mother's dream that her daughter would return to their breathtaking homeland. Moira endures the strenuous journey and arrives in the village of Ballymann, where the villagers' reception is mixed. Donegal is a charming place, but despite Moira's excitement, some of the villagers' disconcerting remarks send her in search of the truth about her mother. In the process, a romance blossoms between Moira and a handsome, honorable thatcher who defends her against the villagers' prejudice and hostility.

Deibel's descriptions of Ireland's landscape, enticing cuisine, sonorous language and vibrant culture converge to form a spectacular background for the story. A gentle thread of suspense builds throughout, beginning with a strange dream Moira has at the story's opening, which hints at her task in Donegal and her mother's looming secret. There's also a love triangle that keeps Moira on her toes.

As an outsider, Moira struggles to be accepted by the tightknit, superstitious Irish community, but she wins hearts through her powerful faith and her love for everyone she encounters. While unraveling her family's secret and becoming immersed in Irish culture, Moira discovers her roots and finds happiness.

As in **A Dance in Donegal**, the devastating details of a family's history form the foundation of Kelly Irvin's latest suspense novel, **Her Every Move** (Thomas Nelson, \$16.99, 9780785231905). When a climate change debate at a San Antonio

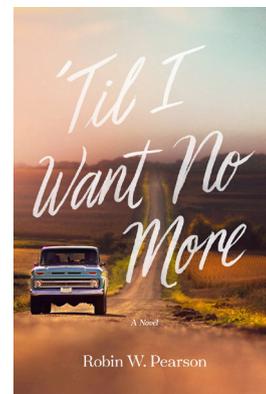
library becomes the target of a tragic bombing, the event's coordinator, Jackie Santoro, is identified as a key suspect.

Detective Avery Wick believes Jackie's motive was to avenge her father, who died by suicide before the commencement of his criminal trial, and whose death left his family with a deep-seated resentment toward the city's officials who leveraged the allegations against him. While detectives look into Jackie's past, the real attacker threatens to continue his trail of destruction if his group's demands are not met.

As these tense events unfold, Irvin dives deeper into Jackie's and Avery's complex personal lives, and as the pair gets to know each other, the professional boundaries between them become blurry. Though it includes a slow-burning romance and

gripping details of chaotic explosions, the novel is, at its core, a heart-warming exploration of faith and friendship.

The past also plays a critical role in Robin W. Pearson's encouraging, family-centric love story **'Til I Want No More** (Tyndale House, \$15.99,

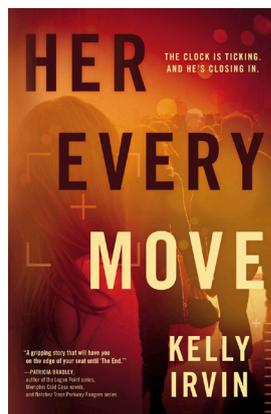
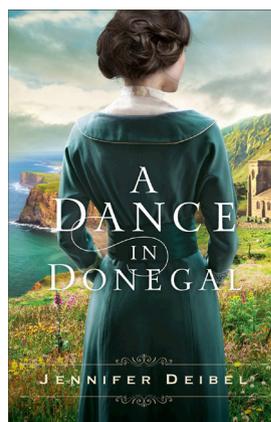


9781496441577). Theodore is kind and loving, the kind of man that columnist Maxine should settle down with. Even her mother approves of him. But Maxine fights to maintain control of her feelings amid her premarital counseling sessions with Theodore—and the return of her teenage love, JD, whose presence threatens to destroy her future with Theodore and expose secrets that she has concealed for a long time.

Emotional scenes reveal key events from Maxine's childhood and turbulent teenage years, when she felt unwanted. These early experiences contributed to her decision to settle down with Theodore before she'd properly dealt with her past, but grown-up Maxine sometimes still feels unworthy. The novel also includes Maxine's articles about her family life, upcoming wedding plans and relationship with Theodore, adding another layer of context to Maxine's life as the drama unfolds.

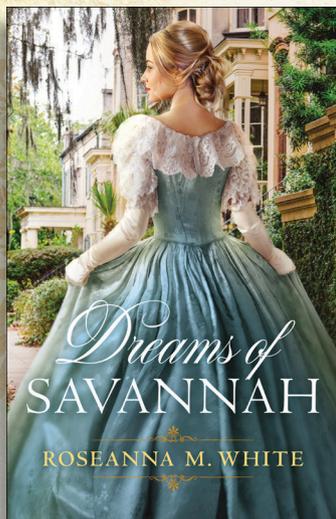
With help from her community, Maxine learns that by confronting her tangled past, she can face her future and discover her true self. Uplifting faith-based messages are included throughout, and the story's easy pace allows time to take in each lesson.

—Edith Kanyagia



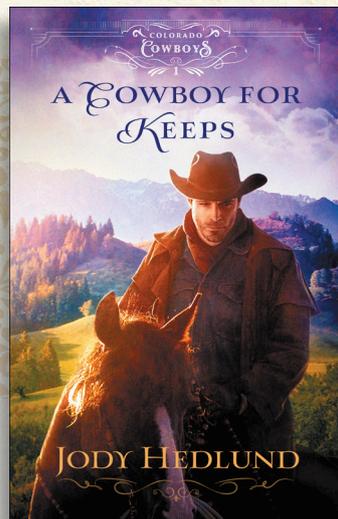
UNPUTDOWNABLE READS

BY ACCLAIMED AUTHORS



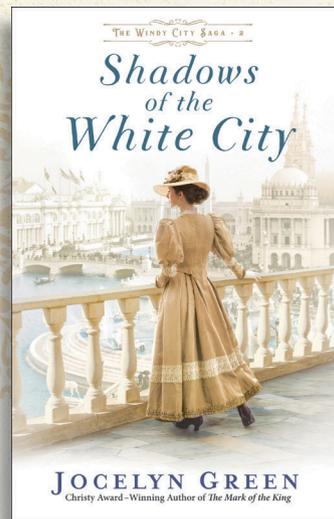
When the Civil War alters the life of two star-crossed lovers, they must decide where the dreams of a new America will take them—and if they will go there together.

Dreams of Savannah
by Roseanna M. White



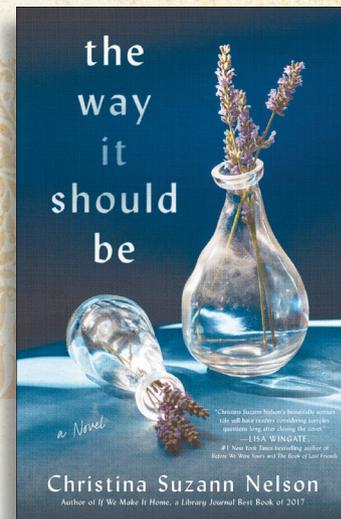
She's a mail-order bride without a husband. He's a bachelor in need of an investment on his ranch. And their mayor has the perfect solution in mind.

A Cowboy for Keeps by Jody Hedlund



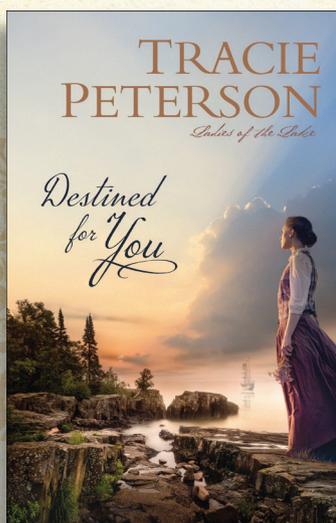
When a woman's Polish ward goes missing at the World's Fair and the unexpected happens, will she be able to accept the change that comes her way?

Shadows of the White City
by Jocelyn Green



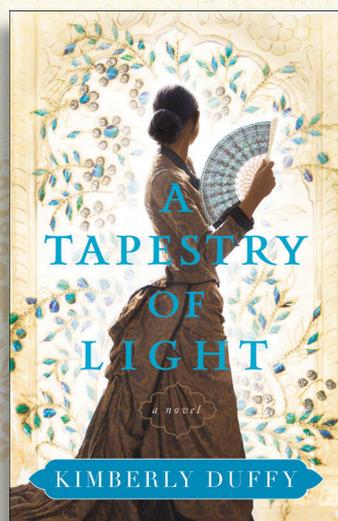
In the face of addiction, can three women redefine their expectations of how life should be to find the hope they—and those they love—so desperately need?

The Way It Should Be
by Christina Suzann Nelson



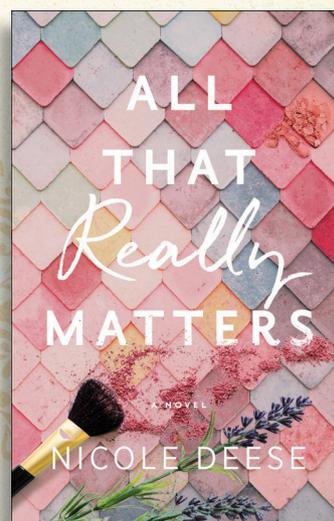
When tragedy at sea brings two people together, they soon find their lives inextricably linked.

If they survive what's ahead, could it be possible they've been destined for each other all along?
Destined for You by Tracie Peterson



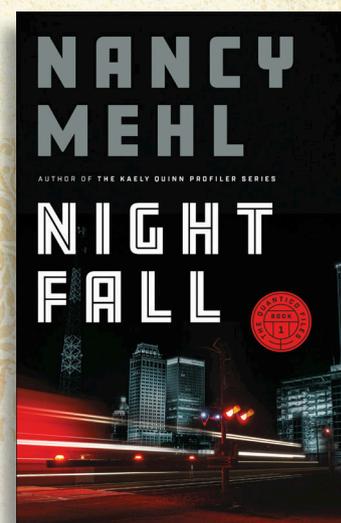
After news arrives that her brother must leave India for England to take his place as a nobleman, a young woman must find a way to stitch a place for herself in a cold, foreign land.

A Tapestry of Light by Kimberly Duffy



To secure a TV show, an influencer is determined to prove that she's good both online *and* in person. Challenged at every turn, she's left to wonder, has her perfect life been imperfectly built?

All That Really Matters by Nicole Deese



In a race against time, an FBI profiler must decide how far she will go—and what she is willing to risk—to put a stop to a serial killer.

Night Fall by Nancy Mehl

BETHANYHOUSE



On being conned (just a little)

Tori Telfer reflects on the fine line between herself and the con artists she profiles in her raucous romp, **Confident Women**.

I spent most of 2019 perched on a stool in a coffee shop, “writing.” I was supposed to be writing a book about con women—con women in the court of Marie Antoinette and con women in Olympic-mad Beijing and con women who came down from Canada to wreak havoc on the tender hearts of Cleveland’s finest businessmen. But there were times when I clutched my almond croissant like a woman possessed and just sat there, staring into space, consumed by one burning question: *Have I ever been conned?*

I had a mercenary reason for asking myself this question. I had been struggling with the introduction to my book, trying to cram every single thing there was to say about cons and women into a few punchy pages, and the resulting introduction read like a Google Drive document that was being edited by 10 people at once. I needed a better way in. I needed an anecdote—something to start the book off with a bang. And wouldn’t it be great, I thought, if the anecdote involved *me* being conned?

If I could just dredge up some suppressed memory about being cheated by a crook or swindled by a spiritualist, the introduction would practically write itself. Sure, I knew on an intellectual level that being conned was not something to wish for. The victims in my book were seriously damaged by their run-ins with con women—broke, despairing, ashamed,

traumatized. Some of them even ended up dead. But I couldn’t help trawling through my memories anyway, searching for con artists at every turn, asking myself, *Wait, was she a con artist? Was he?*

There was the roommate who lied to me about . . . well, everything. She told me, for example, that she’d been given the phone number of the lead singer from Dashboard Confessional while sunbathing on an abandoned beach.

There was the man who convinced me that he needed money for a tow truck to come and get his broken-down truck. He sat with me on the curb, chatting about his tattoos, as my boyfriend took \$40 out of an ATM behind us. We were entirely convinced that he was going to come back in the morning and repay us. He was even in costume as a construction worker. It was as though we had attended a piece of interactive theater, not a petty fleecing.

And then there was the time I chatted with a known con artist on Facebook Messenger. I had been researching her cons but ultimately decided not to include her in my book after our interaction. She told me that Roman Polanski wanted to make a movie about her life. I decided to leave her story up to him.

But none of these interactions felt compelling enough to make it into my book. Instead of the stuff of great introductions, they felt like the stuff of . . .

life. Who among us hasn’t been lied to on Facebook Messenger, or had trouble with a roommate, or given money to someone who may have been pulling the wool over our eyes? Instead, I found a fantastic article from the 1970s about a con artist named Barbara St. James who changed her hair color a lot and used her as my opening anecdote. But afterward I was left with all those small stories from my past—those microswindles, if you will—wondering what to do with them.

As much as the microswindles irritated me, I had to admit that I was a bit of a microswindler myself. I have lied more times than I care to admit. (Ask me about the time I made up the story of my first kiss.) In living rooms and on Facebook Messenger and while sitting on plenty of curbs, I have pretended to be a little bit different than the person I truly am. It didn’t seem fair, then, to interpret the interactions I’d had with microswindlers as examples of Me Being Good (or at least naive) and Other People Being Bad. I started thinking of them less as moral and more as transactional. They were a sort of payment, I thought—payment for the privilege of trusting other people.

If I am going to trust most of the people I interact with, then yes, every now and then I will have to fork over \$40 for something shady or listen to an anecdote about Dashboard Confessional or Roman Polanski that probably isn’t true. And the payment isn’t entirely one-sided, either. I only

chatted with the con artist on Facebook Messenger because I was thinking about writing about her—thinking about absorbing her life story into my book, like some sort of soul-sucking spirit. And as far as my old roommate and my friend on the curb? I have used them as anecdotes in conversation again and again. I am using them now. The world of the microswindle is not as clear-cut as one might hope.

The macroswindles that made it into my book were more clear-cut. After opening my book with Barbara St. James, I lined up the rest of my chapters—the woman from Beijing, the woman from Versailles, the woman from Canada and all the rest—and the resulting cast of characters was big, fascinating, compelling. Their tales were twisted and bizarre and sometimes confusing, but there was often some clarifying moment: a trial, say, or a prison sentence. Their stories were special, for lack of a better word—special enough to be worthy of a book. But their stories were just *bigger*, not other. They were still on the same spectrum as the woman on Facebook, as the guy on the curb, as my old roommate, as me.

—Tori Telfer



Visit BookPage.com to read our review of **Confident Women** (Harper Perennial, \$16.99, 9780062956033).

Worldly women

Three riveting books honor soldiers, journalists and style icons from around the globe.

March is the perfect time to learn how women have shaped not just North America but every continent on earth. In unforgettable words and images, these books reveal the lives and contributions of women in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and beyond.

The Daughters of Kobani

The story of how young Kurdish women in Kobani, Syria, brought down terrorists from the Islamic State group has been waiting to be told. Yet when author and journalist Gayle Tzemach Lemmon was asked to tell their story, she hesitated. "It just doesn't make sense that the Middle East would be home to AK-47-wielding women driven with fervor and without apology or hesitation to make women's equality a reality," she writes in **The Daughters of Kobani: A Story of Rebellion, Courage, and Justice** (Penguin Press, \$27, 9780525560685). So she decided to go see for herself.

By 2016, civil war was tearing Syria apart, leaving room for ISIS, with help from allies such as Russia and Iran, to swagger in. On the front lines in Kobani were women like Azeema, trained as an expert sniper, and her childhood friend Rojda, whose mother still called her every day. Based on hours of on-the-ground reporting and countless interviews with Kurdish Women's Protection Units (YPJ) fighters, Lemmon delivers a vivid, street-by-bombed-out-street account of the final days of the battle for Kobani. Strewn throughout are reports of what the soldiers were up against: appalling ISIS acts like beheadings, torture and worse. The YPJ was outnumbered and underequipped, but they were fearless.

The battles for Kobani, and later Raqqa, were key moments in a history that is still being made, but those victories hold no guarantees. As Lemmon observes, it is "easier to kill a terrorist than to slay an ideology." Still, no matter the final outcome, the women who fought this war have shown the world what courage and justice look like. And if the next generation must keep fighting, these warriors have shown them how.

—Priscilla Kipp

★ You Don't Belong Here

Award-winning journalist Elizabeth Becker turns her insightful gaze on three women who covered the Vietnam War in **You Don't Belong Here** (PublicAffairs, \$28, 9781541768208). As she explores the significance of these women's legacies—New Zealand-born Australian journalist Kate Webb, Frances FitzGerald from America and Catherine Leroy of France—Becker notes that "it took us decades to understand what we had accomplished as women on the front line of war."

A few women (such as World War II reporter Martha Gellhorn, who stowed away on a hospital ship on D-Day) had done their best to report on wars in the past, but the United States military didn't make it easy for women

seeking to be war correspondents. Up until the war in Vietnam, women were forbidden on the battlefield. Even after that changed, news organizations still sent male journalists as a matter of course, with the result that most of the women covering the Vietnam War had to pay their own way and fight to stay.

Many of these barriers were eventually broken, thanks in part to the extraordinary women Becker profiles so adroitly here, combining their personal histories with the major events of the conflict. Leroy, a French photojournalist who died in 2006, was an experienced parachutist who used her skills to cover a parachute jump into combat and whose searing images appeared in *Life* magazine. Webb was one of the few journalists on the Navy command ship when the order to evacuate came, and she was able to file a report on April 30, 1975, the very day the war ended. FitzGerald later wrote a book about her experience on the ground, *Fire in the Lake*, which looked at the history of Vietnam and its people and won both the Pulitzer Prize and a National Book Award.

You Don't Belong Here is a significant contribution to the history of both the Vietnam War and women in journalism.

—Deborah Hopkinson

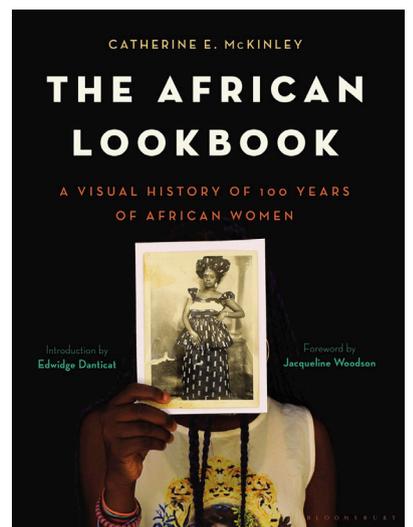
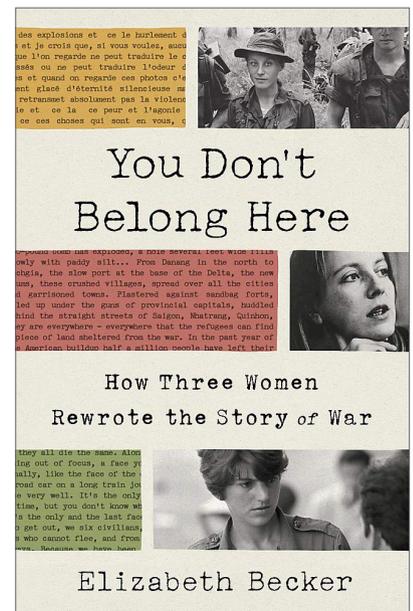
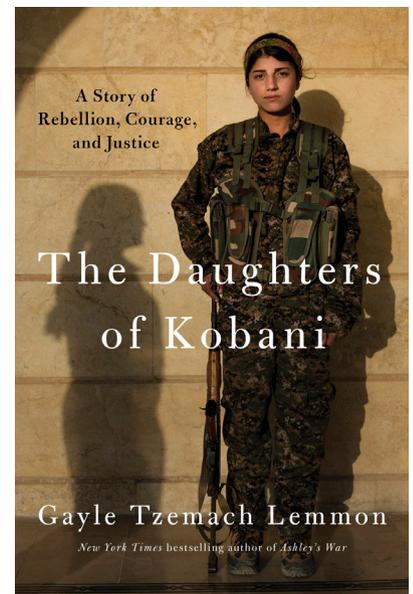
The African Lookbook

Any explanation of the photographs in **The African Lookbook** (Bloomsbury, \$30, 9781620403532), which presents just over 150 pictures of African women between the years 1870 and 1970, would be fictional, since so much about them is unknowable. Many subjects are anonymous and many images undated. Instead of an explanation, what author Catherine E. McKinley offers in this compelling, quixotic book is a testament—a bold declaration of the enduring strength, beauty and power of African women, many of whom gaze at the camera with evident self-possession.

From colonial-era photographs to studio portraits to postcolonial expressions of cosmopolitan poise, the collection offers a vibrant, inchoate and compelling snapshot of African women over time. McKinley accompanies the photographs with prose, occasionally explaining an item in the picture—for example, "She wears the silver chains of the Ga people." In response to other images, McKinley interprets the subjects' expressions, as when she describes the faces of three young women: "The girls have a look of expectation: an awareness that the world is large and made up of things they have the gumption for." In all cases, McKinley gets close to the pictures without forcing a narrative that oversteps what can be known.

Throughout **The African Lookbook**, McKinley puts African women at the center of their own stories, exploring their pictures with admiration and respect and inviting readers to look alongside her.

—Kelly Blewett



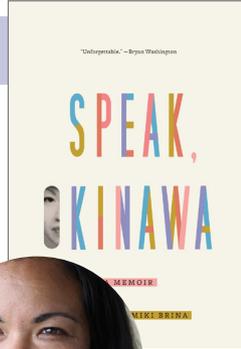
SPINNING LIFE

Six memoirists share their experiences of transforming

★ **Speak, Okinawa** by Elizabeth Miki Brina

Speak, Okinawa (Knopf, \$26.95, 9780525657347) largely centers on the different mental health crises experienced by Elizabeth Miki Brina's parents. Her father is scarred by PTSD from his service in Vietnam. Her mother has developed alcoholism after growing up in poverty in Okinawa, Japan, and then moving to America, a country that's racist against her. The question that Brina strives to answer throughout the book is whether love can heal either of them. In this way, **Speak, Okinawa** reads like a deeply personal apology from Brina to her mother.

—Jessica Wakeman



© THAD LEE

What do you love most about your book?

I love how my book aims to capture more than my life and my story—or rather, how my life and my story encompass so many other lives and stories, including my mother's story, my father's story and the history of the people of Okinawa.

What resistance did you face while writing this book?

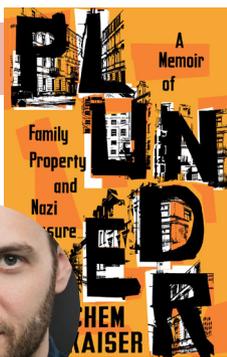
The resistance I faced was from myself: deciding what personal details to share or not share, what was mine or not mine to tell, and knowing that these decisions would affect the narrative as well as the reader's perception of the people being portrayed. That is a great deal of responsibility I didn't want to abuse.

Is there anything in your book that you're nervous for people to read?

I'm definitely nervous for my parents to read the book. I hope they forgive me.

Plunder by Menachem Kaiser

In 2010, Menachem Kaiser embarked on an effort he admits was "sentimental and unpragmatic"—to reclaim an apartment building owned by his family before World War II in the Polish city of Sosnowiec. But **Plunder** (HMH, \$27, 9781328508034) takes an unexpected turn when he discovers that his grandfather's cousin Abraham Kajzer was the author of a well-known memoir about his experiences in the Gross-Rosen network of concentration camps. These camps provided the forced labor for the Nazis' Project Riese, an underground complex that purportedly housed a trove of looted gold and other treasure. As Kaiser explores the story of his newly found relative, he journeys deep into the shadowy realm of Nazi treasure hunters.



© BEOWULF SHEEHAN

—Harvey Freedenberg

What kind of reader will most enjoy your book?

Anyone who has confronted or wanted to confront their family story, especially with respect to World War II. So many of us don't know what our parents or grandparents or great-grandparents went through in the war. It is hugely

rewarding to investigate, to step into your story. It is so much stranger, more complicated, more beautiful, more tragic than you thought.

How is your book better as a memoir than as a novel?

If I had written it as a novel, the narrative could have been neat, clean, linear, not plagued by false starts and misunderstandings. But that would have been the wrong move. The constraints of memoir—it has to be true, whether or not it makes sense, whether it helps or hinders the narrative—can be frustrating but also allow you to turn inward, to not have answers, to question your own motivations.

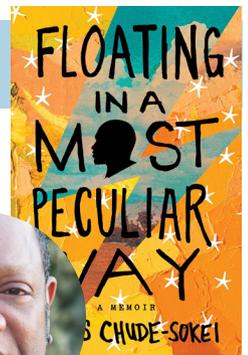
What is the most interesting thing you had to research for this book?

There are some very out-there conspiracy theories rampant among the treasure hunters, particularly with respect to Nazi technology that's been lost or covered up. I spent months researching Nazi UFOs, Nazi antigravity, Nazi time travel, Nazi space stations and on and on. Fascinating if occasionally horrifying stuff.

Floating in a Most Peculiar Way by Louis Chude-Sokei

Louis Chude-Sokei was born in Biafra on July 6, 1967—just past midnight on the day that war was declared between Biafra and the Federal Republic of Nigeria. His father was killed in the war. His mother moved to the U.S. and sent the fatherless boy away to Jamaica.

When Chude-Sokei's mother eventually brought him to the U.S., he learned what it takes to survive in an unfamiliar culture. Chude-Sokei felt like he had fallen from space, an alien creature in a Black neighborhood in Los Angeles that didn't accept his accent, his Blackness or his love of science fiction and David Bowie. **Floating in a Most Peculiar Way** (HMH, \$27, 9781328841582) cannily captures this tumbling free fall through cultures as Chude-Sokei negotiates what felt like "life on Mars."



© SHARONA JACOBS

—Henry L. Carrigan Jr.

What resistance did you face while writing this book?

One of the main difficulties I faced was the cultural and racial context. When I began sharing my story, readers seemed comfortable with a book that was either about African Americans or about Nigerians or about Jamaicans, but they were challenged by one that was about all of those groups—in one family and in one person. Writing in a way that was true to those tensions and disagreements was a great but necessary challenge.

Many people think memoirists write from memory instead of relying on research. What do you think?

Memoirs require research, and I can affirm that as a professional researcher and scholar. However, what is different here is that you do the research not to display it, as you do with academic writing, but to fill in context, texture, flavor. So even if it's not noticeable, the very moods, tones, worlds and conversations you produce in a memoir depend on the accuracy of that research.

How is your book better as a memoir than as a novel?

Easy: much less stuff to invent!

INTO LITERATURE

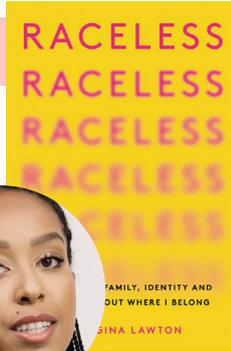
memory and truth, joy and pain, into captivating stories.

★ *Raceless* by Georgina Lawton

Georgina Lawton was born to a white mother and father and had a white brother. Yet, as we learn in the first pages of Lawton's eloquent memoir, *Raceless* (Harper Perennial, \$17.99, 9780063009486), Lawton is not white. Clinging to the myth of a "throwback gene" from survivors of the Spanish Armada on the west coast of Ireland, her parents fiercely insisted that their daughter, despite all appearances, was white. When Lawton discovered the lie at the heart of her identity, her shock and sense of betrayal were nearly enough to break her. Beautiful and moving, *Raceless* is an important book about the cost of deception and the value of identity.



© JAMIE SIMONDS



—Deborah Mason

What kind of reader will most enjoy your book?

Imperfect parents and children of imperfect parents. Anyone who suffers from anxiety or spiritual unease, particularly of the Jewish variety. Anyone who contemplates empathy and how to cultivate it.

What surprised you as you wrote?

I was surprised by the ways my preoccupations kept resurfacing in different ways. These essays explore a range of subjects, from preteen heartbreak to a ghost-writing gig for a Syrian refugee, but when I revisited the experiences years later, I saw them all through the lens of motherhood. It's a thread that binds *Spilt Milk*.

What is the most interesting thing you had to research for this book?

Curiously, I did the most research on topics I thought I already understood. I wound up in some dark research holes for "Boy in Blue," reading about everything from the slave patrol practices that inspired modern-day policing to the recent brain science that exempts juvenile offenders from being put to death. Much of this didn't make it onto the page, but it all informed the writing.

What do you love most about your book?

That I cover multiple themes and places, that it looks at identity in a way we don't see very often, that it's not boring! Examining DNA testing, Afro-futurism, Black hair and my own past took me on a journey of self-actualization while helping me understand my parents' choices, too.

How is your book better as a memoir than as a novel?

Raceless is a hybrid of memoir and analytical writing. If I had just written it as a novel, I wouldn't have been able to bring in other perspectives and studies. Situating my personal experiences within some sociological discourse added weight to my narrative.

What surprised you as you wrote?

No one prepares you for the emotional time travel that a memoir necessitates. Writing something traumatic from your past is hard enough, but constantly editing and reworking it means that internal wounds take longer to heal. I was surprised by how draining some of it was.

★ *Spilt Milk* by Courtney Zoffness

In "Boy in Blue," one of 10 essays in *Spilt Milk* (McSweeney's, \$22, 9781952119149), Courtney Zoffness recounts her family joining a protest in May 2020. They held signs proclaiming that Black Lives Matter and chanted their fury about police brutality. Her son Leo, then 6, was entranced by law enforcement, proclaiming, "You're unarrested" in a misunderstanding of what officers actually say. "We've yet to correct him," Zoffness writes. "In Leo's linguistic reality, freedom rules. Nobody suffers. Everyone is equal. Everyone is blameless."



© HANNA COHEN



Throughout *Spilt Milk*, Zoffness applies thoughtful analysis to these everyday situations. This is a generous, warm debut from an already prizewinning writer.

—Carla Jean Whitley

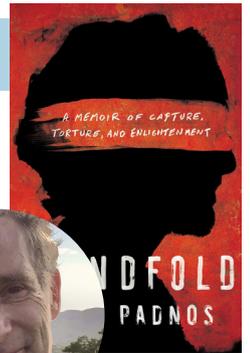
Blindfold by Theo Padnos

In 2012, Theo Padnos traveled to Turkey to report on the civil war in Syria. He met up with some young Syrians whom he hoped would help him, but Padnos soon discovered that these men were not journalists but operatives of al-Qaida. They kidnapped Padnos, taking him to the first of 13 prisons he would endure over two years in captivity.

Padnos' exquisitely painful accounts of his torture, and the tortures and deaths of his fellow inmates, in *Blindfold* (Scribner, \$27, 9781982120825) both horrify and provoke a strange hope that it can't get any worse. Even so, Padnos endows his captors with humanity, casting them as people struggling to survive in a world turned upside down, just as he is.



© KAREN DEMAS



—Henry L. Carrigan Jr.

What is one thing readers may have a hard time believing?

Possibly some people will have difficulty believing I wasn't killed.

What surprised you as you wrote?

So many things I didn't remember until I started writing about them. There's a point in this book when some kidnappers are playing in my hair with the muzzle of their gun. I recalled some details of this scene a few days after it occurred but didn't recover anything like a coherent memory of the event—didn't understand what it meant—until years later when I wrote about it.

How is your book better as a memoir than as a novel?

It's all true. If it were a novel, people might suppose that I piped in random details from my imagination. It's important that people understand I haven't made anything up because I am writing about a place—a Syrian Islamic state—in which so much of what happens defies belief.



Visit BookPage.com to read extended versions of these Q&As and full reviews of all six memoirs.

Pigeon pies and profiteroles, just like Granny used to make

Drama abounds in a fictional British baking contest during World War II from the author of *The Chilbury Ladies' Choir*.

Like many admirers of coziness and food, novelist Jennifer Ryan and her daughters share a passion for cooking shows like “The Great British Baking Show” and “Nailed It.” But such competitions are hardly new, the British author explains, speaking cheerily by phone from Ireland, where she is visiting family. Cooking contests were a popular way for the British government to boost homefront morale during World War II. Local contests in churches and town halls were “basically free entertainment” that could help people cope with food shortages.

A more high-stakes affair is the centerpiece of Ryan’s third novel, **The Kitchen Front**, in which four women from the village of Fenley compete to become the first female presenter on the BBC’s “The Kitchen Front,” an actual World War II radio program that focused on cooking with rations. And yes, recipes are included, ranging from a delectable French pastry creation with honey caramel sauce to a not-so-savory-sounding whale meat and mushroom pie. Ryan explains that a professional cook tested and tweaked each dish, some of which were adapted from Ministry of Food leaflets, such as sheep’s head roll. “I had to include that because, of course, no one’s going to cook it,” she says with a laugh. “But I was intrigued about how it’s put together.”

With her previous two novels, including the bestselling *The Chilbury Ladies' Choir*, Ryan has successfully carved out a prominent place in the saturated realm of World War II fiction. She likes this era because “it was a very empowering time for women.” Ryan began her career as a nonfiction book editor in London, then moved to the U.S. after meeting her husband, settling in the Washington, D.C., area. After becoming a mother, she experienced her own period of self-empowerment, enrolling in a part-time master’s program in writing at Johns Hopkins University, where she began writing *The Chilbury Ladies' Choir*. Her manuscript won a contest, and she quickly found an agent and sold the book. “Sometimes I feel like I still don’t believe it,” she says.

For **The Kitchen Front**, Ryan spent about a year researching and another year writing. “I interviewed quite a lot of old ladies in the U.K. about their war experiences,” she says, “and what absolutely astonishes me is how they look back on it with such a positive attitude.” After all, she says, civilian morale was crucial. “The government knew that this was going to be a long, hard-fought war. They weren’t

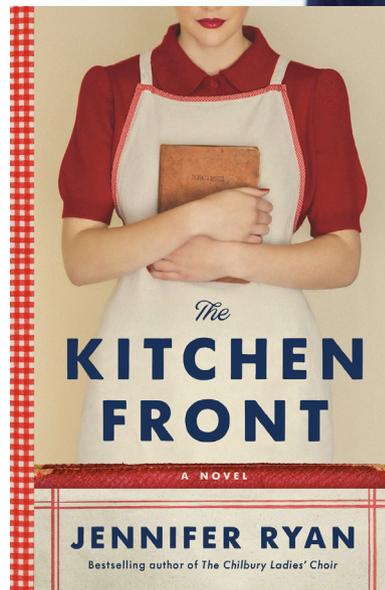
going to be able to keep men fighting on the front line if they kept having letters from their loved ones saying, ‘I’ve had enough here.’”

Alternating chapters focus on the different contestants in Ryan’s ensemble cast, which includes Audrey Landon, a widowed mother of three who fears she may lose the family farm, as well as her estranged sister, Lady Gwendoline Strickland, who lives a lonely but privileged life with her wealthy, abusive husband in a nearby manor. (Lady Gwendoline’s character is based on Marguerite Patten, whom many consider to be the first celebrity chef.) Nell Brown, Lady Gwendoline’s kitchen maid, is

“I wanted to bring that out in the book, this passing of recipes from one generation to another.”

such a timid soul that she seems an unlikely choice for a BBC host. And Zelda Dupont is a Cordon Bleu-trained professional who is trying to hide her pregnancy. Each of these four women is simply trying to “put a patch” on her problems by winning the contest. “By the end of the book,” Ryan says, “they’re reaching inside themselves to discover what it is they actually want.”

As was the case with *The Chilbury Ladies' Choir*, part of Ryan’s initial inspiration for **The Kitchen Front** sprang from her grandmother, whom she calls “the best cook ever.” Many of her grandmother’s funny stories involved her wartime experiences, and often food was involved. “Whale meat stories were her favorite,” Ryan says. One favored anecdote involved a friend who served a meat pie and joked with her guests in the middle of the meal that



The Kitchen Front
Ballantine, \$28, 9780593158807

Historical Fiction

it was made of pigeons she’d gotten in Trafalgar Square.

Among the book’s recipes are Ryan’s grandmother’s wild mushroom soup, coquilles St. Jacques, curried salt cod, Spam and game pie, Cornish pasties, summer pudding and choux pastry profiteroles—one of her grandmother’s “signature dishes.”

“She had a very different way of cooking from my mother, which I think spoke an awful lot of her Second World War experience with rations,” Ryan says. “I really wanted to bring that out in the book, this passing of recipes from one generation to another—that tradition and ritual around cooking these dishes and the love that you put into making and sharing them.”

Despite the fact that she writes about war, Ryan is the first to admit, “I like uplifting books. I don’t like unhappy endings. I know it’s very uncool of me.” She confesses that she’s become addicted to “Call the Midwife” but says she needs to wean herself off the TV series. The problem, she says, is that “quite often it’s about quite traumatic things. And if I watch it before going to bed, I don’t sleep very well. Maybe I’m too much of a sensitive soul.”

—Alice Cary



Visit BookPage.com to read our starred review of *The Kitchen Front*.

★ Klara and the Sun

By Kazuo Ishiguro

Speculative Fiction

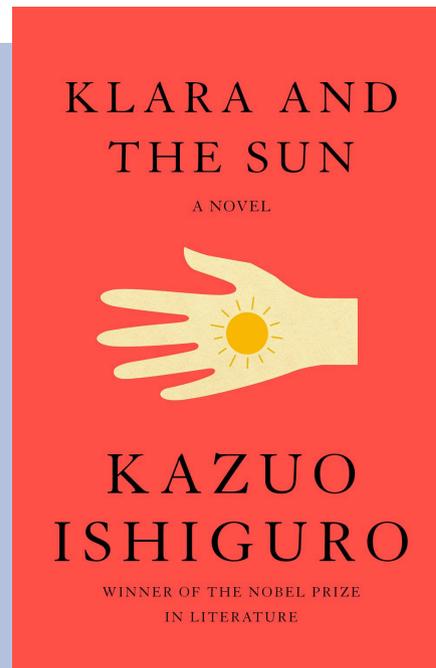
Anyone who has read Nobel laureate Kazuo Ishiguro's masterpieces knows that, in his works, little is as it first appears. Situations are not quite as his unreliable narrators believe. First-person protagonists speak in formal prose that sounds not quite right. And his later works are wonderfully unclassifiable—not quite detective fiction or dystopian sagas but borrowing from these forms while veering into original terrain.

He continues his genre-twisting ways with **Klara and the Sun** (Knopf, \$28, 9780593318171), a return to the dystopian tenor of *Never Let Me Go* that, like that work, explores whether science could—or should—manipulate the future.

Klara is an AF, an Artificial Friend available for purchase. Like Stevens the butler in *The Remains of the Day*, she speaks in quirky locutions such as

"I was able to bring several speculations together." She and other AFs are on display in a store, where the prime real estate is the front window. The advantages of that position include access to the Sun, from which AFs derive "nourishment."

A teenager named Josie, suffering from an unspecified illness, insists that her Mother purchase Klara. What follows is the story of Josie's home life and Klara's role in the family's affairs. Among them are the Mother's trauma from the death of another daughter, a young man sweet on Josie and, most provocatively, the issue

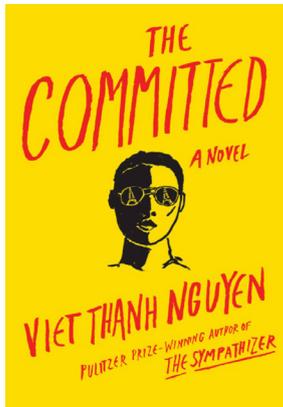


of whether science can correct injustices wrought by illness or one's station in life. Ishiguro is an expert at slowly doling out information to build tension. The wonder of this book is that he incorporates many elements, from environmental damage to genetic testing, without the story seeming heavy-handed. But the predominant theme in **Klara and the Sun** is loneliness. "Humans, in their wish to escape loneliness," Klara says, "made maneuvers that were very complex and hard to fathom." As Ishiguro notes in this brilliant book, each person has their own Sun, a source that gives them strength, and feels enervated when the source leaves them in shadow.

—Michael Magras

The Committed

By Viet Thanh Nguyen



Literary Fiction

The much-anticipated sequel to Viet Thanh Nguyen's 2016 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Sympathizer*, **The Committed** (Grove, \$27, 9780802157065) invites debate through its complex

portrayal of political alignments, racial identity and, as the narrator admits, selfish flaws. It's richly layered with philosophical arguments and intellectual ideas, as well as a small but engrossing dose of criminal thrills.

The Committed follows its narrator, a Vietnamese refugee and former spy known only as "the Captain," and his "blood brother" and best friend, Bon, after their "reeducation" in a refugee camp at the end of *The Sympathizer*. The Captain and Bon are adjusting to life in 1980s Paris. Working at a restaurant and living among a burgeoning population of Vietnamese immigrants, the Captain ruminates on the differences between communism and global capitalism, going so far as to embrace capitalism in one of its most complicated forms, as a drug dealer. As unexpected as his new role is, the Captain embraces it with the same ease with which he embraced his ability to lie as a spy.

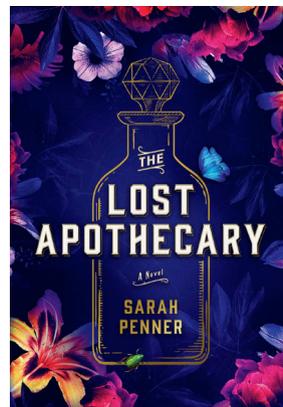
The Captain's close association with a French Vietnamese woman gives him access to a wealthier and more influential class of clientele for his newfound business enterprise. But at the same time, he finds himself drifting further from Bon, who is seeking more idealistic pursuits. As the Captain puts it, he finds himself in "a place where I could watch myself becoming more about me and me alone, the best justification there was for capitalism."

While it is helpful—and should be a prerequisite based on its Pulitzer Prize status alone—it isn't necessary to read *The Sympathizer* to become enmeshed in the pages of **The Committed**. Reminiscent of John Le Carré's deeply textured spy novels, **The Committed** proves Nguyen is no one-hit wonder when it comes to fine literature.

—G. Robert Frazier

The Lost Apothecary

By Sarah Penner



Historical Fiction

When an author threads a story with multiple perspectives that span years, they run the risk that readers will prefer one character's voice over another, creating a divide in investment that's difficult to bridge. With **The**

Lost Apothecary (Park Row, \$27.99, 9780778311010),

first-time novelist Sarah Penner takes that risk, weaving together the tales of three women separated by more than two centuries but united through pain, fear and hope. In Penner's case, the risk pays off in a spellbinding way.

In 1791 London, Nella works in her apothecary shop with a very specific purpose: making discreet poisons to help women rid themselves of the dangerous men in their lives. Nella's work is solitary for good reason, until she meets Eliza, a 12-year-old whose curiosity transforms her from unlikely client to unlikely friend.

Like a well-brewed potion, Sarah Penner's first novel casts a delicate spell.

Meanwhile in the present, Caroline is making a solo journey to London in the wake of her husband's infidelity. As she wanders the city, a chance discovery reawakens her long-buried passion for history, and as she seeks her new purpose in life, she just might find it in the story of Nella and Eliza.

What's most striking about **The Lost Apothecary** is not how expertly Penner braids the three strands of her story together, though the structure and pacing are certainly well done. What is most admirable is that, as she leaps between first-person perspectives—including two women who are often reflecting on the exact same events—the sense of character never once falters. Their presences and voices are distinct, even as they're bound by an emotional link that is clear to the reader (though not always clear to the characters). There's a powerful

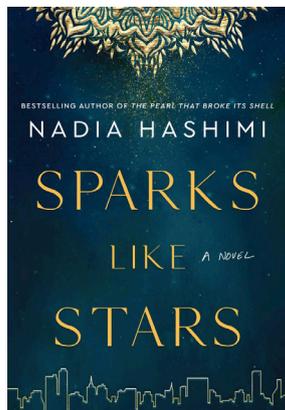
unity to this story, making it nimble yet sturdy, light yet satiating.

Like in a well-brewed potion, all the ingredients have been given exactly the right level of care and time, and the result is a novel that simply overwhelms with its delicate spell.

—Matthew Jackson

Sparks Like Stars

By Nadia Hashimi



Coming of Age

In her fourth novel for adults, Nadia Hashimi (*The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*) details a life upended by Afghanistan's 1978 Saur Revolution.

Ten-year-old Sitara Zamani lives a charmed life among

the rose gardens of Kabul's presidential palace. Her father, as President Daoud Khan's most trusted adviser, buoys the existing government—and his family—with his steady wisdom. This all changes the night Sitara leaves her bed to look at the stars, and in doing so evades a coup led by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. Sitara's family is murdered in the coup, but at the whim of a dodgy palace guard named Shair, an American diplomat and a vanload of hippies, Sitara begins a new life as "Aryana" in the United States.

Sparks Like Stars (William Morrow, \$27.99, 9780063008281) is not a novel that looks away from pain. Hashimi has taken an inventory of the toll childhood instability takes on a person's emotional well-being. After her flight from Kabul, Aryana retreats further into herself as she is funneled into the American foster care system. She eventually becomes a physician (like the author), and when a man named Shair becomes her patient, memories of the coup overwhelm her. Aryana must decide how to best treat a dying man who may have murdered her family, and whether searching for their remains in Afghanistan will bring her the peace she has never found.

Hashimi's novel conveys its themes through a mix of frank and poetic language. Maxims from Aryana's father operate as a bridge between past and present, which at times feels contrived given the first-person narration. Still, Aryana is an intriguing character who likens herself to Anastasia Romanov, whose disputed escape from her family's political execution becomes a kind of obsession for Aryana.

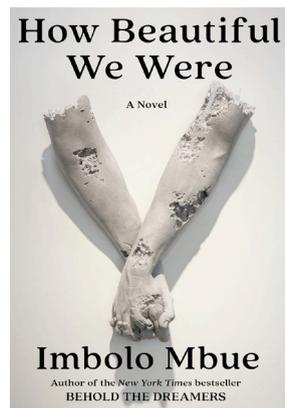
When viewing ancient artifacts from Ai-Khanoum, a city lost to time, Aryana's father says, "People cannot imagine their civilization will not endure forever. Pride is blinding." This idea is woven throughout the novel, creating implications

for not only the progressive Daoud regime but also the unfolding Cold War and the decadeslong American presence in Afghanistan. The politics of **Sparks Like Stars** are necessarily close to the heart of its heroine, whose fate is largely dictated by the whims of government agents. The novel is an elegiac tribute to family and civilization—fragile collective entities that should be cherished while they still hold.

—Elena Britos

★ How Beautiful We Were

By Imbolo Mbue



Literary Fiction

In 2017, Imbolo Mbue won the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction for her novel *Behold the Dreamers*, but it's taken 17 years for the novel she began before that one, **How Beautiful We Were** (Random House,

\$28, 9780593132425), to reach publication. Readers who enjoyed *Behold the Dreamers* will be pleased that Mbue persisted to tell this powerful story of the fateful clash between an American oil company and the tiny African village forced to live with the consequences of its environmental destruction.

Set in an unnamed country that Mbue says bears some resemblance to her native Cameroon, the novel chronicles more than four decades in Kosawa, the only one of eight "sibling villages" that must live with the "curse that came from living on land beneath which oil sat." As the deaths of their children mount and the damage to their agriculture becomes more catastrophic, the villagers' frustration turns to desperation. They kidnap several oil company representatives, which initiates a series of events that brings both disaster and hope to the community.

Mbue narrates her story through the voices of five members of Kosawa's Nangi family—Thula, a young woman who evolves into an activist; her mother, Sahel; grandmother Yaya; uncle Bongo; and brother Juba—along with a collective of Thula's contemporaries she calls the Children. While there are clear villains and heroes, the political and ethical questions faced by Mbue's characters are never presented in black-and-white terms, even when Mbue describes Kosawa's response to the oil company's intransigence. Mbue devotes considerable attention to issues like patriarchy and the beauty and role of myth and magic in the lives of Kosawa's villagers, deepening and contextualizing the novel's tragic elements.

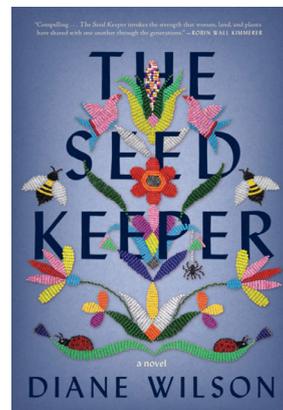
How Beautiful We Were proceeds at a deliberate pace that's appropriate for the moral gravity of the

story and the fateful choices—wise and unwise, but always undeniably human—made by Mbue's characters. To those disinclined to question the role that economic exploitation plays in supporting our modern lifestyle, reading this novel may prove an unsettling experience.

—Harvey Freedenberg

★ The Seed Keeper

By Diane Wilson



Literary Fiction

The story of a bold, strong Dakhóta woman named Rosalie Iron Wing unfolds in captivating ways in Diane Wilson's **The Seed Keeper** (Milkweed, \$16, 9781571311375). As much as this is Rosalie's story—of

her past, her separation from her family and her marriage to a white man—it is also the story of seeds, land and connection to a place.

Told in a range of women's voices, **The Seed Keeper** spans from the recent death of Rosalie's spouse back to her childhood in the foster care system, then goes even further back to reveal the stories of her ancestors and the land they called home. The women in Rosalie's family and family-by-choice are fascinating, and each offers her own perspective on both the story and the setting in which it unfolds, adding depth to our understanding of Rosalie and the complexities of her character. It's a rich tale of trauma and choice, history and meaning-making.

The seeds and words of Diane Wilson's novel will find their way into your world, no matter how far from the Dakhóta lands that may be.

But while this story is about the legacy of Dakhóta women, it's also about white settlers and the ways that Western ideas and farming tactics have impacted rivers, soil and the lives of people and animals. The contrast between how white colonizers use the land and Native Americans care for it viscerally demonstrates the inextricable connection between the earth and the people who love it. When the Dakhóta people were forced to cede their land, the women took seeds with them, and those seeds now form a connective thread of memory and ancestry between generations.

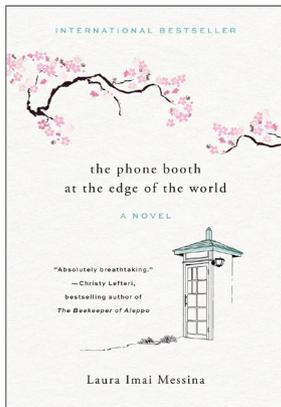
Wilson's memoir about her life as a Dakhóta

woman, *Spirit Car*, won a Minnesota Book Award. In her first novel, the writing sings in compact, careful sentences, lending a timelessness to the narrative and making it clear that this compelling story is not just about these characters but also about culture, landscape and how we can—and often cannot—understand each other. Haunting and beautiful, the seeds and words of this novel will find their way into your world, however far from the Dakhóta lands that might be.

—Freya Sachs

The Phone Booth at the Edge of the World

By Laura Imai Messina



Literary Fiction

The Phone Booth at the Edge of the World (Overlook, \$25, 9781419754302) is a poetic novel about a real telephone booth in Otsuchi, Japan, a rural town decimated by the 2011 tsunami. Known as the “Wind Phone,”

the disconnected rotary telephone allows grieving family members to speak, in a way, to loved ones who have passed on.

Yui lost her mother and daughter in the tsunami, and in the days following the catastrophe, she lived in a shelter with other survivors. Her existence was confined to a mat, and she was joined in her grief by a man who carried around an empty picture frame, observing the world through its void. As Yui begins to live again while trying to heal from her pain, she hears of the disconnected telephone that carries people’s words to the dead.

When Yui makes her first pilgrimage from Tokyo to the phone booth, she meets a widower named Takeshi along the way. Takeshi’s daughter has gone mute from the trauma of losing her mother. On their first visit, Takeshi goes to the phone to speak to his late wife, but Yui hangs back, hesitant. Yui and Takeshi become friends and travel monthly to the Wind Phone, but still Yui does not speak to her lost family.

Between chapters that follow Yui’s story and the experiences of other grieving people who visit the phone booth, author Laura Imai Messina intersperses bite-size sections that are almost like poems. They have titles such as “Parts of Yui’s Body She Entrusted to Others Over the Years” and “Two Things Yui Discovered After Googling ‘Hug’ the Next Day.” These snippets are lovely breathers, a chance for the reader to marvel at the tiny details that make up a life.

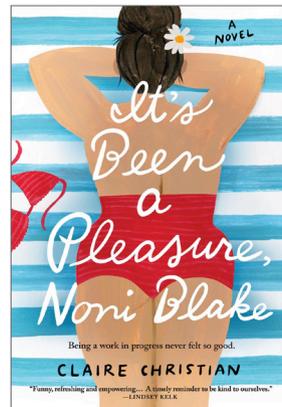
The English-language debut from Messina, an

Italian author who lives in Japan with her husband and children, unfolds over the course of many years as a tender tribute to grief and what it teaches us. Healing is not linear, and the ones we lose never truly leave us. It can be unfathomably painful when we’re reminded of our losses, even though remembering our loved ones is often what can heal us. The phone booth is a magical place that not only connects the living to the dead but also the living to the living.

—Jessica Bates

★ It’s Been a Pleasure, Noni Blake

By Claire Christian



Comic Fiction

Noni Blake is in a rut. Her teaching job doesn’t fulfill her. A nine-year relationship has come to its sad but inevitable end. She hates her hair and probably drinks too much. Noni decides what she needs is to shake things up.

Her first instinct is to revisit old flames, the ones who got away. But hooking up with the men and women from her past doesn’t give her what she’s seeking, and Noni realizes she needs something else. She needs a pleasure quest.

“I would never tolerate the things I say to myself if someone else was saying them,” Noni realizes. “I disregard my feelings. I don’t value my desires. I don’t nurture myself. I’m mean. *Holy shit*. Pleasure isn’t a person. It’s personal. And I need to work out what it looks like to me.”

With an unexpected windfall from the sale of her house, Noni embarks on a six-month sabbatical in Europe. She frequents London pubs with old friends. She buys lingerie in Amsterdam. She visits a retreat center nestled in the Scottish mountains. She reads and walks and thinks. And in Edinburgh, she decides to get a tattoo. The tattooist’s name is Beau, but Noni calls him “the Viking” for his gorgeous face and solid frame. (Picture Jason Momoa; I know I did.) Noni’s pleasure quest did not include plans to meet a beautiful Scottish man, but she finds herself drawn to the Viking. As she gets to know him better, Noni realizes the plans she has made for her life may be at odds with her heart.

It’s Been a Pleasure, Noni Blake (MIRA, \$16.99, 9780778331568) is, well, pure pleasure. An Australian playwright and novelist who previously published a young adult novel titled *Beautiful Mess*, Claire Christian is a deliciously fun writer, letting us peek into Noni’s mind as she learns to listen to her own voice. Amid gorgeous European

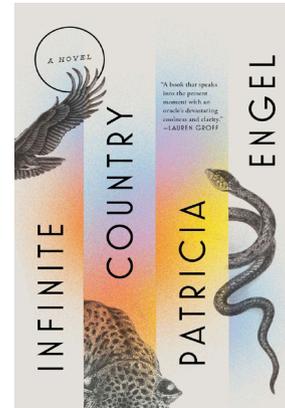
landscapes, Noni and the people she encounters are wholly likable, even when making questionable decisions.

Sexy and joyful, this is the story of a woman grappling with the idea that it’s OK to seek—even prioritize—pleasure.

—Amy Scribner

Infinite Country

By Patricia Engel



Family Saga

The fourth novel by Patricia Engel is a 21st-century odyssey about a Colombian family bifurcated by immigration rules. It’s an intriguing, compact tale, rife with both real-life implications and spiritual significance.

Escaping poverty in Colombia, the family initially arrived in the U.S. on tourist visas that later expired. They remained together until the father, Mauro, was briefly imprisoned and then deported. Unable to bring infant Talia to her minimum-wage jobs, mother Elena sent the child, the youngest of three, to live with Talia’s grandmother in Bogotá.

The story opens as Talia, now a nervy 15-year-old, breaks out of a Catholic reform school where she was sent after an impulsive, violent act. One of the novel’s multiple storylines follows Talia as she hitches rides back to Bogotá, where Mauro waits with a plane ticket to the United States, offering the possibility of a long-delayed family reunion.

Another major storyline follows Elena, who tries to make a life for herself in New Jersey with her two older children. She is mistreated by one employer in a restaurant and disrespected by another. She finally lands a job with a wealthy family, taking care of a son who forms a stronger bond with Elena than with his own mother.

Infinite Country (Avid Reader, \$25, 9781982159467) joins a growing category of fiction about the U.S. and its attitude toward Latinx immigrants, and Engel stands out as an especially gifted storyteller who elevates this saga through the use of Andean folk tales. She also heightens our interest by shifting the novel’s perspective to Talia’s sister in New Jersey more than midway through the book, and her voice adds a new dimension to the tale.

Engel does a marvelous job of rendering these characters as individuals, each with a unique story. Mauro’s journey is illuminated by his visits to the sacred Lake Guatavita outside Bogotá, where gods of wisdom reside, and where the birds above the lake mirror the family’s mantra: “We are all migrants here on earth.”

—Grace Lichtenstein

★ Last Call

By **Elon Green**

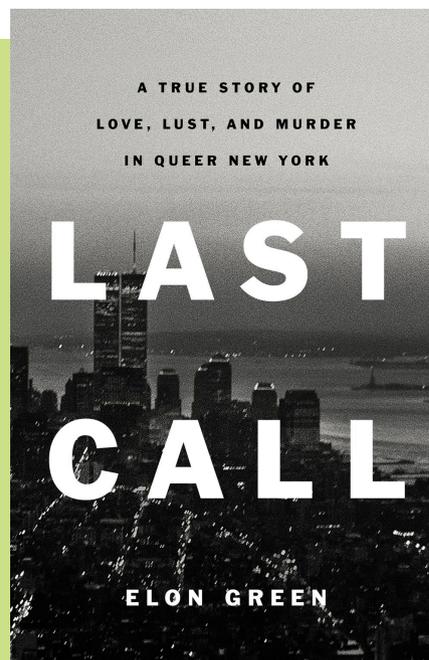
True Crime

A serial killer in New York City sounds like an atrocity that would dominate the headlines. Men were disappearing; days later, their body parts would be found in trash bags outside the city. Yet because Richard Rogers, known as the Last Call Killer, murdered gay men in the 1980s and '90s, during the AIDS crisis, you may not have heard of him or his victims.

In **Last Call: A True Story of Love, Lust, and Murder in Queer New York** (Celadon, \$27, 9781250224354), author Elon Green recounts this particularly frightening chapter in New York, contextualizing it within the city's history of anti-queer violence. Weaving together multiple histories and jumping back and forth in time can be hit-or-miss

as a narrative structure, but **Last Call** does it well, thanks to Green's original reporting conducted with law enforcement, politicians, victims' families and patrons at gay bars where Rogers lurked.

True crime too often focuses on the "bad guys," as if repeatedly mulling over their motives may eventually explain evil. In **Last Call**, Green instead foregrounds Rogers' known victims. He shows us the people they were and the lives they left behind. Their lives mattered, and **Last Call** is a testament to how



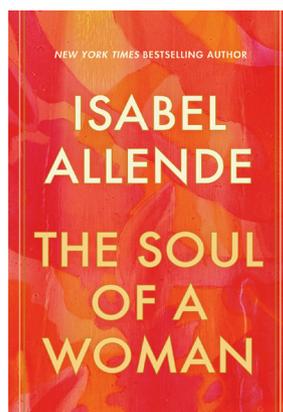
homophobia shaped these men's lives and, eventually, their deaths.

Readers should be aware that there's a lot of gore in **Last Call**; after all, Rogers dismembered his victims. Regular readers of true crime may not find the violence shocking, but the cultural context of the AIDS panic adds additional weight to this brutality. To his credit, Green never lets us forget the amplified threats that existed for gay men during this era. However, because **Last Call** shows how the passage of time often changes culture for the better, it's ultimately uplifting—if a book about a serial killer could, in any way, be called "uplifting."

—*Jessica Wakeman*

The Soul of a Woman

By **Isabel Allende**



Memoir

"My anger against machismo started in those childhood years of seeing my mother and the housemaids as victims," writes Isabel Allende in **The Soul of a Woman** (Ballantine, \$22.99, 9780593355626), her reflection on how

feminism has shaped her life. "They were subordinate and had no resources or voice. . . . My feelings of frustration were so powerful that they marked me forever."

Allende, a fixture of Latin American storytelling since the publication of *The House of the Spirits* in 1982, is well qualified to deliver a feminist manifesto. Those who have followed her career are familiar with the number of times she has struggled defiantly to overcome roadblocks in her path. *The House of the Spirits*, which addressed the ghosts of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, was rejected by Chile's macho publishing culture. (Eventually it was published in Argentina instead, to great acclaim.) While many critics have praised her work, comparing her to Gabriel García Márquez, she's also had many detractors, mostly male writers who seemed determined to dismiss her. In **The Soul of a Woman**, Allende describes these experiences and others that imbued her with the grit and tenacity that define her today.

Allende discusses her past matter-of-factly and directly, without losing her piquante humor. Her mother was an unconventional and vivacious

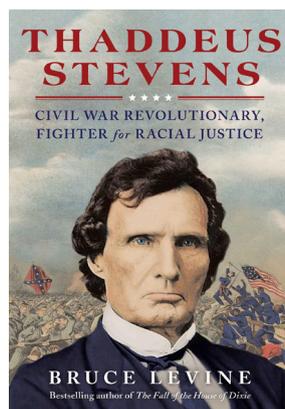
woman who grew bitter under the heavy hand of patriarchy and misogyny. Allende decided to adopt a different way of life for herself, despite the misgivings of her mother and stepfather, the Chilean ambassador to Argentina. She details her career from its roots in feminist journalism through the literary pursuits that made her a success in spite of adversity and personal tragedy.

Ultimately Allende tells us of a life lived fully, for better or worse. The passionate choices she has made are boldly laid out without apologies in this slim volume. Allende even reflects on the twilight of her life, though it seems unbelievable that such a vibrant spirit could ever dim. But when it does, the blaze her life leaves behind will illuminate this world for decades to come.

—*Anna Spydell*

Thaddeus Stevens

By **Bruce Levine**



American History

There is no better time to revisit the legacy of Thaddeus Stevens (1792–1868), one of the foremost opponents of slavery in the United States during the mid-19th century. As chair of the Ways and Means committee in the

House of Representatives, he ensured the U.S. military had the funds it needed to fight and win the Civil War. He marched well ahead of public opinion, and of President Lincoln, in advocating for voting

rights for Black men, and later for women, too. He saw the Civil War as a second American Revolution that would overturn slavery, disrupt and dispossess wealthy slaveholders of their property and replace a racist elite with social and economic equality. His razor-sharp wit was cherished by his friends and feared by his foes. After the war, he supported Reconstruction and was a leader in the impeachment trial of President Andrew Johnson.

He died as the nation tried to heal or at least ignore the wounds of the war. After his death, he was scorned and dismissed as too radical, too obdurate and too doctrinaire—an unpleasant man.

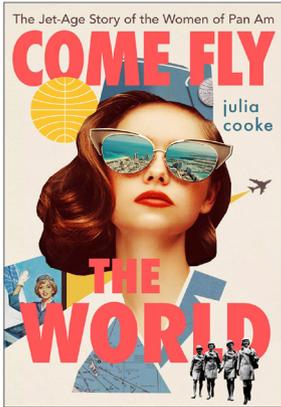
Bruce Levine, a distinguished historian from the University of Illinois, restores Stevens' reputation and contextualizes his political views in **Thaddeus Stevens: Civil War Revolutionary, Fighter for Racial Justice** (Simon & Schuster, \$28, 9781476793375). Levine's book is not a full biography. We learn very little of Stevens' personal life; he was born in Vermont, became a successful lawyer and businessman in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and was rumored to be involved with his longtime housekeeper, a biracial woman. Rather, Levine's purpose is to focus on Stevens' "role as a public figure," his fight against slavery and "the postwar struggle to bring racial democracy to the South and the nation at large."

Levine writes in lucid prose with a great depth of understanding so that we see the evolution and occasional backsliding in Stevens' thinking about race, slavery and economic and social justice. It's impossible to read this book without seeing a reflection of our own combustible times. In the 1850s, for example, immigration was a hot-button national issue, though the targeted minorities at that time were German and Irish. Levine quotes liberally from Stevens and his contemporaries, allowing the essence of the man to shine through.

—*Alden Mudge*

Come Fly the World

By Julia Cooke



History

In 1967, a book called *Coffee, Tea, or Me? The Uninhibited Memoirs of Two Airline Stewardesses* captured the world's imagination with tales of amorous adventures. Decades later, Donald Blain revealed that as a

publicist for American Airlines, he actually wrote the book and its sequels, and two female flight attendants were hired to pose as the authors for book tours. Although the stunt sounds like something from “Mad Men,” readers fell for it hook, line and sinker, casting an indelible reputation on the profession.

“The industry saw no reason not to capitalize on male fantasy,” writes Julia Cooke in the fascinating **Come Fly the World: The Jet-Age Story of the Women of Pan Am** (HMH, \$28, 9780358251408). Cooke has created a sweeping account of not only the airline industry and its cultural history but also women’s evolution in the workforce. She blends an overview of the job with the personal stories of several (real!) flight attendants, dispelling ludicrous myths and showing how Pan Am presented adventurous, curious women with a way to see the world at a time when their opportunities were limited.

Stewardess positions were so coveted in the 1960s that in 1968, over 266,000 women applied for 12,000 spots in the American airline industry. Many of these young women, such as biology major Lynne Totten from upstate New York, saw the job as an exciting chance to try something new. Years later, when a male passenger spotted Totten reading an issue of *Scientific American*, he suggested that *Vogue* might be a better choice. She quickly set him straight, but Totten was hardly an anomaly. As Cooke points out, “throughout the 1960s, 10 percent of Pan Am stewardesses had attended graduate school at a time when only 8 percent of American women had graduated from college.”

Despite the unparalleled opportunities offered by Pan Am, these stewardesses had to pave their own way, fighting against weight and height limits, age ceilings, marriage bans, racism and other glass ceilings that prevented them from being offered management positions.

An entertaining and informative narrator, Cooke has a big story to tell and excels at painting her panorama in broad strokes. At times, however, readers may find themselves wishing for a few more anecdotes, as well as more direct quotations from the women she profiles. Nonetheless, many of her accounts are memorable, especially those involving

Pan Am’s flights to Vietnam, which Cooke covers extensively and in which young American men reading Archie comics were dropped off, many to never return.

Come Fly the World is an eye-opening account of female flight attendants’ successes and struggles in the not-so-distant past.

—Alice Cary



Visit BookPage.com to read our Q&A with Julia Cooke.

★ Festival Days

By Jo Ann Beard



Essays

Jo Ann Beard’s prose is never more intensely vibrant than when describing death. Her celebrated essay “The Fourth State of Matter,” published in *The New Yorker* in 1996, depicts the decline of a beloved dog and the end of a marriage before segueing into the horror of a mass shooting at the University of Iowa. Beard’s new collection of essays, **Festival Days** (Little, Brown, \$27, 9780316497237), shimmers with a similar emotional intensity, especially when evoking the flashes of memory that come to those pausing on the threshold between life and death.

Beard is known as a nonfiction essayist, but her work often reads like suspenseful fiction. Her essay “Werner,” included in this volume, is about a man who jumps from a burning building in New York City. Beard’s narration so completely enters the subjective experience of Werner, clutching his cat under his arm as he contemplates the jump, it feels to the reader like a virtual reality experience. Similarly, Beard’s prose in the essay “Cheri” conforms intimately to the physical and mental experiences of a dying woman.

Allowing her work to exist beyond the labels of fiction or nonfiction, Beard’s metaphorical patterns evince the imaginative truths that underlie her writing. **Festival Days** is woven from these repeating symbols: the elderly dog, the husband’s betrayal, the friend dying of cancer. In three different essays in this collection, someone falls through a thin sheet of ice into a winter lake. Twice they are rescued; once they are not. These resonances across the essays suggest a greater unity, a story unfolding over a lifetime.

Beard’s literary powers are most evident in the long eponymous essay that concludes this collection. Here, Beard weaves metaphor and memory into a stunning portrait of lifelong friendship, of those relationships that hold us and ground us

Join us on social media



Let’s be friends!

Follow BookPage on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter for even more interviews, reviews & bookish fun.



fb.com/readbookpage



[@bookpage](https://twitter.com/bookpage)



[@readbookpage](https://www.instagram.com/readbookpage)

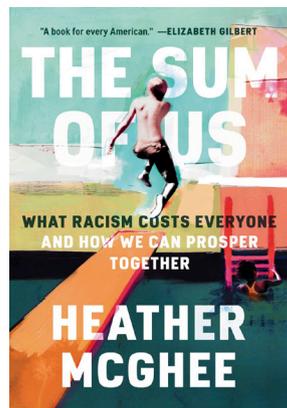
BookPage

across the decades, that persist with love even to the final goodbye.

—Catherine Hollis

The Sum of Us

By Heather McGhee



Social Science

Why can't we have nice things? Depending on your lot in life, you may ponder this from time to time. Things like easy access to health care, fair public utilities, unions that provide job security and protect worker

rights—these are all societal gains that many other nations have achieved. So why can't the United States, the wealthiest nation on the planet, provide these and other amenities to every citizen?

This is the question that Heather McGhee, former director of the think tank Demos, asks in **The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together** (One World, \$28, 9780525509561). She ably moves through some of the largest infrastructural deficiencies in the U.S. and explains how a zero-sum mindset, combined with the constant plague of systemic racism, have led to fewer amenities for all.

McGhee's anecdotes about the past read like cautionary parables for the future. For instance, throughout the 1920s, the Works Progress Administration built hundreds of public swimming pools across the nation to provide relief from the summer sun. But after federal courts ruled that segregated swimming was unconstitutional, many cities opted to fill their grandest pools with concrete rather than allow Black swimmers to use them. And so no one got relief from the heat.

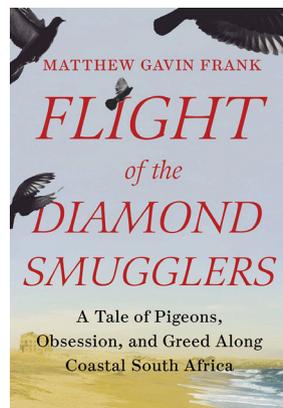
McGhee unpacks how this kind of thinking shows up in every sector of society. Businesses have stoked racial mistrust to divide unions in their factories, using social capital to turn workers against collective bargaining. Years of accumulated racial resentment have kneecapped attempts to provide universal healthcare coverage, from Harry Truman's era to Barack Obama's. State-subsidized college tuition and affordable housing were vilified as handouts for the undeserving poor, which led to absurdly high tuition rates and the housing market crash of 2008.

Supported by remarkable data-driven research and thoughtful interviews with those directly affected by these issues, McGhee paints a powerful picture of the societal shortfalls all around us. There is a greater, more just America available to us, and McGhee brings its potential to light.

—Matt Gifford

★ Flight of the Diamond Smugglers

By Matthew Gavin Frank



Reported Memoir

In 1888, the De Beers company began marketing the diamond as a must-have symbol of love, commitment and status, creating unprecedented demand. But their diamonds, although beautiful,

were harvested via aggressive mining operations that have left a legacy of pain, crime and destruction.

Perhaps not unlike a sparkling diamond on an outstretched finger, alluring despite its origins, Matthew Gavin Frank's **Flight of the Diamond Smugglers: A Tale of Pigeons, Obsession, and Greed Along Coastal South Africa** (Liveright, \$25.95, 9781631496028) is a work of strange beauty born of personal tragedy. Frank and his wife Louisa's sixth miscarriage set him on the path to this book—an often unsettling, thoroughly researched, poetically expressed mélange of memoir, historical analysis and philosophical meditation.

Frank writes that the couple “feared all this love we had inside of us would ever remain stupidly, perfectly unrequited,” so in 2016 they went to Louisa's birth country of South Africa to hold a memorial at the Big Hole, a former diamond mine and historical site that was a frequent destination for her family. The author became fascinated by the Big Hole's origins and the history of mining in the area, including the pigeons that have been used as tools of thievery.

The narrative's path is not linear; instead, Frank follows the flow of his prodigious curiosity. He interviews mine workers and corporate staff, muses on human failings and fragility and develops a friendship with a boy named Msizi and his pigeon, Bartholomew. Msizi smuggles the bird into work sites, covertly affixes diamonds to Bartholomew's feet and sends him aloft. Frank observes their relationship with a sharp yet sympathetic eye. It's a relationship of function, fondness and unease under the threat of punishment were they to get caught. Frank also tries to contact Mr. Lester, a shadowy figure known for his cruelty and power who may be behind the disappearance of diamond smugglers. Is he even real, and will he allow himself to be found?

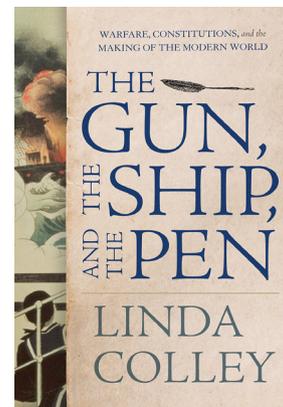
Suspense builds as the pages turn. Betwixt and between, there's much to marvel at, from the far-reaching aftermath of diamond mining to the ways old memories have a hold on us. Readers

will empathize with Frank's efforts to process his grief and with Diamond Coast residents' search for glints of hope in a grim desert. Through it all, pigeons soar in the sky and alight on the ground, offering companionship, a particular set of skills and thought-provoking fodder for metaphor.

—Linda M. Castelltito

The Gun, the Ship, and the Pen

By Linda Colley



World History

From the mid-18th century to the beginning of World War I, two approaches to transforming the world—warfare and constitutions—played in tandem. The unusual relationship between them is the fascinating and important subject of

Princeton historian Linda Colley's **The Gun, the Ship, and the Pen: Warfare, Constitutions, and the Making of the Modern World** (Liveright, \$35, 9780871403162).

By 1750, the costs of warfare, in both money and lives, for such European powers as Britain, France and Spain had significantly increased. This pressure, combined with the rise of revolutionary conflicts, expanded the use of written constitutions and the ideas they expressed. In 1767, Catherine the Great published her most important work, the Nakaz, or Grand Instruction. Although it wasn't a formal constitution, it shows how the concept developed and proliferated. She also developed techniques for political communication that later exponents of constitutions, including Benjamin Franklin, borrowed and built on.

Colley's wide-ranging survey covers many aspects of the global impact of constitutions, from the crucial importance of printers and publishers, to Thomas Paine's interest in putting political and legal concepts on paper, to Toussaint Louverture defying the French in 1801 and publishing his own constitution for a future Black-ruled Haiti. In 1838, for the first time in world history, the inhabitants of Pitcairn, a tiny island in the South Pacific populated by descendants of Tahitian people and British mutineers of the HMS *Bounty*, proclaimed in their constitution that both adult men and women were to be enfranchised in elections.

This carefully crafted exploration shows how constitutions have helped to bring about an extraordinary revolution in human behavior, ideas and beliefs over the years. Though constitutions are flawed, Colley writes, “in an imperfect, uncertain, shifting, and violent world, they may be the best we can hope for.”

—Roger Bishop

★ When We Were Infinite

By Kelly Loy Gilbert

Fiction

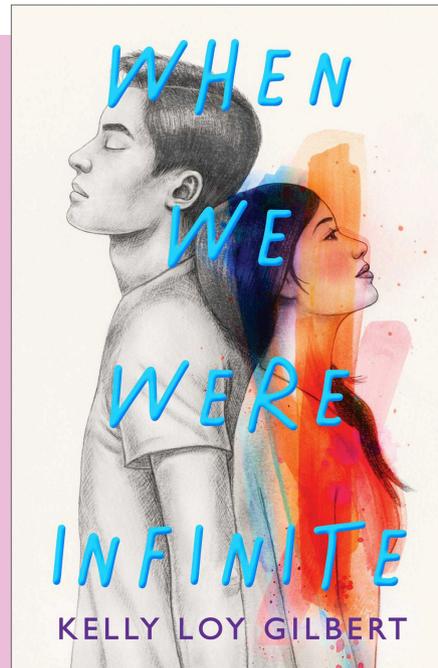
It's rare to encounter a YA novel that so vividly depicts a high-achieving, overly self-reflective teenager (like myself at that age, or my similarly overachieving, overly self-reflective high school friends). Even more rare is a YA book that expands what the entire category of YA literature can be. Kelly Loy Gilbert's astonishing **When We Were Infinite** (Simon & Schuster, \$19.99, 9781534468214) is both.

Senior year is a time of lasts for Beth: her last time doing AP bio homework; her last youth symphony showcase performance; her last time hanging out and laughing at everything and nothing with her four best friends, Jason, Brandon, Sunny and Grace. Preparing for her Juilliard audition leads to a lot of late nights, but somehow Beth always finds time for her friends, planning the perfect homecoming evening for them, for instance, or helping Sunny

check out "crafternoon" at the LGBTQ community center.

When something terrible happens to Jason, Beth desperately wants to make everything all right again. Her concern for Jason, as well as her fear of being separated from her friends, weigh heavily on her, and the new beginnings that beckon beyond graduation begin to fill her with dread rather than excited anticipation. Will Beth ever feel as electric, as real, as infinite as she does right now, in this moment, surrounded by the friends she loves?

YA is a literature of immediacy. Explorations of



family dynamics and life transitions as well as the search to claim one's own identity and agency have always been staples of the category. **When We Were Infinite** brings these themes into the 21st century. Gilbert's characters' experiences reflect issues that include gender, sexuality, race, class and mental health, and in every moment, these experiences feel vital and organic to both the characters and the larger story.

Microaggressions are ignored but remembered. Romances start and end. College applications are submitted, and decisions are made. And as for my own high school friends? We group-texted earlier today about this book.

—Jill Ratzan



Visit BookPage.com to read our Q&A with Kelly Loy Gilbert.

Wings of Ebony

By J. Elle



Fantasy

Rue is content with life in her childhood home in Houston, where she lives with her mother and younger sister. But after her mother's unexpected death, her long-absent father returns and takes Rue to Ghizon, a secret, distant

island where every citizen can use magic. Rue must integrate herself into Ghizon's rigid society, far from the only home she's ever known.

When Rue escapes Ghizon to visit her sister, she sets off a chain of events that transcends realms and reveals Rue's identity as half human, half god. With strength and determination, she rises to confront evil.

Wings of Ebony (Denene Millner, \$19.99, 9781534470675) presents a fresh and complex take on the "chosen one" trope. Honest and often humorous as she explores what it means to balance her magic and her humanity, Rue retains a cutting, clear voice no matter what she's facing. She is as critical of Houston's systemic racism as she is nostalgic for her neighbor's cooking. Eventually she learns to recognize the beauty of her magical heritage, too, and she is just as vocal about the racism, colonialism and privilege that plague Ghizon. Rue is determined to

survive, succeed and protect her loved ones, whether they're from Houston or Ghizon.

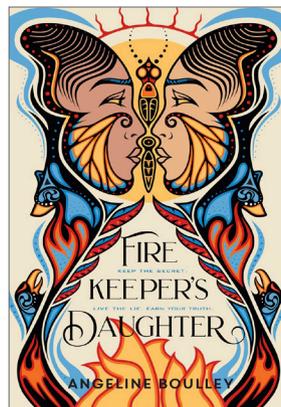
Thanks to her fiery nature, Rue develops dynamic relationships with the rest of the novel's characters. Some see her as an enemy, but others stand beside her to fight for justice. By conveying all of these perspectives, **Wings of Ebony** asks readers to reflect honestly on their own beliefs and where *they* would stand.

Debut author J. Elle's depiction of a young woman embracing the seemingly conflicting sides of her identity is masterful and moving. Bursting with insight, a deeply felt sense of community and an imaginative magic system, **Wings of Ebony** tells a thrilling, fast-paced story that illuminates serious issues and is sure to resonate with readers.

—Tami Orendain

★ Firekeeper's Daughter

By Angeline Boulley



Mystery

Daunis Fontaine's post-high school life is nothing like the one she imagined. A lingering injury has dashed her dreams of playing hockey for the University of Michigan. Drugs have ravaged her community, including the nearby Ojibwe reservation where her deceased father's

family live but where she will never truly belong, as the ramifications of being a biracial, non-enrolled member of the tribe are vast and consequential.

Firekeeper's Daughter (Holt, \$18.99, 9781250766564) opens slowly as debut author Angeline Boulley establishes a complex, tightknit community made up of both Anishinaabe (Indigenous people) and Zhaaganaash (white people). The plot kicks into high gear after Daunis witnesses a horrifying murder and decides to go undercover for the FBI, using her connections to help them uncover who is pumping opioids into the community, and who is behind the steadily increasing body count.

Make no mistake, **Firekeeper's Daughter** is, at times, brutal. Boulley's depiction of abuses experienced by Native women, including sexual assault and murder, is unflinching. However, these scenes never feel casual or cheap. Instead, Boulley, who is an enrolled member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, where the book is set, writes with honesty, empathy and a clear awareness of the epidemic of violence experienced by the vast majority of Native women.

Though **Firekeeper's Daughter** contains gripping action sequences and gasp-inducing twists, it's Daunis' mission of self-discovery that has the most impact. Her introspective revelation of self-worth acts like a healing salve for the novel's violence and darkness. Though it both shocks and thrills, in the end, what leaves you breathless is **Firekeeper's Daughter's** blazing heart.

—Luis G. Rendon



Visit BookPage.com to read our Q&A with Angeline Boulley.

Standing on their shoulders

Fascinating stories from women's history will empower and inspire young readers.

During Women's History Month, we celebrate the contributions women have made to our country. These books about women who dared to dream big—and to act on those dreams—are sure to prompt young readers to follow in their footsteps.

From activists to athletes to ancestors through the ages, it's important to honor those who came before us, writes Monica Clark-Robinson in **Standing on Her Shoulders: A Celebration of Women** (Orchard, \$18.99, 9781338358001, ages 4 to 8): "When we remember them and speak their names, / We respect the struggles they overcame." Her lyrical text makes a strong case for not just learning about historical figures but also thinking about how their accomplishments have impacted our lives today.

In the book's vibrantly colored pages, illustrated by Laura Freeman, a multigenerational family discusses "women who were little once / just like you" and imagines the day when the children in the book—as well as the kids reading it—might offer their own proverbial shoulders to support future generations. The book highlights a diverse group of groundbreaking women from a range of places and eras, from gymnast Simone Biles and snowboarder Chloe Kim, to artists Frida Kahlo and Faith Ringgold, and politicians Deb Haaland and Hillary Clinton. There are activists (Harriet Tubman), explorers (Sacajawea) and scientists (Harriet Chalmers Adams), too. In the back matter, readers will discover beautiful portraits and brief biographies of the women they've met throughout the book.

Standing on Her Shoulders is an excellent resource, sure to serve as a starting point for further research and to help excited readers start planning for their own futures.

Life as a lighthouse keeper can be grueling and lonely, filled with hard, unending physical labor and isolation. This is particularly true of open-water lighthouses like the one in **Kate's Light: Kate Walker at Robbins Reef Lighthouse** (Margaret Ferguson, \$18.99, 9780823443482, ages 6 to 9) by Elizabeth Spires,

illustrated by Caldecott Medalist Emily Arnold McCully (*Mirette on the High Wire*). But it can also be invigorating and rewarding, as it was for Kate Walker.

Walker emigrated from Germany to the U.S. in 1882 with her son, Jacob, and soon met and married lighthouse keeper John Walker. In 1885, when her husband was posted to Robbins Reef Lighthouse, located on a small island in the middle of the very busy and dangerous New York Harbor, Walker was skeptical. Where would her son play? Wouldn't the family miss their friends, not to mention being able to walk to other places?

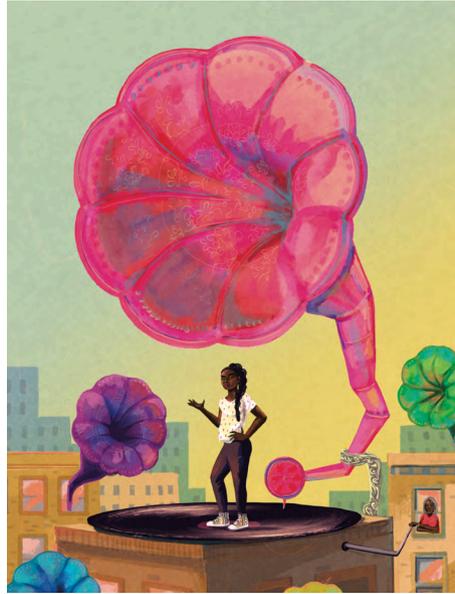
Walker grew to appreciate her unique situation and even became the assistant keeper of the lighthouse. For five years, she and her husband built a lovely, if unconventional, life together. But then John died of pneumonia, leaving Kate and their children worried for their future. Ever resourceful, Walker convinced the lighthouse board to hire her as a permanent keeper. For 33 years, she presided over the lighthouse. She became known for her heroism, carrying out more than 50 rescues, and for her dedication to keeping sailors and ships safe.

Spire, a poet, professor and author of several children's books, creates a memorable tribute to an indomitable woman and her remarkable life. Walker's willingness to step into the unknown is thrilling, and McCully's illustrations add drama and impact to the swashbuckling story. Heavily applied watercolors create a massive

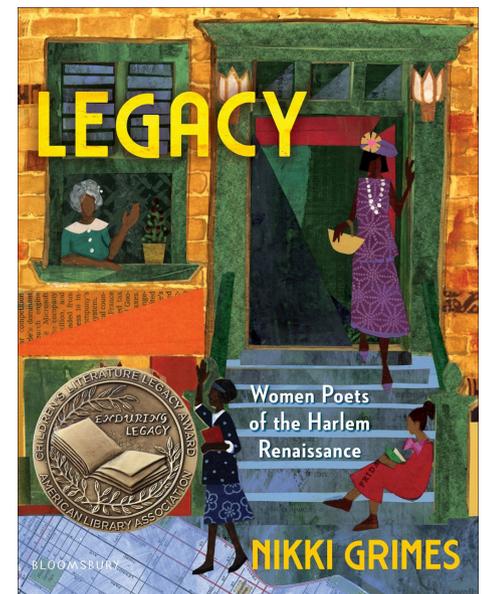
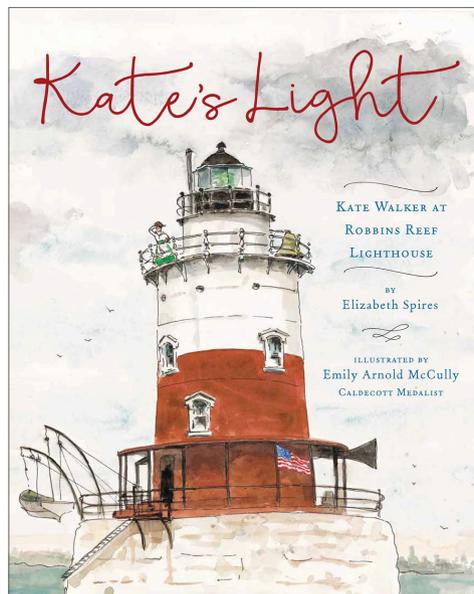
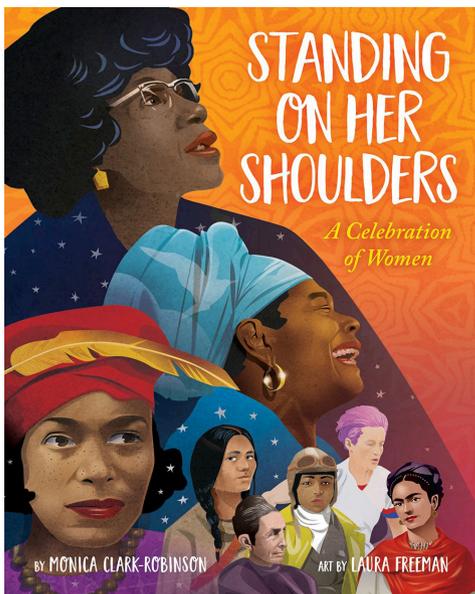
thunderstorm on the page, and carefully rendered details will help readers imagine what it's like to call an island lighthouse home. **Kate's Light** is an unusual true story compellingly told.

In her new tour de force of a poetry collection, **Legacy: Women Poets of the Harlem Renaissance** (Bloomsbury, \$18.99, 9781681199443, ages 10 to 14), bestselling author and Coretta Scott King Award winner Nikki Grimes stakes a claim for women in the pantheon of Harlem Renaissance poets.

As Grimes informs readers in her preface, Black women not only created



"Having My Say" illustration by Shadra Strickland, from *Legacy* by Nikki Grimes, reprinted with permission from Bloomsbury.



poetry during the Harlem Renaissance but also headed up the publications that featured the male writers we know by name. In pursuit of making these women's names and contributions known, Grimes has crafted a memorable and compelling volume of poems that pays tribute to the inspiration she has drawn from these women.

Legacy's poems follow a complex poetic form called the Golden Shovel, created by the poet Terrance Hayes. In this form, the poet begins by choosing a short poem or an excerpt from a longer poem. The words of this poem become the new poem's "striking line," and each word of the first poem becomes the last word in each line of the new poem. It's an ambitious and fitting form that enables Grimes' poems to be shaped by the words of the women honored in **Legacy**.

Each of Grimes' poems is preceded by the poem from which its striking line originates. Poems by Mae V. Cowdery, Esther Popel, Gwendolyn Bennett and more speak of beauty, dreams and determination, while Grimes' work offers sketches of life, celebrates the natural world and declares self-confidence and pride. The book's artwork, a feast of color that displays a range of techniques and styles, was contributed by 19 female artists including Cozbi A. Cabrera, Nina Crews, Laura Freeman and Jan Spivey Gilchrist.

Grimes lays claim to an amazing artistic legacy on every page, her poetic rejoinders building a stirring call and response. **Legacy** amplifies the words of these extraordinary poets and offers a road map for carrying them into the future.

From the moment she took her first flight in 1932, Hazel Ying Lee knew she was destined to become a pilot. "When the plane landed back on the runway like a skipping rock, Hazel stepped out with only the horizon in her eyes," writes Julie Leung in her appealing picture book biography **The Fearless Flights of Hazel Ying Lee** (Little, Brown, \$18.99, 9780759554955, ages 4 to 8). Lee was determined to make her dream a reality, no matter the obstacles—which included an era rife with racism, the exclusion of women from many professions and a mother who was firmly against the idea of Lee becoming a pilot.

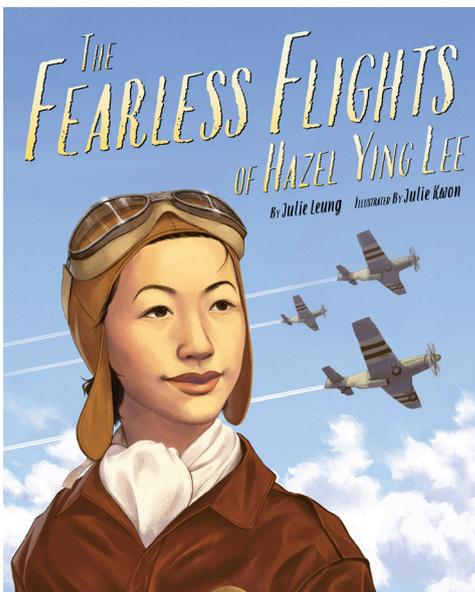
Lee delighted in competition and applied the same vigor to her quest to become a pilot that she showed while racing and swimming with her brothers as a child. She worked as an elevator operator to save up for flying lessons, and when World War II began, she was ready. Male pilots were sent overseas, and the U.S. military created the Women Airforce Service Pilot (WASP) program, where Lee became a valued and accomplished member.

Julie Kwon's illustrations superbly capture Lee's experiences on the ground and on the wing. In a shadowy elevator, the light around Lee is a warm glow, illuminating her dreamy I'd-rather-be-flying expression. In the air,

fluffy clouds contrast with the sharp edges of the WASPs' airplanes. Lee's spirit shines throughout; she never stopped learning and trying new things, even as she worked under dangerous conditions to protect her country.

The author's note offers further details about Hazel and her fellow WASPs and elaborates on the racist treatment Chinese American families like Lee's often endured. **The Fearless Flights of Hazel Ying Lee** is an edifying, exciting real-life adventure that will inspire readers to let their own dreams take flight.

—Linda M. Castellitto



Readers' advisory



Bestselling author **WANTED** for leading millions of young people to a life of reading

Every children's author dreams of writing a book that transforms an unsuspecting young person into a voracious bibliophile, but few writers have led more children down a path paved with syllables and sentences than Dav Pilkey. After more than two decades of writing and illustrating children's books, he should be considered armed (with pencil, paper and imagination) and EXTREMELY literate.

BookPage has received a tip that Pilkey will soon publish a new volume of his bestselling Dog Man series, **Mothering Heights** (Graphix, \$12.99, 9781338680454, ages 7 to 9), putting readers who have thus far escaped falling prey to Pilkey's infectious blend of hilarity and

heart in danger of discovering the joy of reading.

Recent exploits: For nearly 20 years, Pilkey perpetrated a series of sensationally silly stories featuring the adventures of "Captain Underpants," believed to be an alias of Benjamin Krupp. However, in 2015 Pilkey unleashed a still-ongoing series with far more graphic and novel characteristics—the so-called "Dog Man" tales, which chronicle a half-dog, half-man's successful integration into local law enforcement and his efforts to do good. Approximately 40 million copies are believed to have made their way into the hands of young readers, but the true scope of Pilkey's reach is impossible to know for certain.

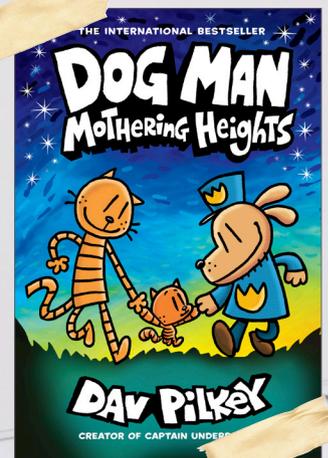
Operating territory: Pilkey is believed to reside in the Pacific Northwest, but his books have been translated into more than 40 languages and can be found on bookstore and library shelves worldwide.

Known associates: Experts have long suspected a link between Pilkey and two juveniles, George Beard and Harold Hutchins, both believed to be fourth graders. Although Pilkey's name appears on the cover of every Dog Man book, a mounting pile of evidence suggests that true authorship should in fact be attributed to Beard and Hutchins.

Future plans: Chatter on the streets indicates Pilkey is planning the imminent release of a 10th Dog Man book. Dubbed **Mothering Heights**, details of the plot have been kept under wraps, but it may see Dog Man

while Petey and Grumpy. All we know for certain at this stage is that laughter and joy are anticipated by young readers everywhere.

This dossier was compiled by Detective Stephanie Appell, BookPage Department of Juvenile and Adolescent Literary Affairs.



It's all Greek to Laura Amy Schlitz

A Newbery Medalist mines the treasures and troubles of ancient history.

Through her acclaimed books, Laura Amy Schlitz has transported young readers to a medieval English village, Victorian London, a big American city at the turn of the 20th century and more. In **Amber & Clay** (Candlewick, \$22.99, 9781536201222, ages 11 to 14), she sets her sights on ancient Greece to tell the story of an enslaved boy named Rhaskos, who longs to become an artist, and a privileged girl named Melisto, who chafes against familial and social expectations. Told in a mix of prose and verse, and with artifacts illustrated by Julie Iredale, **Amber & Clay** is historical fiction at its most inventive.

How familiar were you with ancient Athens before you embarked on this project? What did you learn about it that surprised you?

I didn't know much when I started work on this book. I had to dig in. After a year or two, I had to buy a new bookcase to accommodate all the Greek books I bought. I drew maps, made lists, filled notebooks and tried to make clay pots. I went to museums and stared at things for long periods of time. I went to Greece. I tried to learn the language.

When I began my research, I was often angry. I was angry with the Greeks for being a slave society. I was angry with them for being misogynist. I was taken aback by how hard their lives were, how omnipresent the threats of war and enslavement were. Those fifth-century Greeks experienced little in the way of creature comforts, nothing of abundance or security. At the same time, I was astonished by their creativity, their appetite for beauty, their staggering ingenuity, their leaps of intellect and imagination. They adored excellence and aspired to justice.

And yet.

I told a wise friend how confounded I was by these contradictory Greeks, and she said, "When you are simultaneously repelled and attracted by something, sometimes it's because you're standing on holy ground."

I didn't understand that, but I believed her. I kept researching. After a while, the Greeks began to come into focus for me. I started to see how their struggles and hardships and aspirations came together to form a culture. I was able to see them in a way that felt clear-headed and not sanctimonious.

What was it like to travel to modern-day Athens as part of your research?

It was one of two major turning

points for me. I took an archaeological tour of Athens, and two fantastic guides tirelessly answered my questions.

Greece is astonishingly, hauntingly beautiful. I was moved to tears. When you see those dense forests and the mountains against the sky, when you see the water and the rocks and that fierce light, you understand how the ancients peopled their world with nymphs and gods and monsters.

The second turning point for me was trying to learn the language. I didn't succeed; I had no teacher, and the language is hard. But trying to fit those jawbreaker words in my mouth—struggling to muscle out those consonants—I fell in love. Trying to learn Greek brought the story closer to me.

As you wrote, how did you decide which characters would speak in verse and which in prose?

For the first hundred pages of the first draft, everything was written in prose. But one day I was tempted to write a passage from Hermes' point of view, and he spoke in verse. That encouraged me to see if the Rhaskos chapters would work better in verse. To my surprise and relief, they did.

As I went on writing, it seemed to me that the gods and the sphinx should speak in verse that was tailored to the character. Hephaistos, god of the forge,

for example, is a bass; his lines are slower and heavier than the fluent pattern of Hermes.

Honestly, I was just messing around. Some of my efforts entertained me, so I kept messing. Sometimes when I was stuck, I'd throw back my head and yell in Greek, "Sing to me, Muse!" It seemed to help. My terrible Greek probably snagged the attention of the muse.

Amber & Clay includes moments in which supernatural events (gods, ghosts, magic) exist alongside the human events of the story. Was that always the case?

The earliest drafts didn't have the gods, though I was planning on a ghost. The first god

to poke his nose in was Hermes. Later I came to understand that leaving the gods out would be negligent. It would have been un-Greek. Nowadays, we draw a line between what is natural and what is supernatural, but the ancient Greeks didn't. They divined the gods in the land, in their dreams and in their passions. If I'd omitted the gods, I'd have ignored a huge chunk of their experience.

How did you get the idea to include the novel's visual elements, illustrated images of historical artifacts and museum placards, as part of the narrative?

As I was writing the story, I wanted to be able to drag children to a museum and say, "See? That's what I'm talking about!" I wanted the reader to feel a little bit like an archaeologist, to have to search for the story behind each artifact.

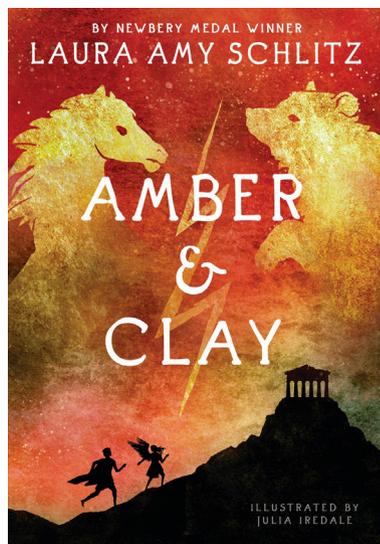
There are many emotional moments in Amber & Clay and some desperately sad ones—but there's humor, too. Was it challenging to include funny moments when you were exploring some pretty dark themes?

No. What I've discovered is that if you try to write something funny, that's challenging. But if you try to write truthfully, even about sad things—maybe even especially about sad things—humor trickles in uninvited, like rain through a leaky roof. Over the years, I've come to trust that.

—Norah Piehl



© JOE RUBINO



Visit BookPage.com to read our starred review.

★ Too Small Tola

By Atinuke

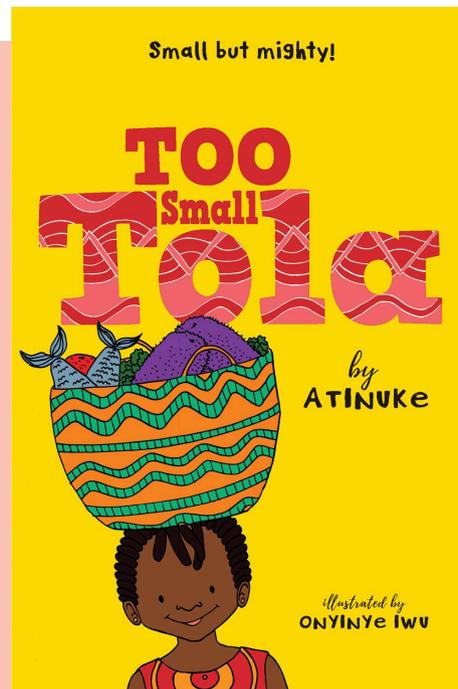
Illustrated by Onyinye Iwu

Chapter Book

Nigerian-born children's author Atinuke introduces a memorable new heroine in **Too Small Tola** (Candlewick, \$15.99, 9781536211276, ages 7 to 9), which contains three short, illustrated stories.

Tola lives in Lagos, Nigeria, the most populous city on the African continent, in an apartment that she shares with her older brother, sister and grandmother. The book's stories explore facets of Tola's everyday life. She helps Grandmommy shop for groceries, she deals with the neighborhood bully as well as the electricity and water being shut off in her building, and she helps her neighbor, Mr. Abdul the tailor, finish his work so that his family can have their Eid feast.

Atinuke is a masterful storyteller, playing with language and rhythm as she evokes Tola's world. Every sentence is fun to read—a quality that shouldn't be underestimated in a book created for young readers still learning the ropes of independent reading. Each tale ends by coming full circle back to its beginning, and the stories echo and connect to each other in ways that will reward



multiple readings. **Too Small Tola's** gentle morals linger with an unusually satisfying combination of inevitability and surprise.

Atinuke surrounds Tola with appealing characters and a vibrant setting full of wonderfully specific details, such as the treats Tola and Grandmommy share on their way home from the market. Illustrator Onyinye Iwu renders Tola and her family in endearing and expressive images that capture their personalities perfectly. **Too Small Tola** will make readers eager to read more about Tola; Lagos is clearly bursting with more stories to tell.

—Autumn Allen

meet CAT MIN

How would you describe your book?
A story about a shy rabbit's personal journey to self-realization, empathy & what it means to make a friend.

Who has been the biggest influence on your work?
Shawn Tan, My Twins, Studio Chibi! Films, Jen Wang, (too many!)

What books did you enjoy as a child?
I read mostly Korean and Japanese comic books. Some of my favorites: ONE PIECE, ADDITION, LAND OF SILVER RAIN, SLAM DUNK, DRAGON BALL.

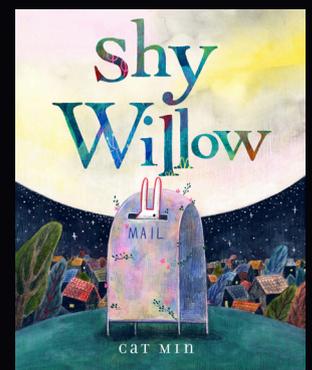
What one thing would you like to learn to do?
Make a mobile game (escape room or visual novel), Make my own clothes (comfort is key!).

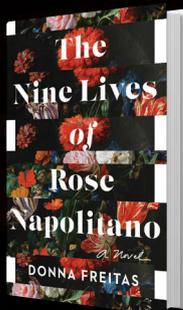
Who was your childhood hero?
All the art teachers I've ever had — they encouraged and nurtured my love for drawing.

What message would you like to send to young readers?
Dear Reader, your thoughts, feelings & voice matter. ♥ CAT MIN



In Cat Min's delightful debut picture book, **Shy Willow** (Levine Querido, \$17.99, 9781646140350, ages 4 to 7), Willow the rabbit must find a way to deliver a very important letter to the moon. Raised in Hong Kong and now based in New Jersey, Min creates animation videos and comics as well as children's book illustrations.





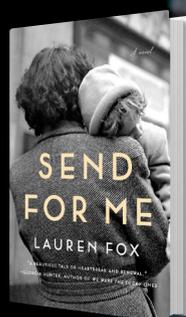
FOR BOOK CLUBS THAT LOVE CELESTE NG, ANN PATCHETT, AND JODI PICOULT

Donna Freitas
THE NINE LIVES OF ROSE NAPOLITANO:
A NOVEL

"Ambitious, compelling, and provocative . . . delves deep into love,

motherhood, and the complicated dance that is navigating the world as a woman—it's intricate structure kept me turning pages and the questions posed therein kept me awake at night." —Claire Lombardo, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Most Fun We Ever Had*

Pamela Dorman Books | Available in Hardcover, eBook, Audio, and Large Print Editions



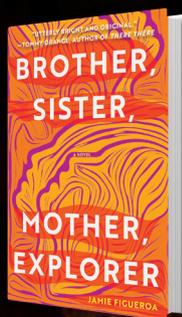
FOR BOOK CLUBS THAT LOVED *WE WERE THE LUCKY ONES* AND *LILAC GIRLS*

Lauren Fox
SEND FOR ME:
A NOVEL

An achingly beautiful work of historical fiction that moves between Germany on the eve of World War

II and present-day Wisconsin, unspooling a thread of love, longing, and the powerful bonds of family.

Knopf | Available in Hardcover and eBook Editions

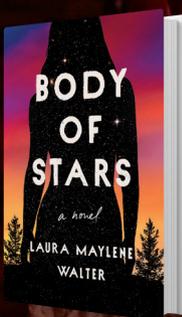


FOR BOOK CLUBS THAT LOVE LITERARY DEBUTS LIKE *THERE THERE* AND *A BURNING*

Jamie Figueroa
BROTHER, SISTER, MOTHER, EXPLORER:
A NOVEL

A debut novel of enormous power and grace about a sister trying to hold back her brother from the edge of the abyss.

"So full of voice. It is utterly bright and original."
—Tommy Orange, author of *There There*



FOR BOOK CLUBS THAT LOVED *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* AND *THE IMMORTALISTS*

Laura Maylene Walter
BODY OF STARS:
A NOVEL

A bold and dazzling debut—an exploration of fate and female agency in a world very similar to our own—except that the markings on women's bodies reveal the future.

Dutton | Available in Hardcover, eBook, and Audio Editions



FOR BOOK CLUBS THAT LOVED *BEFORE WE WERE YOURS*, *ORPHAN TRAIN*, AND *THE NIGHTINGALE*

Martha Hall Kelly
SUNFLOWER SISTERS: A NOVEL

Lilac Girls introduced readers to Caroline Ferriday. Now, Martha

Hall Kelly tells the story of Ferriday's ancestor Georgeanna Woolsey, a Union nurse during the Civil War.

Ballantine Books | Available in Hardcover, eBook, Audio, and Large Print Editions



FOR BOOK CLUBS THAT LOVED *JESMYN WARD*, *YAA GYASI*, AND *CHINUA ACHEBE*

Imbolo Mbue
HOW BEAUTIFUL WE WERE: A NOVEL

From the celebrated author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Behold the Dreamers* comes a sweeping, wrenching story about the collision of a small African village and an American oil company.

Random House | Available in Hardcover, eBook, Audio, and Large Print Editions

cozy up

with

6 Perfect Picks for Book Clubs

Love your library, but hate the holds list?

Be the first to learn about the best new books from Penguin Random House.

Re@

BORROW. READ. REPEAT.

Sign up for our monthly insider eNewsletter, and be the first to learn about future bestsellers.

TinyUrl.com/BorrowReadRepeat

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest for recommendations on just-published and forthcoming books, book trailers, reviews, and more.

Find Us at BorrowReadRepeat.com



Make the most of your book club gatherings!

Check out our Book Club Brochures and Book Club Kits for title suggestions, discussion questions, recipes, playlists, and more!

TinyUrl.com/BRRKitsAndBrochures



Penguin Random House
LIBRARY MARKETING