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MAY 2021



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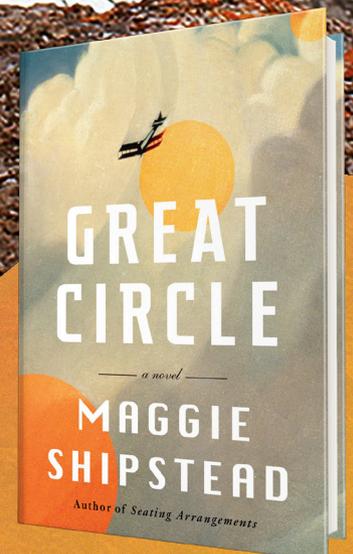
Time stands still in an ambitious new novel from award winner A.S. King

Delightful friend groups provide support and laughter in two romances

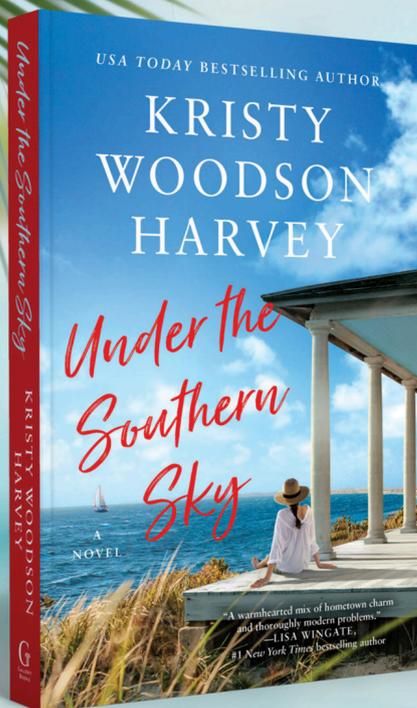
Far-flung

MAGGIE SHIPSTEAD

The travel writer and novelist takes readers around the world with a brilliant new book, *Great Circle*.



These beach-worthy books have your summer reading covered!



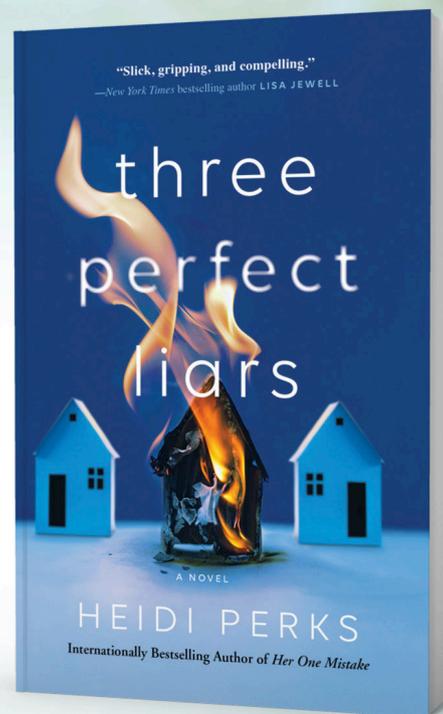
“A warm-hearted mix of hometown charm and the sort of thoroughly modern problems that bring us back to the people who know us.”

—LISA WINGATE,
#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Before We Were Yours*

“A slick, gripping, and compelling murder mystery, packed with complex female characters and modern dilemmas.

I couldn't put it down.”

—LISA JEWELL, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Family Upstairs*



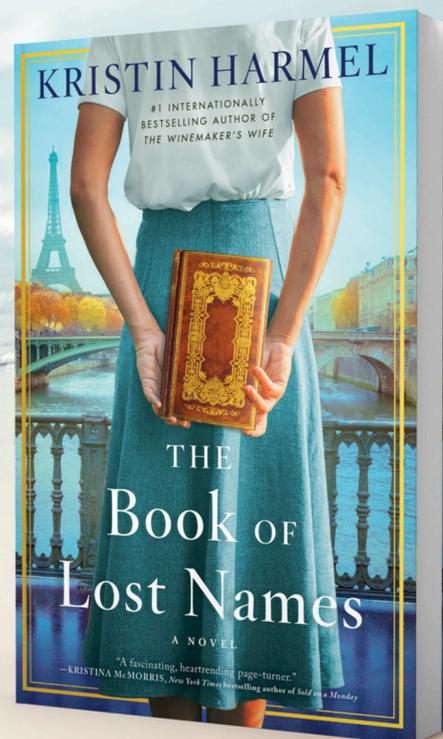
“I was immediately seduced by *Summer Darlings*...

This is one terrific summer read.”

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Cover photo courtesy of Maggie Shipstead. Shipstead is pictured in Svalbard, Norway.

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BUZZ
PICK
OF THE MONTH

Your Next Great Read

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INGRAM

And you thought your quarter-life crisis was bad

In Zen Cho's new fantasy novel, a ghost refuses to give up her grip on her living granddaughter.

At the beginning of Zen Cho's **Black Water Sister**, Jess Teoh moves back to Malaysia with her parents. The recent Harvard grad is struggling with typical post-college angst and also trying to figure out how to come out to her family (or if she should come out at all). But then the ghost of her grandmother, Ah Ma, starts talking to her, revealing that Ah Ma was a spirit medium devoted to a god called the Black Water Sister, and that she and the god intend to use Jess' body to get revenge on a local businessman from beyond the grave.

You're known for your historical fantasies. What drew you to *Black Water Sister's* contemporary setting?

I love historical settings, but I've also always wanted to write a novel about Malaysia, where I grew up, and the people I grew up among. **Black Water Sister's** protagonist, Jess, isn't me—her family and problems are different from mine—but in creating them, I drew a lot on my own life. And even though it's set in the 21st century, it's still in many ways a novel about history and how it shapes our present.

Jess is an unwilling and underpowered heroine. The idea of the reluctant hero is such an interesting one that's been done in so many different ways. Do you have any favorites from literature?

I've been rereading J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, which is an old favorite and a formative influence, and of course Frodo Baggins is a classic example of the underpowered hero who has a quest forced upon him. I think that's a big part of the lasting power of that book, this idea of small hands moving the wheels of the world. The journey from being or feeling powerless to finding your power has an immediate relatability that makes it a very compelling narrative for a storyteller to draw on.

How do you think Jess' life might have been different if Ah Ma hadn't spoken to her?

The book starts with Ah Ma saying to Jess, "Does your mother know you're a pengkid?"—*pengkid* being a Malay slang term for tomboy or lesbian. Jess' journey brings her to the point where she can give the answer that she needs to give. If Ah Ma had never spoken to her, I like to think that Jess would someday find the courage within herself to give that answer, but it might have taken a much longer time.

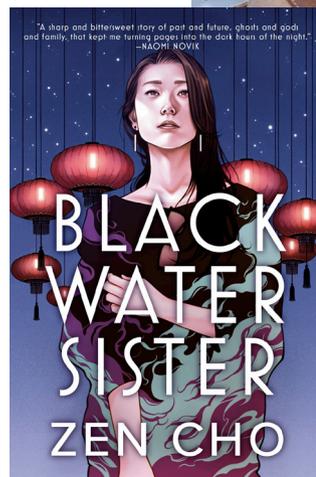
This book features gods both major and minor, real and created. What drew you to writing about a "small" god (one of your own creation) instead of one of the "big" gods?

What interests me about histories and stories and places is often the specific, the local—the small, if you like. What isn't generalizable to other places and peoples. For example, probably my favorite Malaysian gods are the Datuk Kong, local guardian spirits who are primarily worshipped by the Chinese community but who themselves may be Malay-Muslim, Orang Asal (Indigenous) or from some other ethnic background or faith tradition. If you pray to a Datuk Kong at a specific shrine, you won't necessarily find that Datuk Kong anywhere else. A helpful Datuk Kong features in the book.

I wanted the Black Water Sister to be a god that was similar in scale, a god who is very much of her time and place. I was also conscious that in writing about spirit mediumship and the Taoist pantheon, I was writing about a living faith tradition. By making up a god, I was trying to put a respectful distance between the story I invented and the actual religious practices that inspired it.

Both the god and Ah Ma are incredibly strong, but they're also surprisingly weak if you know how to push them. What fascinated you about supernatural forces that are simultaneously so powerful yet so weak?

The three main women in **Black Water Sister**—the god, Ah Ma and Jess—function as images of one another. So in the same way that Jess is weak but has strengths that neither she nor the god and Ah Ma initially suspect, the god and Ah Ma are strong but also weak in ways that Jess and the reader discover over the course of the book. Part of the reason why it's important for the god and Ah Ma to have weaknesses is that, even though they're Jess' adversaries, they're also bound to and dependent on Jess. One of the book's major themes is interdependency—what responsibility do you owe those to whom you are connected by blood or circumstance?



Black Water Sister
Ace, \$17, 9780425283431

Fantasy

whole worldview that excludes any belief drawing from any alternative faith tradition. But that doesn't actually match the reality in a multicultural society like Malaysia.

My aim wasn't to suggest that any one vision of the world is the correct one but to represent that diversity of belief that exists within families and communities and even individuals. As a Chinese Christian, for example, you may still revere your deceased relatives, in accordance with the Chinese tradition of ancestor worship. I suppose some people would say that is wrong, but when it comes to this sort of thing, I'm much more interested in what *is* than what should be.

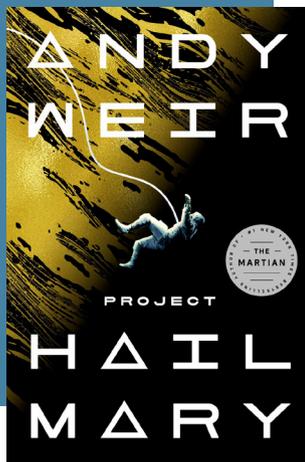
In a recent Twitter thread you talked about your love of Tolkien and the importance of good food writing in epic fantasy. There are some memorable moments with food in *Black Water Sister*. Why do you think great fantasies often feature great food?

My favorite books tend to combine the sublime with the mundane. Fantasy is a great vehicle for that because it's capable of conveying a sense of the numinous—the inscrutable, the magical, the extraordinary—while also being attentive to the small details of everyday life, like what meals the characters are having.

—Laura Hubbard



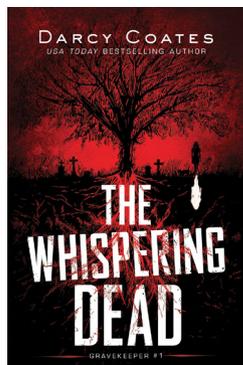
Visit BookPage.com to read our starred review of *Black Water Sister* and an extended version of this Q&A.



★ Project Hail Mary

No author is better than Andy Weir at taking a concept that could be boring on paper (molecular biology) and turning it into a hilarious, engrossing and accessible piece of hard sci-fi. **Project Hail Mary** (Ballantine, \$28.99, 9780593135204) is another intense space puzzle for science nerds and mainstream thrill-seekers alike. Ryland Grace wakes up on a small spaceship with amnesia, unsure of why he's there, what he's meant to do or even what his name is. He begins to recall a mission sparked by alien life near the sun, a mission that may have existential importance for the human race.

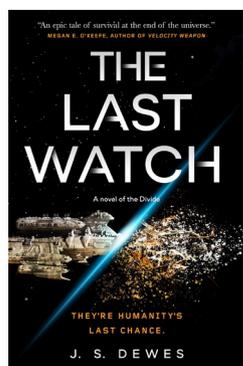
Ryland must survive long enough to find a way to save the world using only his mind and the resources aboard the spaceship. Weir's inquisitive and hilarious, optimistic yet deadpan voice carries this book from the very first page. This cosmic mystery plays out with the same joyous attention to detail—and poignant philosophical questions about the nature of self-discovery and human ingenuity—found in Weir's beloved debut, *The Martian*. It's just so gosh-darn hopeful; one can't help but smile the whole way through.



The Whispering Dead

Darcy Coates will have you gripping the covers with the immediately entertaining **The Whispering Dead** (Poisoned Pen, \$14.99, 9781728239217). Keira awakens in a dreary forest without her memory, hunted by unknown men and desperate for answers. After taking refuge near a cemetery, she discovers that she can hear the whispers of the dead coming from among the gravestones. Now she's on a mission to find out who she is, why she's being followed and how she can bring peace to the ghosts that haunt the town of Blighty. In one of the strongest starts to any book I've

read this year, **The Whispering Dead** instantly pulls the reader into the horrors Keira encounters. Coates also includes many lighter moments and hilarious quips, so there's plenty to enjoy here beyond the spooks and scares.



★ The Last Watch

J.S. Dewes' **The Last Watch** (Tor, \$18.99, 9781250236340) is a high-energy thrill ride at the edge of space featuring a crew of miscreants racing against time aboard an ancient spaceship. A great concept with an even better execution, this is a sci-fi space opera for readers looking to dial up the excitement. The *Argus*, a spacecraft parked at the rim of a vast, empty space anomaly known only as the Divide, serves as the last protection for humanity against the great unknown. The crew, made up of bottom-of-the-barrel military has-beens, would be content to serve

out their time in relative peace. But when the Divide starts expanding, swallowing up the known galaxy, the crew of the *Argus* must find a way to stop it before the universe is completely engulfed. A strong, straightforward concept anchors a fun cast of characters that always seems to have a quip or a retort ready to go. With its "Battlestar Galactica" meets "Game of Thrones" tone, **The Last Watch** is a delight.

Chris Pickens is a Nashville-based fantasy and sci-fi superfan who loves channeling his enthusiasm into reviews of the best new books the genre has to offer.

Oh, baby!

Of pregnancy and peril

In these two thrillers, one group of women is committed to remaining childfree, while the other focuses on impending motherhood. But when support transforms into sabotage, who can the women trust with their lives?

Ah, to be young, carefree and self-righteous, like Sheila Heller and her college friends Dina, Naama and Ronit in Sarah Blau's **The Others** (Mulholland, \$28, 9780316460873), translated from the Hebrew by Daniella Zamir. The four women became fast friends after meeting in a freshman year Bible course at Tel Aviv's Bar-Ilan University, dubbing themselves the Others and making an earnest vow: "We're not like the rest . . . like all the students eager to get married during senior year, start having babies and settle down; we're going to steer our own destinies."

Twenty years on, the women's lives have taken disparate paths. Narrator Sheila is an instructor at the Bible Museum; Ronit is an actor; sweet Naama has been dead for many years; and acid-tongued Dina, a famous feminist scholar, has been murdered, found with the word "mother" carved into her forehead and a baby doll glued to her hands. It's horrifying, but even more so, Sheila muses, because in death Dina was forced to become what she railed against for so long.

Squirrely police detective Micha Yarden presses Sheila to figure out who hated Dina enough to kill her, and Blau smoothly moves the story back and forth in time as Sheila tantalizingly reveals what led to the group's separation. Fascinating parallels between the Others and childless women in the Bible abound, adding yet another layer of social commentary to a compelling and often disturbing narrative.

Is Sheila the culprit, the next victim or some combination thereof? **The Others** will keep readers guessing as it considers the damaging effects of societal pressure, unresolved resentment and lingering guilt.

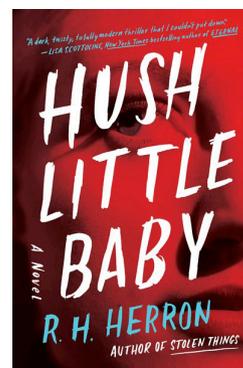
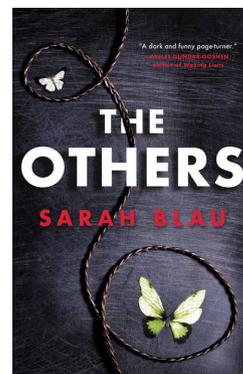
There's pregnancy brain, and then there's what Dr. Jillian Marsh experiences in R.H. Herron's **Hush Little Baby** (Dutton, \$27, 9780593183496). Jillian is an OB-GYN, so she knows all about the hormonal changes and frustrating forgetfulness that pregnancy can bring, but this feels different. Her secure, alarm-protected home in Venice Beach, California, is besieged by a host of strange noises, disturbing smells and items mysteriously missing or moved.

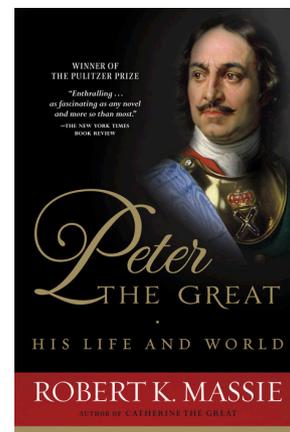
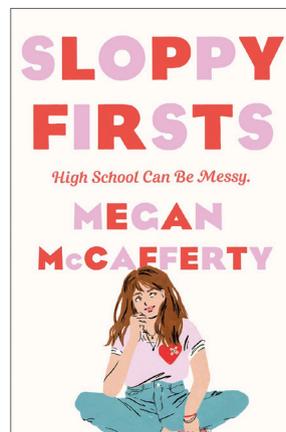
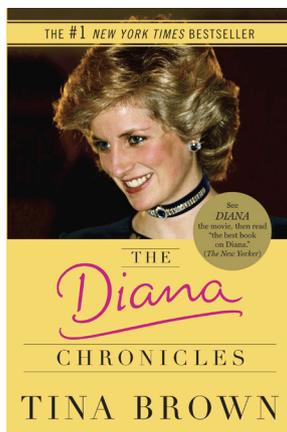
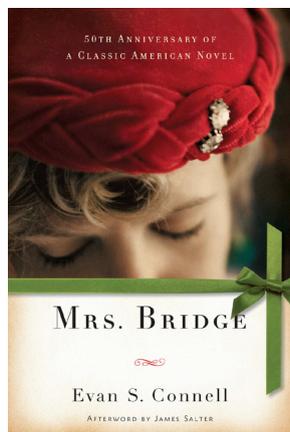
Jillian turns to her moms' group for help. Formed with three women she met through Alcoholics Anonymous, the group named itself the Ripleys after "the protagonist of the Alien movies. . . . We wanted to emulate her, not mommy bloggers." They set out to uncover who could be gaslighting Jillian and why.

Could it be Jillian's unfaithful estranged wife, Rochelle, angling for full custody? Or even Jillian herself, suffering from the aftereffects of her traumatic teen years? Skepticism from her friends and the police increases Jillian's self-doubt and leads to conflicts among the Ripleys.

A wild series of twists takes center stage as Herron's carefully crafted suspense turns into something else altogether, spinning the story in a terrifying new direction. Readers who are drawn to creepy tension and shocking sequences will revel in **Hush Little Baby**, even as they join the characters in taking a harder look at what pregnancy and motherhood offer to and demand from women.

—Linda M. Castelletto





The bookshelf meet cute

Of all the experiences we've craved over the last year, high among them is to spend an aimless afternoon browsing in a bookstore or library. When was the last time we thumbed through an overstuffed shelf and found ourselves nose-deep in a book we never would've expected? Here are five books we've stumbled across and ended up loving.

The Big Rewind

When a novel is described as “Raymond Chandler meets Nick Hornby,” you expect a certain kind of book. So I might’ve picked up Libby Cudmore’s debut looking for a hard-boiled music mystery, but instead I found myself bopping along to a Gen-X cozy mystery, as wannabe music journalist Jett Bennett scrambles to solve the murder of her beloved neighbor, KitKat, and ends up digging into her own relationship history by way of a box of mixtapes. **The Big Rewind** has plenty of nostalgic 1980s and ’90s music references (The Smiths! Talking Heads! Cyndi Lauper!), a little bit of romance, some too-cool New Yorker griping and, best of all, the comforting arc of a cozy, in which there’s a murder but it’s barely the point. Because what *is* a murder investigation, anyway, but an investigation into yourself? (Or something like that.) This is a punk grandma of a book, and I think we can all agree there’s nothing cooler than punk grandmas.

—Cat, Deputy Editor

Mrs. Bridge

Evan S. Connell’s **Mrs. Bridge** was originally published in 1959, and since then it’s gained a reputation as an underrated masterpiece. In 2012, the *Guardian* called it an “overlooked classic.” In 2020, Lit Hub called it a “perfect novel.” Meg Wolitzer and James Patterson have praised it in the *New York Times* and on NPR—but I didn’t know any of that when I checked it out from the library. As I dug into this strange, engrossing novel about an utterly conventional Kansas City housewife, I didn’t know what to expect. India Bridge’s life moves steadily by, with rare flashes of the extraordinary. Other characters experiment and act out, but Mrs. Bridge only occasionally flirts with action before deciding to stay the course of her conformist, upper-middle class, conservative way of life. If that sounds boring, it isn’t—but it’s difficult to explain why not. Connell’s keen insight into the mind of this mid-century woman is compelling, moving and ultimately masterful.

—Christy, Associate Editor

The Diana Chronicles

For the absolute life of me, I could not tell you why or how my middle school-aged self picked up a copy of Tina Brown’s seminal, dishy biography of the late Princess Diana. Perhaps I wanted a more modern princess after my umpteenth reread of every Royal Diaries book. What I do remember is that I inhaled this book with the rapture of a sheltered young history buff who had never encountered media more dramatic than a Disney Channel Original Movie. Brown, who covered and commented upon Diana’s life while serving as editor-in-chief of *Tatler* and then *Vanity Fair*, tells Diana’s story with witty relish and juicy details galore. But under all the tabloid fizz, Brown also paints a refreshingly complicated portrait of her iconic subject. Her Diana is not a sainted martyr or a hysteric with a victim complex, but a woman trying to vanquish her inner demons, who is on the verge of finding equilibrium when her life is cut unfairly short.

—Savanna, Associate Editor

Sloppy Firsts

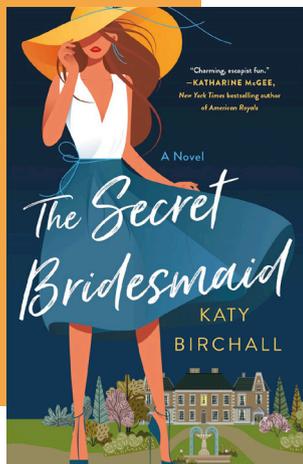
Fall 2001, suburban New Jersey. I was 15, a sophomore in high school. My best friend had moved across the country over the summer, and the twin towers had come down on the fifth day of school. It’s almost always a weird time to be a teenager, but that year felt like an especially weird time. And then, on a shelf in the little bookstore next to the ShopRite, a lime green spine caught my eye. Jessica Darling, Megan McCafferty’s heroine, was also a sophomore in suburban New Jersey whose best friend had just moved away. (“I guess your move wasn’t a sign of the Y2K teen angst apocalypse after all,” Jessica writes to her in the letter that opens the book.) It felt like a sign. McCafferty’s funny, heartbreaking, often profane and deeply honest novel, in which Jessica grieves her friendship, grapples with mental illness and even falls in love, was exactly the book I needed at that moment to make 15 feel a little less weird.

—Stephanie, Associate Editor

Peter the Great

I could have chosen any biography of a European leader to read for my college history class. Why I decided to go for a 1,000-page book about a Russian czar that was written before I could walk has been lost to time, but the ripple effect has been huge. Robert K. Massie won the Pulitzer for this biography, and his deep understanding of his curious, mercurial subject and 17th-century Russia made me feel like I knew Peter personally. That’s probably why I peppered my conversations with anecdotes about him for weeks. (Your dorm room is too small? Peter’s cabin was only about 700 square feet, and his bedroom was barely large enough for him to lie down! Hate your boyfriend’s beard? Take a cue from Peter and tell him if he enters your presence wearing one, you’ll rip it out!) In the years since, I’ve read the book twice more, as well as everything else Massie has ever published, and have found each of his books as immersive.

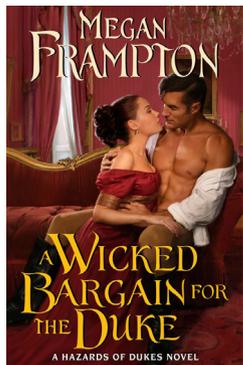
—Trisha, Publisher



★ The Secret Bridesmaid

The Secret Bridesmaid (Griffin, \$16.99, 9781250795793) by Katy Birchall provides charming entertainment, British rom-com style. In a breezy first-person voice, the narrator (Sophie Breeze, ha!) relates her adventures as a professional bridesmaid—or rather, an incognito wedding planner for brides who want to claim they organized their own nuptials. As Sophie embarks on her most high-profile gig yet, emails, voicemails and texts offer hilarious snapshots of the problems she tackles and

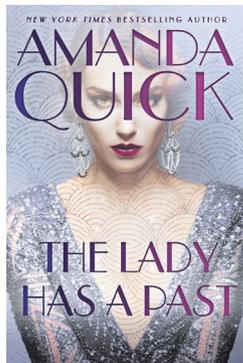
the solutions she devises. The bride is horrid, her brother is an attractive and good-natured dreamboat, and their aristocratic circle is way out of Sophie's league, but it's impossible not to root for her to win the day—and the guy. This kisses-only romance is a pure delight that will leave a smile on readers' faces and in their hearts.



A Wicked Bargain for the Duke

An aristocrat seeking a particular kind of duchess discovers the perfect woman for him instead in **A Wicked Bargain for the Duke** (Avon, \$7.99, 9780063023086) by Megan Frampton. In this third installment of the Hazards of Dukes series, the new Duke of Hasford, Thaddeus, has decided to do his duty by finding a wife and conceiving an heir. Lady Jane Capel appears perfect for him—beautiful and biddable—but he can't look away from her fiery sister, Lavinia. When circumstances force them to marry (a popular trope), the two strike a bargain that

is undermined by their growing feelings for each other and Lavinia's scandalous secret occupation as a novelist. Readers will fall for the likable, laudable Thaddeus and Lavinia as they fall for each other, discovering the joys of the marriage bed through several scorching love scenes. There are compelling secondary characters and a lot of romantic satisfaction in this sweet happily ever after.



The Lady Has a Past

Travel to 1930s Southern California in Amanda Quick's **The Lady Has a Past** (Berkley, \$27, 9781984806888). The latest Burning Cove romance begins with newbie investigator Lyra Brazier on the hunt for her boss, Raina, who has mysteriously left town. Lyra teams up with private eye Simon Cage, and by posing as newlyweds, the pair infiltrates the exclusive hotel and spa where Raina was last seen. Simon is a good man for Lyra to have at her side as the mystery and danger grow. Not only is he wildly attractive, but he also possesses a paranormal gift for

uncovering secrets. But for all his expertise, Simon is new to the ways of the heart, and his transformation from man above the emotional fray to dedicated lover is delicious. Stylish and sophisticated, **The Lady Has a Past** is pure fun spiced with spine-tingling suspense. Vile villains, clever characters and a glamorous desert resort setting all come together to provide a great escape. This romantic mystery is a first-rate example of Quick's expertise at spinning an enthralling tale.

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

With friends like these

Complex and delightful friend groups ground two new romances in warts-and-all reality.

Looking for love means putting your best foot forward. But as guarded as we are with romantic prospects, we open ourselves wholeheartedly to the friends who love us exactly as we are. By showcasing strong friend groups, two romances offer a glimpse into their characters' truest, facades-down, flaws-exposed selves.

In Kris Ripper's **The Hate Project** (Carina Adores, \$14.99, 9781335509178), Oscar Nelson and his friends have been fixtures in each other's lives since college, providing encouragement, nagging, excessive emojis and unconditional love. These are all things that Oscar needs badly, given the powerful, pervasive anxiety that threatens to crush him when he loses his miserable customer service job and must find another gig.

A temporary reprieve comes when Jack hires Oscar to clean out his grandmother's house. Jack's late grandfather was a hoarder, so this is no easy task. It's potentially awkward as well, as Jack and Oscar have never really gotten along. And since Jack and Oscar slept together that one time, well . . .

This story, if you'll pardon the pun, has a lot of unpacking to do. Ripper digs deep into Oscar's issues, depicting them with such uncompromising starkness that readers may have trouble envisioning how he will come out on the other side. Ripper also devotes time to Jack's issues, since he's got his own burdens to carry.

Ripper methodically reveals that nearly every character has had to work hard to get where they are—even the sunniest character, Jack's irrepressible grandmother, Evelyn. While **The Hate Project** depicts a lot of struggle, including a realistic amount of backsliding, it also

showcases lovely moments of hope, steadfastly suggesting that troubles can be overcome with loyal friends.

The friendship group in **Just Last Night** (William Morrow, \$15.99, 9780063036857) faces a challenge that's far more abrupt—painfully so. Three 30-somethings who've been tightly wound into each other's lives since they were teenagers are forced to grapple with a sudden death among their ranks.

Eve, Ed and Justin are wrecked at the loss of their fourth, Suzie. But their bond is further undermined when Eve discovers that, 10 years

ago, Suzie had a one-night stand with Ed, whom Eve has been hopelessly, silently in love with for years. This revelation causes Eve to reevaluate both the relationships that define her and those she'd written off, including her connection with Suzie's gorgeous estranged brother, Finlay. He and Eve grow closer as she sorts through the impact of the past on her present.

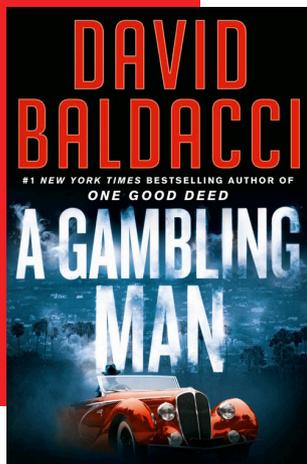
With complex subjects and complicated characters, Mhairi McFarlane's unflinchingly honest romances often go where other authors fear to tread. The turmoil and heartache in

Just Last Night feel visceral and real. A scene that describes a character's experience of childhood abuse carries a lot of weight and is particularly difficult to read.

But McFarlane's romances are always worth the journey. With warmth, humor and humanity, they stir such deep empathy and engagement that you won't just watch the characters' cathartic experiences; you'll feel them. Likewise, you won't just admire this friend group; you'll feel like you're a part of it, and that you're all the better for it.

—Elizabeth Mazer

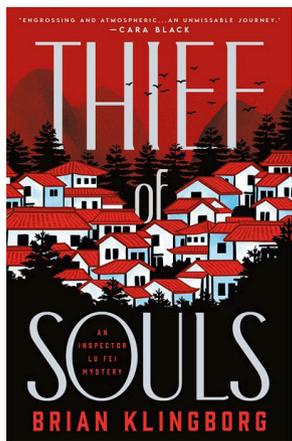




A Gambling Man

To be known by only one name lends a certain *je ne sais quoi* to the stature of a hard-boiled PI. It has worked well for Andrew Vachss' dark avenger Burke and Robert B. Parker's sybaritic strongman Spenser, and it works just fine for David Baldacci's mononymous sleuth Archer. It doesn't hurt that Archer's second outing, the 1949-set **A Gambling Man** (Grand Central, \$29, 9781538719671), takes place during the gumshoe golden age, when men smoked "Luckies," drove luxurious European roadsters and were pursued by women of ravier wit. Archer is an ex-con, so some shenanigans are required to obtain a license to ply his trade in his new home of California. The ink isn't even dry on said license before he's assigned his first case, an extortion attempt on a mayoral candidate in the seaside community of Bay Town. Then an alluring chanteuse who was connected to the case is brutally murdered. It will not be the last death to rock Bay Town, and the newly minted PI's mettle will truly be tested. Baldacci establishes bona fides for

this historical mystery with great delicacy, deftly navigating the cliché minefield and giving his readers a sense of the milieu without drowning them in minutiae. He delivers a cracking good suspense novel in the process.

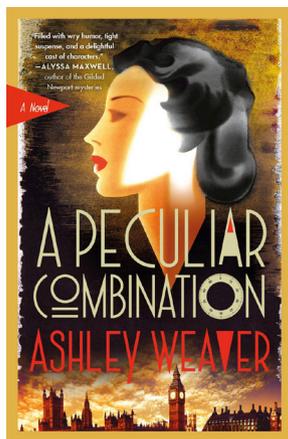


Thief of Souls

Brian Klingborg's **Thief of Souls** (Minotaur, \$27.99, 9781250779052) features one of the best opening sentences I have ever read in a mystery: "On the night the young woman's corpse is discovered, hollowed out like a birchbark canoe, Inspector Lu Fei sits alone in the Red Lotus bar, determined to get gloriously drunk." Lu Fei is a deputy police chief in Raven Valley, a backwater township in northeast China, close to the North Korean border. Not much happens in Raven Valley as a rule, but that somnolence is about to be upended. Almost immediately after the victim is discovered, a suspect is identified: a wannabe boyfriend whose phone yields surreptitious photos of the young woman and whose job in a meatpacking plant would afford him access to the sort of surgical knife that was used to eviscerate her. The city police officer called in to take over the investigation wants a quick solution to the case and is perfectly willing to let the "boyfriend" fit that bill. But Lu has doubts, and he conducts a quiet side investigation that turns up additional unsolved killings with the same *modus operandi*. Politics and turf wars ensue as Klingborg, who has lived and worked in Asia, peppers the story with narrative detours into Chinese history and pertinent commentary from the likes of Confucius, Mao Zedong and other Chinese philosophical luminaries. This auspicious mystery begs for a sequel. Please let it be soon.

operandi. Politics and turf wars ensue as Klingborg, who has lived and worked in Asia, peppers the story with narrative detours into Chinese history and pertinent commentary from the likes of Confucius, Mao Zedong and other Chinese philosophical luminaries. This auspicious mystery begs for a sequel. Please let it be soon.

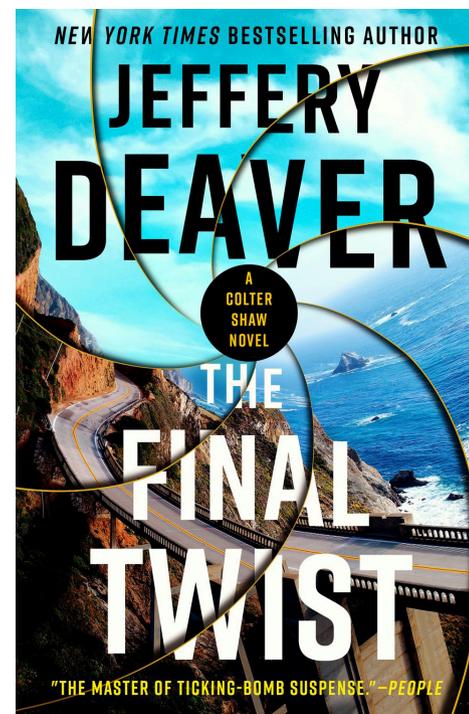
Sign up for our mystery newsletter at BookPage.com/enews.



A Peculiar Combination

The title of Ashley Weaver's series starter, **A Peculiar Combination** (Minotaur, \$26.99, 9781250780485), is a sly reference to the main character's occupation as an opener of locked boxes—and more specifically, locked boxes that do not belong to her. Set in London during World War II, the novel opens as Electra McDonnell, safecracker extraordinaire, and her mentor, Uncle Mick, get nabbed in a sting operation set up by a British spy agency. They'll be given a Get Out of Jail Free card if they participate in a government-sanctioned safe heist in which some phony sensitive papers will be substituted for the real documents, thus misleading the Nazis. It all goes hopelessly awry when they arrive at the scene of the would-be crime and discover the safe is wide open, its owner dead on the floor. In the wake of this failure, Electra finds herself in the unusual (for her) position of wanting to see the operation through to its conclusion, even though she's been freed from her contract with the government. In for a penny, in for a pound and all that. It's a lighter read than many a mystery with the same

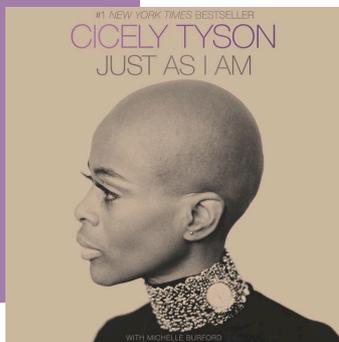
setting, but **A Peculiar Combination** delivers the requisite suspense and misdirection that will keep the hard-boiled crowd on board as well.



★ The Final Twist

Jeffery Deaver's latest thriller **The Final Twist** (Putnam, \$28, 9780525539131) lives up to its name admirably, even delivering said twist on the very last page of the book. (Don't cheat by looking at the ending.) Main character Colter Shaw could scarcely be more different from Deaver's famous sleuth, the brilliant forensic consultant Lincoln Rhyme. Colter is a mountaineer and a survivalist; he's action-oriented where Rhyme is cerebral. And unlike Rhyme, who works closely with law enforcement, if Colter has to bend the law to serve his ends, he will do it without remorse. He supports himself by finding missing people and collecting the reward money. His life's mission, however, is finishing his late father's work and destroying BlackBridge, a mercenary corporation that has been distributing drugs in a San Francisco neighborhood to drive down property values so they can swoop in and purchase tracts for pennies on the dollar. Shaw strongly suspects that BlackBridge had a hand in his father's "accidental" death, and he means to dispense some Old West-style justice once he finds out the truth. A couple of subplots, one involving Colter's long-lost brother and another centered on a legal document from a century ago that may have a breathtaking impact on modern-day California politics, flesh out the main narrative, distracting the reader until Deaver wallops them with the shocking final page.

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.



★ Just as I Am

The late Cicely Tyson was more than an actor; she was a titan who enthralled her audience. In her memoir, **Just as I Am** (HarperAudio, 16 hours), Tyson lays out the whole of her life—including her turbulent relationship with her mother and her fraught marriage to musician Miles Davis—with unflinching honesty and hard-earned wisdom. Award-winning audiobook narrator

Robin Miles performs the majority of the book, bringing the same warmth and depth of characterization that she brought to the audiobooks for Isabel Wilkerson’s *The Warmth of Other Suns* and *Caste*. But Tyson steals the show with her generous introduction, the fire in her spirit burning brightly.

—Deborah Mason

Firekeeper’s Daughter

In Angeline Boulley’s YA novel, **Firekeeper’s Daughter** (Macmillan Audio, 14 hours), 18-year-old Daunis shoulders the burden of exposing the corruption in the nearby Ojibwe community. With a low voice and even tone, Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota actor Isabella Star LaBlanc imbues small acts and observations with a meaningful, ominous feeling, ensuring listeners will pay full attention to every detail as they instinctively sense that danger is near.

—Autumn Allen

★ The Sum of Us

An examination of racial inequity in America might not be the most obvious audiobook choice for your next road trip, but to write **The Sum of Us** (Random House Audio, 11 hours), Heather McGhee traveled across the country to understand the roots of white America’s zero-sum attitude and how this mistaken belief system damages everyone. Listeners can hear McGhee’s despair as she describes the devastation caused by predatory housing lenders, as well as her hopefulness when she discusses coalitions succeeding in confronting voter suppression.

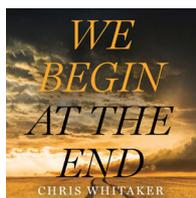
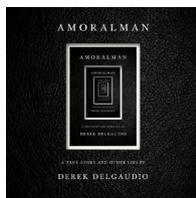
—Norah Piehl



AMORALMAN

A sleight-of-hand master whose hit one-man Broadway show, *In & of Itself*, is now a movie, David DelGaudio offers a memoir like no other in **AMORALMAN: A True Story and Other Lies** (Random House Audio, 5.5 hours). As both author and narrator, DelGaudio is a captivating storyteller who brings weight to his experiences amid the dubious world of con artists.

—Anna Zeitlin

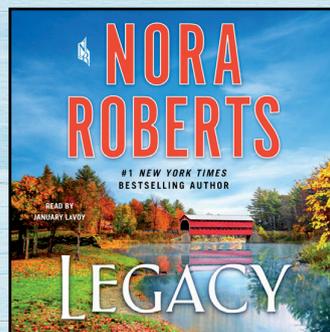


We Begin at the End

Part crime drama and part coming-of-age tale, **We Begin at the End** (Macmillan Audio, 10.5 hours) centers on three characters whose tragic stories become entwined in “a spiderweb of hurt.” American actor George Newbern’s clear, unhurried narration proves to be the ideal match for British author Chris Whitaker’s lyricism and layered plotting, evoking a deep sense of angst, tragedy and ultimately hope.

—G. Robert Frazier

Spring Listening



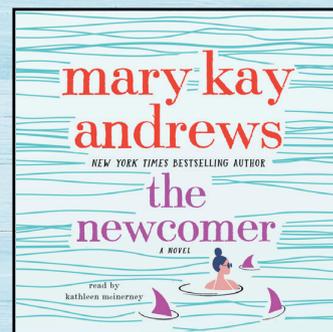
READ BY JANUARY LAVOY

“Roberts once again offers a master class in storytelling.”

—Booklist on *Hideaway*

“January LaVoy gives a gripping performance.”

—AudioFile on *Under Currents*

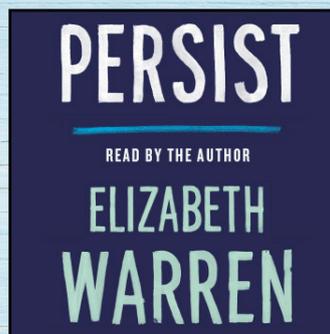


READ BY KATHLEEN MCINERNEY

“This entertaining narration by Kathleen McInerney will engage listeners craving a contemporary mystery....

McInerney captures the story’s colorful characters and themes.”

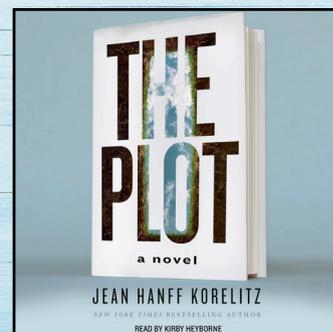
—AudioFile on *The High Tide Club*



READ BY THE AUTHOR

“Senator Elizabeth Warren narrates her new audiobook on the state of the nation with passion and conviction....Warren is a natural behind the mic, allowing listeners to feel her anger and share in her humor.”

—AudioFile on *This Fight is Our Fight*



READ BY KIRBY HEYBORNE

“The suspense quotient is through the roof. It’s remarkable.”

—Stephen King



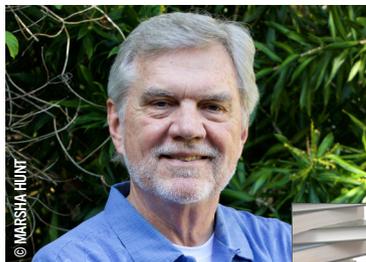
READ BY THE AUTHOR

In this sweeping debut, Asha Bromfield takes listeners to the heart of Jamaica and into the soul of a girl coming to terms with her family.

FROM MACMILLAN AUDIO

Building the book business

Behind one of the most influential book companies you've probably never heard of



We know authors and agents, publishers and printers, libraries and bookstores—but there's one company responsible for bringing just about every book you've ever read into your life, and you may not even know it exists. In **The Family Business** (West Margin, \$24.99, 9781513267210), author and journalist Keel Hunt charts the history and contributions of Ingram Content Group, a family-owned business based in Tennessee that has shaped the publishing world for 50 years. We asked Hunt a few questions about Ingram, its role in the industry and its vision for the future.

Ingram's role in the publishing business is relatively invisible to the general reader. What gaps does Ingram fill for publishers, libraries and retailers?

Basically, Ingram helps publishers, bookstores and libraries by providing essential services that enable publishers to do business in all their modern markets. For many years, Ingram performed a classic middleman function as a distributor of print books, but today, executives at Ingram describe their job in terms of getting content to its destination—that is, from the publishers who curate and own the content of books to entities that provide it to readers. This frees up publishers to do their most essential work: finding great content.

Sometimes it's easy for readers to forget the business machine that lies behind the art of literature. What do you think readers should know about Ingram?

Ingram has always been a family-owned business, and it grew from a handful of employees to one of the largest media businesses in the world. Its innovations have carried not only Ingram but also the publishers, bookstores and libraries it serves into the digital age. One of my favorite lines in **The Family Business** is CEO John Ingram's early observation that the future was not going to be "either/or"—as to whether print or digital books would carry the day—but "either/and,"

with both digital and print formats available to serve consumers' needs and preferences.

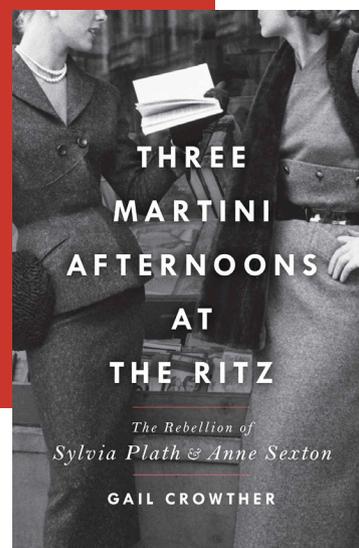
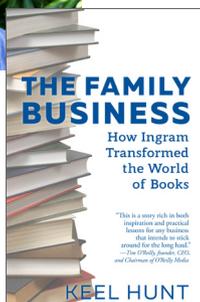
You have written two books about Tennessee politics and have worked as a reporter. How did that work inform this book?

Ever since my earliest days as a news reporter, I have loved to write about original characters and how they navigated tough situations. That's certainly been the case with my previous books about politics and government (*Coup* and *Crossing the Aisle*). Some of the best stories in our culture—take Walter Isaacson's biography of Steve Jobs or Andrew Ross Sorkin's *Too Big to Fail*—are about choices that business leaders have made in their own environments. **The Family Business** has all these ingredients.

If there's one thing your book proves, it's that Ingram has always been a forward-thinking company. What are they doing today that will affect the reader experience in the future?

I suspect only a few people know how Ingram is helping our nation—and the world—navigate day to day through the COVID-19 pandemic. Looking further ahead, it will be fun to see what comes next from this innovative business, and how it will serve our culture and the world.

—Trisha Ping



Three-Martini Afternoons at the Ritz

Though their poetry, personalities and lives were vastly different, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton are inextricably bound in the public imagination. Just a few years apart in age and hailing from the same Massachusetts town, these two poets pushed boundaries in their highly confessional work. Additionally, the fact that both women died by suicide fuels their legacies.

Plath and Sexton did know each other, though not well. In 1959, shortly before Plath moved to En-

gland, the two women attended a Boston writing workshop led by Robert Lowell. After class, they would convene at the bar of the Ritz-Carlton to talk poetry and, one presumes, share some intimate details from their lives. These undocumented, informal gabfests provide the thin thread with which Plath scholar Gail Crowther connects the pair in **Three-Martini Afternoons at the Ritz** (Gallery, \$28, 9781982138394), her thoroughly engrossing examination of these two disparate, talented and troubled poetic geniuses.

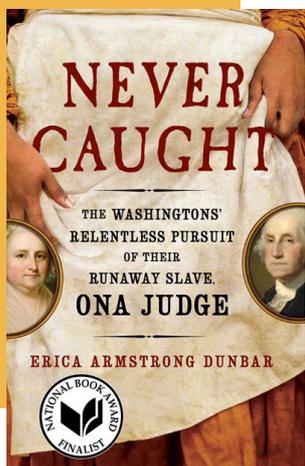
Crowther synthesizes Plath's and Sexton's individual stories into a seamless narrative. Many details will be familiar to die-hard acolytes of either or both poets—the bouts of mental illness and failure of psychiatric treatments, the turbulent marriages and sexual indiscretions, the unyielding resistance they encountered when they dared to play by their own rules—but Crowther's clever integration of these two lives reveals the strong connections between them in new and surprising ways. For example, she rightly identifies both women as rebels who fearlessly pushed against

social constraints before second-wave feminism made it more acceptable for women to bare the truth about their inner conflicts, contradictions and sexuality.

Crowther also searches for the differences between how Plath and Sexton conducted their lives—as daughters, wives, mothers and poets. Although the contrast between the orderly Plath and the wild-spirited Sexton could at times be dramatic (a difference that plays out in their poetic voices as well), there is a shared poignancy in the personal struggles these women experienced.

Since there was no fly on the wall during those martini-soaked afternoons at the Ritz, we, like Crowther, can only surmise what was said. And with little evidence to draw on beyond a few passing comments in diaries and letters, and one poem Sexton wrote after Plath's death, Crowther perhaps speculates a bit too much about what each of these women may or may not have thought of the other. Despite this leap, she makes a convincing case that the ripple effects of Plath's and Sexton's not-so-quiet rebellions are still being felt. "Plath and Sexton are still with us," she writes near the end of this passionate and affecting study, "agitating with their voices, exposing all those wrongs that still exist, and all those universal themes that will never go away: love, death, sex, pain, joy."

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.



What you wish you'd learned in school

Erica Armstrong Dunbar illuminates the life of a freedom fighter in **Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge** (37 Ink, \$16.99, 9781501126413). Born into enslavement in Mount Vernon, Virginia, Ona Judge moved with George and Martha Washington to Philadelphia, where, under Pennsylvania law, enslaved people were to be freed after six months—an edict Washington flouted. When Judge fled the Washington household, she became the

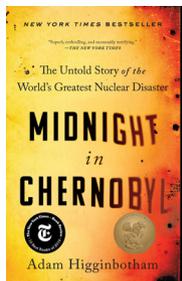
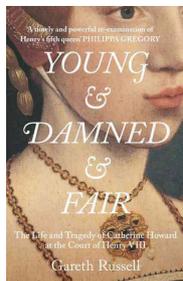
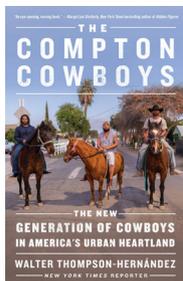
center of a protracted search. Books clubs may view Washington in a new light after reading Dunbar's revealing narrative, which also explores social justice, gender and notions of heroism.

In **The Compton Cowboys: The New Generation of Cowboys in America's Urban Heartland** (William Morrow, \$16.99, 9780062910615), Walter Thompson-Hernández tells the remarkable story of the Compton, California, ranch where local youngsters have the opportunity to learn firsthand about the long history of America's Black cowboys. The narrative focuses on a core group of characters, including single mother Keiara, who hopes to win a rodeo championship. A lively blend of reportage and history, the book provides a fundamental new perspective on the concept of the American cowboy and its legacy within the Black community.

These terrific titles shed new light on fascinating figures and monumental moments that have shaped our world today.

Gareth Russell's **Young and Damned and Fair: The Life of Catherine Howard, Fifth Wife of King Henry VIII** (Simon & Schuster, \$20, 9781501108648) provides fresh insight into the life of Catherine Howard, whose brief reign as queen of England ended when she was charged with treason and executed. Too often a side character in the story of her husband, Catherine is given new depth and dimension in Russell's narrative, which focuses on her innermost circle and explores the court intrigue that brought about her end. Rich in detail and talking points, including Tudor politics and the role of aristocratic women in the 16th century, this compelling biography is a can't-miss pick.

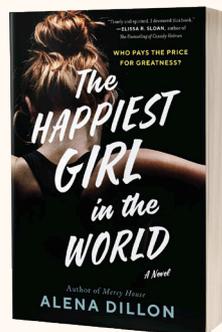
In **Midnight in Chernobyl: The Untold Story of the World's Greatest Nuclear Disaster** (Simon & Schuster, \$19, 9781501134630), Adam Higginbotham delves into the mysteries behind the 1986 explosion at the Chernobyl atomic energy station. The Soviet government tried to cover up the truth about the catastrophe, which sent radioactive clouds across parts of the Soviet Union and Europe. Incorporating newly available archival material and extensive interviews, Higginbotham pieces together the events that led to the accident and dispels the mythology that has since surrounded it in this darkly fascinating book.



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

BOOK CLUB READS FOR SUMMER



THE HAPPIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD by Alena Dillon

"A tender reflection on the importance of second chances, the ways in which both courage and cowardice can break a person, and what it takes to make yourself whole again."

—MEGHAN MACLEAN WEIR, author of *The Book of Essie*

MOTHER MAY I

by Joshilyn Jackson

"Chilling, thought-provoking, and hauntingly written, ... kept me on the edge of my seat with its breathless race against time. A true page-turner that will stick with me for a long time."

—MEGAN MIRANDA, bestselling author of *The Girl from Widow Hills*

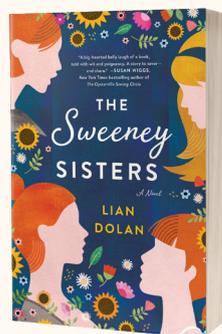


THE SWEENEY SISTERS

by Lian Dolan

"Family secrets, laughter and tears, shocking reveals, and an uplifting ending make this a story to savor—and share."

—SUSAN WIGGS, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Lost and Found Bookshop*

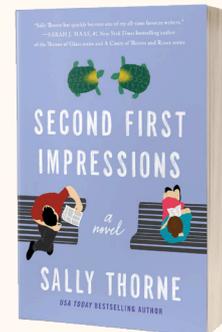


SECOND FIRST IMPRESSIONS

by Sally Thorne

"The warmest, coziest, sweetest book of the year, an absolutely perfect blend of humor and heart. I want to live inside Sally Thorne's brain."

—EMILY HENRY, bestselling author of *Beach Read*



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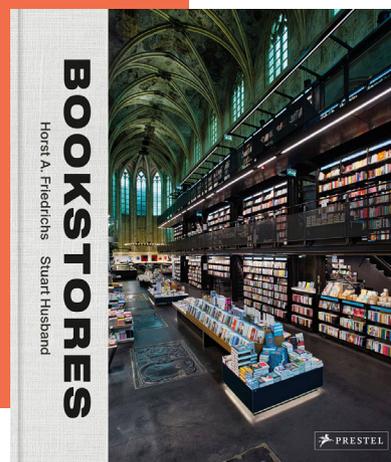


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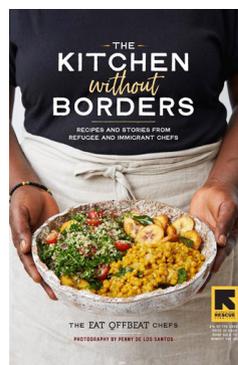
by susannah felts



★ Bookstores

For a bibliophile, it doesn't get any better than **Bookstores: A Celebration of Independent Booksellers** (Prestel, \$45, 9783791385815), a coffee-table stunner featuring images by London-based photographer Horst A. Friedrichs. With every turn of the page, you'll take a journey around the globe and through the stacks—from Spoonbill & Sugar-town in Brooklyn, New York, to the curious Baldwin's Book Barn in Pennsylvania, to idiosyncratic

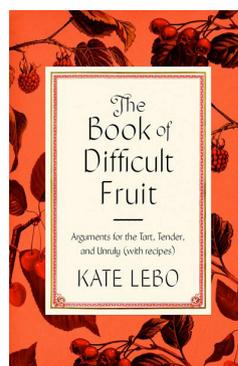
shops in the U.K., Germany, Austria and more. Along the way you'll meet the owners who have made bookselling their lives' work and art. They share how they came to the trade, what makes their shops unique and why the work—and the books themselves, of course—continues to matter so darn much in an age of, well, you know. I want to visit every single one of these bookstores, but that's probably a tall order. Just knowing they exist, and holding this gorgeous artifact in my hands, feels like enough.



The Kitchen Without Borders

The other night my husband fixed a delicious Syrian meal: ma'areena soup, a bit like pasta Bolognese but decidedly different thanks to a seven-spice blend common to Middle Eastern cooking. We found this dish in **The Kitchen Without Borders** (Workman, \$24.95, 9781523504046), a cookbook from Eat Offbeat, a New York City-based catering company that works with immigrant and refugee chefs. Eat Offbeat honors and shares the "special food memories our chefs have brought with them," write Wissam Kahi and Manal Kahi, Lebanese siblings who began

their careers with the simple wish to share their Syrian grandmother's hummus. The book features dishes from Iran, Iraq, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Venezuela and more. Profiles of the chefs appear between recipes for dishes such as fattoush, musabbaha (chickpea salad) and chicken shawarma. It feels like a true global community endeavor.



The Book of Difficult Fruit

Twenty-six fruits, A to Z, form the basis for poet and pie-maker Kate Lebo's lovely, meandering essays in **The Book of Difficult Fruit** (FSG, \$28, 9780374110321). Beginning with aronia, or chokeberry, Lebo weaves personal stories with facts from nature and science, resulting in a difficult-to-classify literary and culinary exploration—the best kind, in my opinion. Ever wondered what exactly a maraschino cherry is? Lebo will tell you, and then she'll tell you about the almond flavor of stone-fruit pits, and then about cherry trees in her backyard,

and about a strange brush with new neighbors, and about how to make real maraschino cherries. And on you go, through durian and elderberry, through Norton grape and Osage orange, all the way to zucchini—a curious, lyrical, alphabetical adventure.

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

Exercise and enlightenment

Alison Bechdel's latest graphic memoir is a comic marvel that will make you think.

In **The Secret to Superhuman Strength**, Alison Bechdel writes, "My bookish exterior perhaps belies it . . . but I'm a bit of an exercise freak." You name it, she's tried it: running, hiking, biking, snowshoeing, weightlifting, running, paddleboarding, karate, in-line skating, aerial yoga and more.

At the start of my call to Bechdel's home outside of Burlington, Vermont, I suggest that we should be doing something like cross-country skiing instead of sitting on our bums, chatting. "Although I'm sure I couldn't keep up," I add.

Bechdel laughs and says, "For all my bragging in that book, I'm not super fast or skilled at anything."

She has her limits, Bechdel admits—increasingly so. The last time she did aerial yoga, for example, "I got up too fast and I ended up having a weird vertigo thing for two days." She turned 60 in September 2020 and has noticed that "I'm still putting in the work, but I'm getting slower and weaker. I can't do stuff I used to do, and it's very disconcerting."

The Secret to Superhuman Strength is a book with so many layers that it's hard to describe; even Bechdel struggles to put it into words. Basically, she says, "It's the chronological story of my life through the lens of my fitness obsessions." She began the project in 2013, "with a desire to write something about mortality and getting older"—an idea perhaps reinforced by her mom's death that year.

On the heels of her previous graphic memoirs, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, about her father, and *Are You My Mother? A Comic Drama*, Bechdel

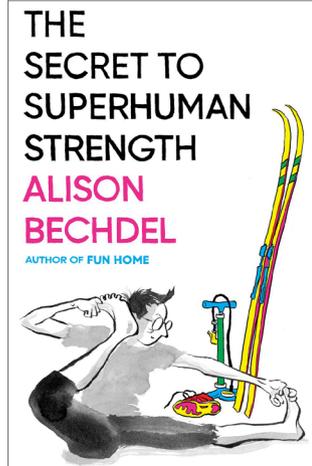
"I wanted to capture some of the vitality and the exuberance of just being alive."

initially thought she might be in the mood for a change of pace. "I felt like I wanted to take a break from all of the intensely personal, introspective books," she says, "but I don't seem to be able to do that."

Bechdel theorizes that her compulsion for candor may stem from her Catholic upbringing. "The notion of confession was always a very powerful experience for me as a kid," she says. "I feel like I'm still confessing—like I'm going to receive some kind of absolution if I do it accurately enough. But I will have pangs afterwards. 'Oh my God, I can't believe I revealed this,' or, 'Oh my God, my poor family.'"

Like all of her books, **The Secret to Superhuman Strength** is not only enlightening but hilarious, with a multitude of unexpected delights. Bechdel is the first to admit that it "veers into many different areas that you wouldn't think were necessarily connected to exercise." Take, for instance, transcendence—how exercise gives her "the feeling of my mind and body becoming one." To explore some of these ideas, she relies on repeated appearances by literary greats such as Jack Kerouac, Margaret Fuller, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

One writer led to another, she explains, "like a chain reaction. . . . I started seeing ways that their actual lives informed mine—the ways they struggled



The Secret to Superhuman Strength

HMH, \$24, 9780544387652

Graphic Memoir



with relationships or struggled with drinking too much



Visit BookPage.com to read our starred review of *The Secret to Superhuman Strength*.

or struggled to establish themselves as an author." She's thankful that "graphic narrative allows you to weave together some pretty complex material in a way that feels easily digestible."

Visually, this is Bechdel's first book in full color; previous books were simply tinted, with shading. "I wanted to capture some of the vitality and the exuberance of just being alive," she says, "and that seemed to demand color." Her wife, Holly Ray Taylor, is also an artist and helped with the extensive coloring. Bechdel calls this a good pandemic project—one that kept the couple "entertained and busy." "If I hadn't been home all day, every day, working for 18 hours, I wouldn't have gotten the book done," she says.

Throughout composing **The Secret to Superhuman Strength**, Bechdel kept up her running regimen, but weightlifting fell by the wayside. Her creative process, however, is a workout in its own right, largely because she takes photos to use as references for each sketch. "It makes drawing into a kind of a physical activity. I'm not just hunched over a drawing board," she explains. "I'm posing. I'm sketching. I'm running outside with my bike to set a scene up. So it's all drawing, but it wouldn't look like drawing to someone watching."

Now that the book is done and Bechdel finally has some free time, who would she want to work out with if she could choose anyone, dead or alive? She says her first thought is "hanging out with Rachel Carson and looking in tidal pools . . . but that's not really a workout."

Eventually Bechdel decides she would love to hike with 19th-century journalist Margaret Fuller: a climb up Maine's tallest peak, the 5,267-foot Mount Katahdin, famed for its precarious Knife Edge Trail. "It seems scary to me," Bechdel says, "but I think Margaret and I would push each other to do it."

—Alice Cary

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Inherently epic

Maggie Shipstead's exceptional third novel was a vast undertaking—but the round-the-globe flight of her aviator protagonist is even more daunting.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MAGGIE SHIPSTEAD. Left page, from top to bottom: Shipstead in a boat off the coast of Greenland; on Greenland's ice sheet; and in Svalbard, Norway. Right page, from top to bottom: Shipstead with an elephant seal in New Zealand's subantarctic Macquarie Island; on Greenland's ice sheet; and in Svalbard, Norway.

Maggie Shipstead often finds herself in far-flung places such as Italy, Romania, the Himalayas, Antarctica and the South Pacific. Sometimes she goes just for fun, but often it's in service of her work as a travel writer and novelist. She's especially drawn to desolate landscapes and polar regions, though she admits that getting there poses a bit of an ethical concern. "You have to burn a lot of carbon," the author says, "but I do think when people see [these places], they better understand [their] fragility and importance."

But when we speak on the phone about her latest novel, **Great Circle**, she's at home in California, her dog Gus sitting attentively by her side as she reorganizes a giant pile of books: a pandemic project. Like most of us, the bestselling author has been grounded for the last year or so, with any adventures taking place on a TV screen, in the pages of a book or in the landscape of the mind.

The good news is that **Great Circle** is anything but earthbound. Instead, fearless aviator Marian Graves takes readers high into the sky over the course of decades, culminating in an attempt to fly around the globe by way of the North and South poles. Over the course of her eventful life, she soars above mountains and rivers, navigating her way through personal triumphs, tragedies and treacherously opaque clouds. Every choice she makes is in pursuit of independence, seeking freedom from oppressive sexism, from the pain

of World War II, from a world that tries to dictate her identity.

"A life is inherently epic, and Marian's life is epic in a more tangible way," Shipstead says of her brilliant and intrepid pilot. Marian's story is indeed rife with the thrill of discovery, the drama of making one's way in a hostile world and the poignancy of loving someone without the guarantee

"I'm so happy in my little hidey-hole; why am I going to the Canadian High Arctic?"

of forever. It's also something of a mystery, as readers learn early on that, like Amelia Earhart, obscurity and supposition surround Marian's final flight. As Shipstead explains, disappearance and death are

perceived very differently, "even though they're often the same thing."

Capturing and creating Marian's life took several years, as Shipstead conducted extensive research on everything from 1920s bootlegging air routes to what it's like to camp on an Antarctic glacier. She traveled to many of the novel's key locations and even spent 30 seconds at the controls of a small plane. "I did not enjoy it."

Great Circle was a massive undertaking: The first draft was 980 pages, comprising 300,000 words and printed on two teams of paper. Shipstead explains that her first two novels, 2012's *Seating Arrangements* and 2014's *Astonish Me*, were both "short stories that I tried to revise, and instead they blorped out into books. This was the first time I was like, all right, I'm starting a novel."

Shipstead points to "a very identifiable moment" that led her to write **Great Circle**. At New Zealand's Auckland Airport, she noticed a bronze statue of aviator Jean Batten, who in 1936 became the first person to fly solo from London to New Zealand. Its plaque includes a quotation from Batten—"I was

destined to be a wanderer”—which inspired the novel’s opening line.

“I was at the airport feeling this bittersweet sense of failure about a project that had abandoned me,” Shipstead says, “and I was very open to some sort of spark of an idea. I’d also just had this adventurous time, was interested in adventurous lives, and it all fell into place.”

The final version of **Great Circle** unspools across more than 600 pages, and this expansiveness allows other richly realized characters to tell their stories, too—in particular, Marian’s twin, Jamie, and childhood friend Caleb. In a shorter book, these characters would be merely tantalizing, introduced and then banished, victims of a restrictive page count. But in **Great Circle**, their inner worlds add context and reveal Marian’s far-reaching impact, for better or worse.

The unspoken and undocumented parts of a historical figure’s life can create an irresistible aura of mystery for the people who, generations later, seek to understand them—especially when the figure did nearly impossible things, edging up to death or even falling over that particular cliff. Marian’s story is interspersed with scenes from 2014, when Hadley Baxter is preparing to play the aviator in an upcoming movie. The gig seems like just the thing to redirect Hadley’s career after many years as the star of a blockbuster film franchise. Ravenous press, Harvey Weinstein-esque executives and demanding fans have taken a toll as well. “They scraped away at us, made us into something ransacked and empty,” Hadley muses.

But Hadley’s celebrity allows her to grasp one of the novel’s core tenets: the truth of a life. “She knows intuitively that no one can know the truth except you, and you barely know it,” Shipstead says. “One of the purposes of her narrative was showing the game of telephone that happens, even with someone who leaves behind clues to their life.”

Hadley’s interest in Marian grows into fascination as the aviator becomes less of a role and more of a role model. And as Marian’s storyline progresses, the reader is drawn ever closer to her final flight, suffusing **Great Circle** with a delicious inherent tension.

“Part of what motivated me [in writing the novel] was something Marian didn’t totally understand until she embarked on this flight,” Shipstead says. “By completing a circle, in a way you’re also rendering it futile. You finish it, and you’re back where you started, and it’s also stretching out in front of you all over again. . . . Now what?”

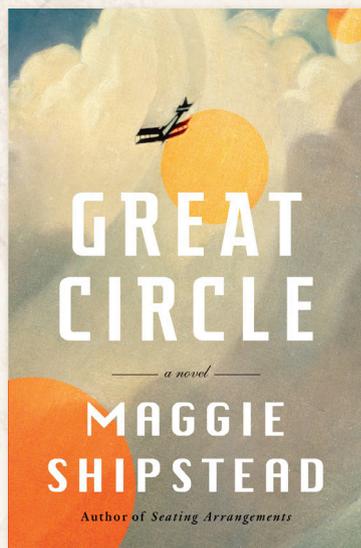
That pull toward a huge goal, that desire that informs a lifetime of choices, is something that intrigues Shipstead. It’s a thread that runs throughout her novel, looping around various characters and drawing them toward things that are thrilling but not always advisable. “In some ways,” she says, “there’s this ambient confusion around why we do things. It’s kind of an animating life force.” She doesn’t profess to know what’s at the heart of such an impulse, so in order to write the book, she had to accept that she’d never be able to pin it down.

“It’s funny, because in all accounts of early female pilots that I read, the vast majority—and I’m sure it’s the same thing for men—just seemed to know that [flying] is something they *had* to do,” Shipstead says. “While I don’t connect with wanting to fly planes, I do connect with it in terms of travel. With every trip, I dread going, in a way. I’m so happy in my little hidey-hole; why am I going to the Canadian High Arctic? But I still feel compelled to go, and I’m always glad that I go, and of course it irreversibly changes me.”

Such impossible questions are essential to **Great Circle** and build to a central preoccupation: “What is the magnitude of one life? And what is the scale of one life versus the scale of this planet we live on? How much can you pack into a life, and what do you choose to make your life about?” Shipstead says, “It’s all of these questions.”

Once readers have finished **Great Circle** and emerged from their own hidey-holes, blinking up at the sky and imagining Marian flying above, they’ll be glad to know that Shipstead has a short story collection planned for 2022. And when it’s safe to travel, she’ll be heading off to another faraway snowy landscape: Alaska. And so the circle continues.

—Linda M. Castelletto



Great Circle
Knopf, \$28.95, 9780525656975

Historical Fiction



Visit BookPage.com to read our starred review of **Great Circle**.

★ Whereabouts

By Jhumpa Lahiri

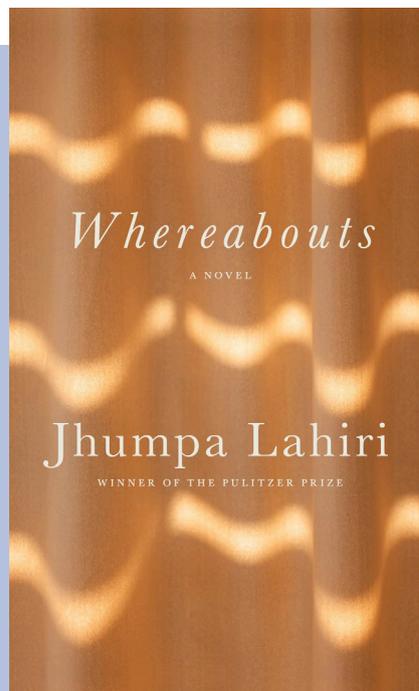
Literary Fiction

Some books leave you with a feeling for which there are no words, or at least no words in English that you know of. Pulitzer Prize winner Jhumpa Lahiri's **Whereabouts** (Knopf, \$24, 9780593318317) is one of those books. The feeling closest to what is evoked by this beautifully crafted novel is a stroll during the blue hour on the first warm evening of spring. (Surely there's a word for that in German.)

Whereabouts is narrated by a middle-aged woman who lives in a country that is much like Italy—and likely is, as the novel was written in Italian and translated by the author. The woman is unmarried and has no children. She has loads of friends and a satisfying enough career in academia. Her father died suddenly when she was young. She had a contentious relationship with

her mother, who is alive but fading, and now their relationship has mellowed a bit. The narrator is neither depressed nor ecstatically happy. She tends to regard everything she sees with a cool, pleasurable equanimity. Even the most shocking kerfuffle in the novel (which we won't reveal here) passes like a storm cloud.

One of the many joys of this little book, besides Lahiri's usual gorgeous writing, is that there's almost no plot. The chapters are short, some less than a page, with headers like "In Spring," "At the Register," "At My House." They are



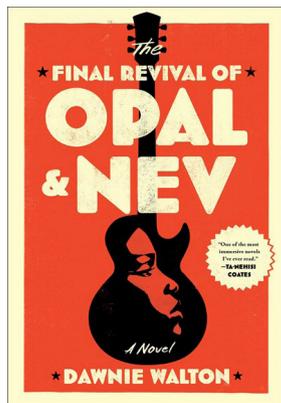
all about the narrator watching, listening and thinking, whether about a favorite stationery shop suddenly turned into a luggage store, how some old flame has aged (and how she ever could have loved him in the first place) or the intimacy of a manicure.

Another lovely thing about the book is that you don't even have to read its chapters in order. The novel is like a contemporary orarium, a collection of private devotions to read for insight and comfort before going to bed. **Whereabouts** is even physically small, just the size for a purse or a roomy pocket, to pull out and enjoy when you have a moment. It is a jewel of a book.

—Arlene McKanic

The Final Revival of Opal & Nev

By Dawnie Walton



Literary Fiction

You may think you know a thing or two about the music industry, but from the opening pages of **The Final Revival of Opal & Nev** (37 Ink, \$27, 9781982140168), it's clear that debut novelist Dawnie

Walton knows a thing or two more.

Walton spins the story of Opal Jewel, a young Black woman from Detroit who has rock 'n' roll aspirations. Opal meets British singer-songwriter Nev Charles at an open-mike night, and after deciding to make music together, they start to ascend the rungs to rock stardom. But when a concert tragically ends in racial violence, they disappear from the spotlight.

Years later, music journalist S. Sunny Shelton, who's spent her life unwillingly linked to Opal and Nev's story, decides to curate an oral history about them in time for a hopeful reunion. When Sunny's interviews unveil the truth behind the group's troubled past, it seems like this story of a band lost to time may end in disaster.

While the novel's interwoven voices and oral history format will undoubtedly draw comparisons to Taylor Jenkins Reid's *Daisy Jones & The Six*, a more apt comparison would be to Jennifer Egan's *A Visit From the Goon Squad*, as its perspective makes it both timely and prescient. Through viewpoints that

leap from Opal, Nev and Sunny to Opal's family members, readers begin to understand the band's glamorous, tragic story from every angle.

Music is at the heart of **The Final Revival of Opal & Nev**, and Walton makes us love these musicians in the same way that we love our favorite bands. She uses this love to dig deeper, grappling with racism and other sinister themes to reveal the true essence of rock 'n' roll. It's not just about sex and drugs and parties; it's a way to express the complexity and sadness of our everyday lives. Using music to cope is glorious and human, and Walton doesn't just cope—she triumphs.

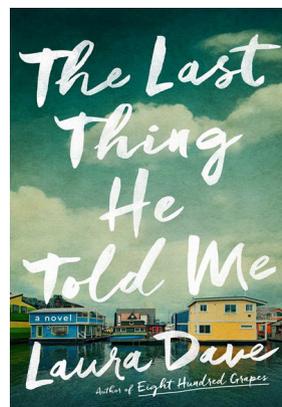
—Eric Ponce



Visit BookPage.com to read a Q&A with Dawnie Walton.

The Last Thing He Told Me

By Laura Dave



Family Drama

In this era of domestic thrillers, a novel about a functional, loving family can feel refreshing and downright unexpected. Extraordinary circumstances severely test the bonds of one such family in Laura Dave's **The**

Last Thing He Told Me (Simon & Schuster, \$27, 9781501171345).

Hannah Hall's adoring husband, coding genius Owen Michaels, vanishes on the same day that his company is raided by the FBI for massive securities fraud. He leaves behind a suspiciously large duffel bag full of cash for his 16-year-old daughter, Bailey. And for his bewildered wife, who is Bailey's stepmother, he leaves a cryptic note with a single directive: "Protect her."

Hannah desperately wants to fulfill his request, but she also wants answers. As she searches for the truth about her missing husband and contends with the legal troubles caused by his disappearance, she also tries to nurture a stepdaughter who barely wants anything to do with her.

As these events unfold in the present, flashbacks show how Hannah's relationships have developed and offer clues about her husband's story. Along the way, her own history also comes into play. Deep-rooted abandonment issues shape her choices in the present, and the attorney she reaches out to for help navigating these treacherous waters is her ex-fiancé.

The drama gets a little thin in spots. The novel's backdrop is a half-billion-dollar financial disaster, but despite Owen's high-profile role, there's no press hounding Hannah and Bailey. They primarily encounter friction from authorities, Bailey's classmates and Owen and Hannah's friends. Beyond that, stepmother and stepdaughter are able to maintain anonymity as a firestorm of drama unfolds around the company's CEO.

Downplaying the conflict might be a trade-off for the novel's greater focus on character development and relationships. Hannah's insights and epiphanies about how to parent an untrusting teenager aren't all that revelatory, but they certainly are reminders of what's most important.

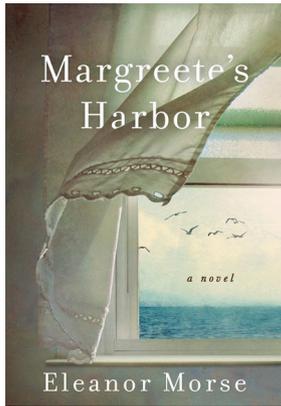
As a result, Dave pulls off something that feels

both new and familiar: a novel of domestic suspense that unnerves, then reassures. This is the antithesis of the way novels like *Gone Girl* or *My Lovely Wife* are constructed; in **The Last Thing He Told Me**, the surface is ugly, the situation disturbing, but almost everyone involved is basically good underneath it all. Dave has given readers what many people crave right now—a thoroughly engrossing yet comforting distraction.

—Carole V. Bell

★ Margreete's Harbor

By Eleanor Morse



Family Drama

Eleanor Morse's precise, patient prose captivates from page one of her fourth novel, **Margreete's Harbor** (St. Martin's, \$27.99, 9781250271549), as she describes an early winter morning for an elderly woman named

Margreete. At home on the Maine coast, Margreete heats up some bacon drippings and retrieves her slippers, but while she's sidelined by a dead mouse that the cat brought in, poof—her stove catches fire. That fire leads to big changes, as Margreete's daughter, Liddie, and her family must move from Michigan to look after Margreete in Burnt Harbor, Maine.

Beginning in 1955 and continuing through 1968, this is a bighearted, multigenerational saga with a simmering social conscience, as Margreete; Liddie; her husband, Harry; and each of their three children wrestle with their secrets and desires. Morse chronicles big and small moments equally well, the sum of which can make—and sometimes break—a family.

Burnt Harbor is “the tiniest eyelash compared to the great eye of the ocean beyond,” and Morse expertly plays with this perspective, showing how global events seep into every molecule of the family's life. For example, with dogged determination, teenager Bernie tries to head to Washington, D.C., to join Martin Luther King Jr.'s March on Washington, partly motivated by his realization that he loves his best friend, a Black boy named Noah. A few years later, Harry chains himself to a White House fence to protest the Vietnam War—at a moment when Liddie desperately needs her husband by her side.

Margreete's Harbor is also a particularly tender portrait of a family faced with dementia. All three grandchildren safely confide their greatest secrets to their grandmother, sure that she won't remember their confessions. But Margreete still has wisdom to share, and when Bernie is just a boy, she advises, “When you grow up, don't ever try to love

someone you don't love. And don't ever try to not love someone you do love.”

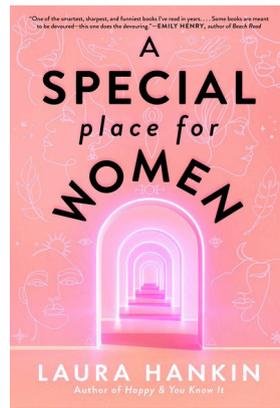
Of course, things aren't always rosy. By moving to Maine, Liddie must leave behind her spot as first cellist with the Ann Arbor Symphony. One of the grandchildren must stop Margreete from jumping out a bedroom window, and Harry has a secret rendezvous with a nurse he encounters in the emergency room. As Morse writes, “Unless you live in a cave by yourself and speak only to the chickadee, life is messy, because humans are messy.”

Full of love, triumph and a boatload of heartbreak, **Margreete's Harbor** is a celebration of life's inevitable messiness. As after any good visit with family or dear friends, you will leave feeling satisfied while yearning for more.

—Alice Cary

A Special Place for Women

By Laura Hankin



Satirical Fiction

Laura Hankin's **A Special Place for Women** (Berkley, \$26, 9781984806260) has a ripped-from-the-headlines hook: It's heavily based on the controversial, real-life, women-only coworking space the

Wing and related critiques of “girl boss” feminism, a phrase that diminishes women's authority while masquerading as empowerment.

Narrator Jillian Beckley is an unemployed journalist from an unsexy part of Brooklyn who recently lost her mom. Jillian doesn't have any female friends to speak of, but there are two men in her life: her childhood neighbor, who is New York's hottest new chef, and a magazine editor on whom she has a crush. In a convoluted plan to impress the editor, Jillian pretends she is dating the chef in order to gain access to an elite club of powerful women called Nevertheless.

This part of the story is similar to the movie *Mean Girls*, as Jillian initially mocks these out-of-touch women but quickly finds herself under their spell. Much of the novel alludes to possibly sinister goings-on at Nevertheless; Jillian worries that the organization is a shadowy cabal that ruins its enemies. At this, the reader may wonder if the novel is an overwrought sendup of the #girlboss culture that lauds female billionaires. After all, is there anything original left to say about wealthy, status-seeking women and the corrupting influence of power?

But then, halfway through **A Special Place for Women**, a creative twist makes these events delightfully complex. This is where Hankin shows her

range as a writer: The book you think you're reading turns into something else entirely.

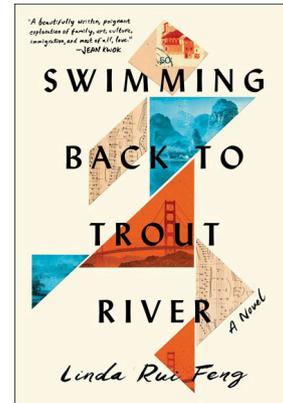
Admirably, the class analysis in **A Special Place for Women** is more finely tuned than most novels with an outsider-masquerading-as-an-insider storyline. That's largely due to Jillian's rock-solid millennial Everywoman voice, which allows her to stay relatable amid escalating bizarre circumstances.

A Special Place for Women is a slow burn that's ultimately fun, fresh and entirely worthwhile.

—Jessica Wakeman

Swimming Back to Trout River

By Linda Rui Feng



Family Drama

A little over halfway through **Swimming Back to Trout River** (Simon & Schuster, \$26, 9781982129392), readers encounter a chapter titled “The Improviser's Guide to Untranslatable Words” in which they are introduced

to several Chinese metaphysical terms. The first, *yuanfen*, is a subtler counterpart to the concept of fate. Rather than certain actions or outcomes being predestined and set in stone, *yuanfen* more loosely and fluidly binds people and events together in a meaningful coincidence, perhaps only for a fleeting period of time.

The second term, *zaohua*, refers to an inherent force of progress that flows through the world, cycling through creation, destruction and rebirth. And the third is *ciji*, which refers to a catalyst or event, most commonly a psychological trauma. Grasping the nuances of these three concepts is the key to unlocking a richer reading experience and deeper understanding of Linda Rui Feng's ambitious and impressive first novel.

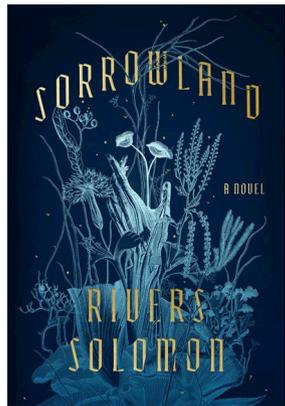
Set against the background of the Cultural Revolution, **Swimming Back to Trout River** tells the story of a family separated by more than physical distance. We follow the lives of Momo and Cassia, an estranged married couple that has immigrated to the United States, leaving their daughter, Junie, with her grandparents in rural China until they are able to collect her. As Feng explores the present-day distance that has grown between Momo, Cassia and Junie, she poignantly traces how the passions and personal sorrows from each of their pasts have shaped and influenced their current situations.

Sensitively exploring themes of grief, hope and resilience, **Swimming Back to Trout River** is a symphony of a novel that is operatic in scope and elevated by Feng's artful writing. The author's experience as a professor of Chinese cultural history

is an additional asset, as she illustrates and celebrates Chinese sensibilities within the framework of a multilayered, deeply human story that transcends borders.

—Stephenie Harrison

★ **Sorrowland**
By Rivers Solomon



Gothic Fiction

Rivers Solomon's **Sorrowland** (MCD, \$27, 9780374266776) is a story you simply won't see coming. You might think you've figured out the pillars of its structure after a few chapters, or come to truly understand

its protagonist after walking a few dozen pages with

her, but to read this powerful, moving and terrifying novel is to enter into a constant state of change. The story envelops you slowly, like a cocoon, wrapping you in its ever-increasing depth and heart until you emerge, at the end, transformed.

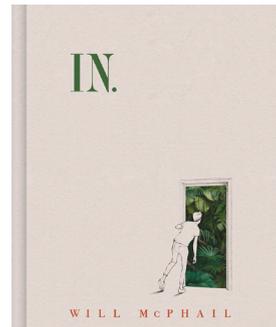
Sorrowland follows Vern, a pregnant woman who flees to the woods in a desperate attempt to escape the religious compound that was once her home. She fights for survival, first as an expectant mother, then as a fierce parent and protector of twin children. But the compound, it turns out, isn't willing to let her go so easily, and not just because of its cultlike grip. Something darker is at work in Vern's life, something at the core of her existence that she'll have to face if she's ever going to have a future.

As Vern gradually awakens to the wider world and its wonders and terrors, Solomon charts her journey through prose that is both economical and fiercely emotional. What's most striking is the way in which Solomon captures Vern's creeping, often frightening realization that the world is altogether more complex and monstrous than she once thought.

Full of horror, love and incisive observation, **Sorrowland** is so perfectly plotted that readers won't be able to predict what's to come any better than Vern can. It's a truly powerful piece of storytelling.

—Matthew Jackson

★ **In**
By Will McPhail

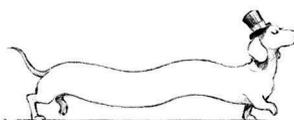


Graphic Novel

In his breakout graphic novel, *New Yorker* cartoonist Will McPhail charts a millennial's un-gainly journey toward emotional connection.

With generous wit and mostly black-and-white drawings, **In** (HMH, \$28, 9780358345541) follows Nick, an artist

meet **WILL McPHAIL**



How would you describe your book?

SOMETIMES I FIND MYSELF IN CONVERSATIONS WHERE I'M SAYING THINGS THAT I DON'T CARE ABOUT, OR EVEN MEAN, JUST TO GET THROUGH THE INTERACTION UNSCATHED. AND WHEN I CAN TELL THAT THE PERSON I'M TALKING TO IS DOING THAT TOO, IT MAKES ME WONDER WHO WE'RE PERFORMING THAT TRAGIC LITTLE DANCE FOR? THIS BOOK IS ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN TWO PEOPLE STOP PERFORMING FOR EACH OTHER AND START SAYING THE WORDS THAT MATTER.

What was most important for you to capture about Nick's story?

I WANTED TO SHOW WHAT AN AMORPHOUS AND CONTRARIAN RASCAL MENTAL HEALTH CAN BE. SUPERFICIALLY, IT LOOKS AS THOUGH NICK'S JOURNEY IS A DAMAGING ONE. EVERYTHING GOES FROM BEING OK AT THE START TO VERY SAD BY THE END. BUT IN OPPOSITION TO THAT, NICK GOES FROM FEELING NOTHING AT THE START TO FEELING EVERYTHING BY THE END. I THINK WE'RE MUCH HEALTHIER EVEN WHEN WE'RE FEELING DEEP GENUINE SADNESS THAN WHEN WE FEEL NOTHING AT ALL. THAT'S A BIT DEEP SO LOOK AT THIS...

What's your favorite opening line when meeting a new person?

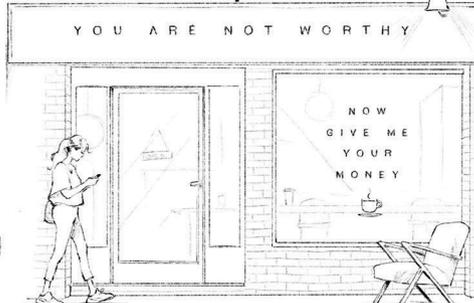
SOMEBODY TOLD ME THAT THE BEST WAY TO REMEMBER A PERSON'S NAME AFTER MEETING THEM IS TO VISUALISE THEM FIGHTING A FRIEND OF YOURS WHO SHARES THE SAME NAME. APPARENTLY THAT JARRING IMAGE MAKES THE NAME STICK IN YOUR BRAIN. SO MOST OF MY INITIAL INTERACTIONS ARE ME JUST STARING AT THEM IN HORROR.



When you unexpectedly connect with someone, how does that feel to you?



Preferred coffee shop ambiance?



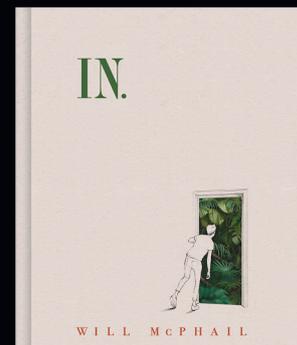
What advice do you have for readers seeking deeper connections?

DON'T BE IN A GLOBAL PANDEMIC.



COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Cartoonist Will McPhail has been injecting *The New Yorker* with hilarity, insight and dark comedy since 2014. His brilliant graphic novel, **In** (HMH, \$28, 9780358345541), follows a young illustrator who, amid the highs and lows of coffee shops, dating and loss, discovers the nature of true human connection. McPhail lives in Edinburgh, Scotland.



trapped in a cycle of hollow conversations and extra-milky lattes. As the book opens, Nick goes to a bar alone because if he were sad—which he isn’t—that is what a sad man would do. His feelings are just out of reach, as if on the tip of his tongue. Real human interactions likewise feel imminent but elusive, unlockable only with the right words.

When Nick does succeed in making a connection, these moments of emotional disorientation erupt with color. Splashes of crumbling landscapes, towering edifices and bizarrely cute flesh-eating monsters illuminate the pages like fever dreams. Here, the narrative power of images speaks for itself.

In has echoes of the 2012 black-and-white film *A Coffee in Berlin* and Ben Lerner’s many disaffected “lost boys of privilege.” That **In** is semi-autobiographical lends both tenderness and a self-implicating edge to McPhail’s lampooning of the “woke millennial hipster.” The watering holes Nick frequents (albeit with scorn) have whimsical names like Gentrificchiato and Your Friends Have Kids Bar, and are “managed/haunted by a collection of Timothees Chalamet.” McPhail suggests a playful dichotomy in which you are either a person who posts up in coffee shops or are emotionally well. If you’re feeling attacked, or if you’re Timothée Chalamet, please read on.

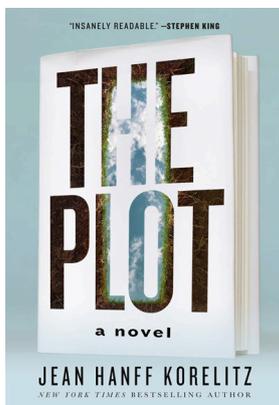
The characters in **In** are absolutely delightful. The moment Nick stops berating himself for his inadequacies, the baton for that task is snatched up by his mother, sister, neighbors, 4-year-old nephew and romantic interest, Wren, who is an especially well-developed character. She is an oncologist and, like Nick, a normcore clothing devotee who enjoys drawing unmentionables in Nick’s Mole-skin notebook.

When Wren becomes unexpectedly entangled in Nick’s family life, he is confronted once again with an opportunity to be *in*—that is, to be vulnerable. And when small talk becomes real talk, the world suddenly seems all that much brighter.

—Elena Britos

The Plot

By Jean Hanff Korelitz



Popular Fiction

Not every 350-page novel can be torn through in a weekend, but readers may find themselves batting away sleep and setting an alarm for early the next day to continue Jean Hanff Korelitz’s

propulsive literary thriller, **The Plot** (Celadon, \$28, 9781250790767). Considering the success of

Korelitz’s previous bestseller, *You Should Have Known*, which became HBO’s “The Undoing” starring Nicole Kidman and Hugh Grant, her skill at ratcheting up the tension should come as no surprise.

The Plot is an ingenious piece of storytelling—a story within a story, two plots for the price of one. Jacob Finch Bonner is a washed-up novelist whose debut book led to a brief dalliance with literary success, but that was years ago, and he has since slipped off the radar. At the novel’s start, Jake is scraping by, teaching at a poorly ranked MFA program. When one of Jake’s students, Evan Parker, reveals the twisty plot behind his yet-to-be-written novel, which Evan is convinced will be a bestseller, Jake begrudgingly concedes that literary fame surely beckons.

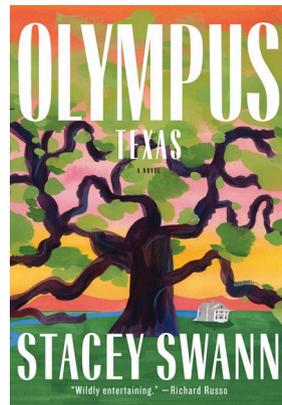
A few years pass, and when Jake doesn’t hear anything about the novel or its author, he does some online snooping and is shocked to discover that Evan died a few months after the residency. So Jake writes the novel that never was, titles it *Crib* and becomes a publishing sensation. But things start to unravel when he begins to receive anonymous threats accusing him of theft.

It takes a certain amount of chutzpah to structure **The Plot** the way Korelitz has—to claim that *Crib* will be a surefire bestseller, and then in case we doubt her, to share parts of *Crib* to reveal just how good it is. But Korelitz is an audacious writer who delivers on her promises. Her next big-screen adaptation surely awaits.

—Jeff Vasishta

Olympus, Texas

By Stacey Swann



Family Drama

J.R. Ewing, the man everyone loves to hate in the classic TV series “Dallas,” may have finally met his match. When it comes to lying, cheating and scandals, the Briscoe family in Stacey Swann’s jaw-dropping debut, **Olympus, Texas** (Doubleday, \$26.95, 9780385545211), gives him a run for his money.

Each character in the expansive clan has his or her own secrets, extramarital pursuits and jealous rages, making it hard to keep everything straight without a set of cue cards. To sum up the worst offenders: March Briscoe suffered a two-year exile from the town of Olympus after an affair with his brother Hap’s wife; Peter Briscoe, the family patriarch, fathered three children outside his marriage, including twins Artie and Arlo; June Briscoe, Peter’s wife and mother to Hap and March, is

enamored by local veterinarian Cole; and Artie is attracted to Arlo’s former bandmate Ryan, whom she accidentally shoots while on a hunting trip.

And that’s just for starters. March’s return home to Olympus sets off a chain of events as tragic as any caused by the mythological gods. Right out of the gate, March is involved in a knockdown brawl with Hap, picking up where their feud left off two years ago.

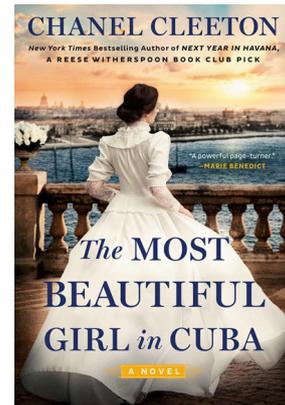
No one here is innocent, likable or without secrets worth savoring, making Swann’s book all the more enticing. Cole best sums up the family’s scandalous ways when he asks June, “When’s the last time you did something without thinking?” The answer, it seems, is that none of them is guilty of overthinking anything—or thinking at all, for that matter.

As the novel races from one indiscretion to another at lightning speed, fans of mythology will enjoy spotting the tragic parallels between Swann’s characters and the Greek and Roman gods. (March is clearly Mars, for example.) Swann’s prose is deeply descriptive and her characters heartfelt, but it all boils down to whether anyone in this family can get past their selfish feelings, unrestrained passions and bottled-up anger long enough to forgive each other.

—G. Robert Frazier

The Most Beautiful Girl in Cuba

By Chanel Cleeton



Historical Fiction

Through her popular historical novels, bestselling author Chanel Cleeton offers a fresh glimpse into Cuba’s tumultuous past. Her latest, **The Most Beautiful Girl in Cuba** (Berkley, \$27,

9780593098875), is set on the eve of the Spanish-American War, as the island country is ravaged by conflict between Cuban revolutionaries and the Spanish military.

The story unfolds through the eyes of three women: Evangelina Cisneros, a beautiful socialite who finds herself in the infamous Recogidas prison after rebuffing the advances of a Spanish military official; Marina Perez, who along with her husband is aiding the revolutionaries while living in deplorable conditions at a reconcentration camp; and Grace Harrington, a cub reporter trying to make her mark at William Randolph Hearst’s New York newspaper.

The women all come from wealthy families yet have chosen their own paths as they seek more than the comfort provided by their privilege. This

is a recurring theme in Cleeton's work: women turning their lives upside down to fight for what they believe in. For Evangelina and Marina, they're fighting for the dream of a liberated Cuba. For Grace, it's a career as a serious journalist in an era when few women (aside from Nellie Bly and Ida B. Wells) could imagine working for a newspaper. Their fates intersect when Hearst places Grace on the Cuba beat, reporting from the front lines.

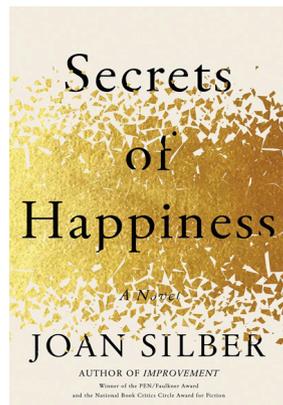
The heart of **The Most Beautiful Girl in Cuba** is ostensibly Evangelina, who is the title character and based on a real person. And indeed, her story is fascinating. She was briefly the most famous woman in New York after a daring rescue landed her stateside to advocate for Cuban independence. But Cleeton's examination of the state of journalism at the turn of the century is an equally compelling part of this engrossing book. The battle of Hearst versus Joseph Pulitzer for the biggest circulation is fascinating. Both of their newspapers used the discord in Cuba to bolster their sales and arguably influenced the conflict more than was appropriate for a supposedly neutral press.

Cleeton delivers a sweeping story of love and courage, as well as a sobering reminder of the power and responsibility of the media.

—Amy Scribner

★ Secrets of Happiness

By Joan Silber



Family Drama

The challenges of balancing money and personal happiness wend their way through National Book Critics Circle Award winner Joan Silber's **Secrets of Happiness** (Counterpoint, \$27, 9781640094451), which begins with a

startling act of duplicity and ends with acceptance and reconciliation despite the characters' changed circumstances.

The novel opens as Ethan, a gay lawyer in Manhattan, relates how his family was blown apart when his father, Gil, was named in a paternity suit by Nok, a woman he brought to New York from Thailand and with whom he had two sons. Gil's wife, Abby, divorced him and journeyed to Bangkok to teach English, seeking serenity in the unfamiliar surroundings of Thailand, and Gil moved in with Nok after he had a debilitating stroke.

Meanwhile, Ethan's new half brother, Joe, also travels to Thailand, hoping to bribe police to release his wastrel brother from prison. After Joe's return to New York, he falls back into an awkward relationship with a high school girlfriend who was

abruptly widowed and then swindled out of inheriting her husband's estate by his greedy family.

The complex seesaw of love and finances, both offered and withheld, is explored throughout seven chapters and across four continents. Silber's device—a secondary character from one chapter commanding the narrative in the next—is as effortless as a dragonfly skimming over a pond. The multiple perspectives bring an unexpected cohesion to the novel's diverse cast, which includes Ethan's boyfriend, who lives with his terminally ill former partner, and Gil's old girlfriend, a free spirit who raises two daughters in Kathmandu, Nepal.

As more connections reveal themselves, the slim threads that bind these characters take on emotional weight, exposing the ways Gil's infidelity has trickled out into the world. But **Secrets of Happiness** also explores the great generosity of love that exists in families, whether we're born into them or choose them. Rarely is a novel of moral ideas so buoyant in spirit or so exquisitely crafted.

—Lauren Bufferd

Hot Stew

By Fiona Mozley



Literary Fiction

Fiona Mozley's **Hot Stew** (Algonquin, \$26.95, 9781643751559) couldn't be more distinct from her first novel, *Elmet*, a finalist for the 2017 Booker Prize. But this lively story of class conflict in

contemporary London offers more evidence of Mozley's talent and versatility, marking her as a writer whose work promises both thoughtful entertainment and surprises.

At the heart of the novel is the city's Soho neighborhood, where most of the ensemble cast's members live and work. Agatha Howard, whose sizable inheritance supports the adage about all great fortunes arising from great crimes, has decided to renovate one of her extensive real estate holdings. But the neighborhood has long been home to London's sex trade, so Agatha's plan sparks a clash with a determined group of sex workers based there, led by Nigerian-born Precious and her older companion, Tabitha.

While Agatha deploys her wealth and connections to enlist a politically ambitious police officer in her plan, the women take to the streets to summon popular support for their cause, even as they recognize they're "hardly going to get Bob Geldof and Bono fighting in [their] corner." Mozley subtly wires these characters and others, including a semiretired mob enforcer, a modestly successful

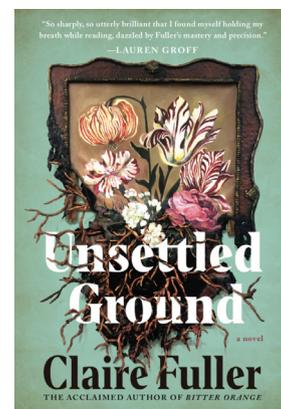
actor and an ex-drug addict whose disappearance heightens police pressure on the district, into a complex network of unpredictable and intriguing connections.

Whether the scene is a déclassé Mayfair men's club or a fetid cellar that affords refuge for a collection of homeless people, Mozley brings her diverse settings to life, as well as the clashing desires and ambitions of her colorful characters. **Hot Stew's** title is an apt one, as Mozley consistently stirs in tasty ingredients and exciting spices, and keeps raising the temperature all the way to its startling climax.

—Harvey Freedenberg

Unsettled Ground

By Claire Fuller



Family Drama

What happens to our secrets after death? What do we do when we discover things we never imagined—about ourselves, our families or the stories we tell to make sense of the world? These questions drive Claire

Fuller's engaging **Unsettled Ground** (Tin House, \$26.95, 9781951142483).

As the novel opens, 51-year-old twins Jeanie and Julius are at a loss when their mother, Dot, dies unexpectedly. The twins lived in a cottage with Dot; Jeanie, who has a heart condition and never learned to read or write, tends the garden, while Julius brings in a small income by way of odd jobs in town. Their home is their sanctuary until Dot's death, when the careful life she controlled and constructed for her family begins to crack. Questions arise about past and present relationships, land and money.

The reader travels with Jeanie and Julius as they begin to grapple with the complexities of adulthood and the truth about their mother. This exploration builds a sense of mystery at a slow and steady pace. There comes a moment when the reader must know what happened, and they won't be able to stop reading until they discover how it all resolves.

Even the title opens up questions, about what it means to settle or to remain unsettled, and about the nature of home and how one is made. The story exists on ground that has been disturbed by secrets and money, by the need for both independence and connection—and that ground continues to shift underfoot as the novel progresses.

Readers will root for Jeanie and Julius to survive and, even more than that, to live.

—Freyja Sachs

★ Facing the Mountain

By Daniel James Brown

American History

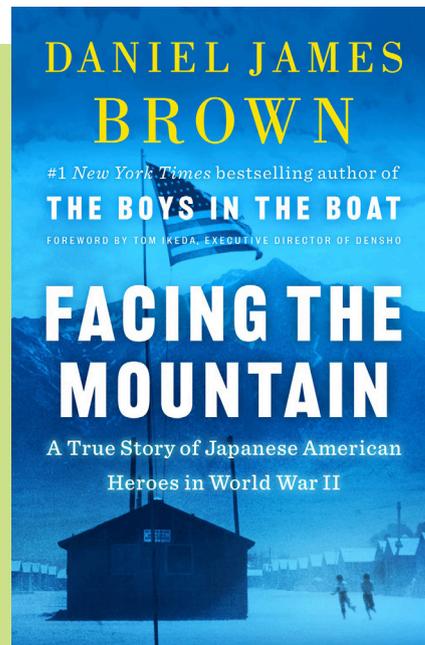
Imagine that you and your family have been taken into custody. You've lost your home and small business. Fellow Americans have berated and beaten you. Now you're all living behind a fence in a single room in a squalid barrack in some desolate nowhere. And the government comes to you and says, "We want you to join the Army and risk your life to fight for the United States."

It's astounding that anyone said yes, much less thousands of people. The Japanese Americans who formed the 442nd Infantry Regiment—the most decorated unit in U.S. history for its size and service length—were American patriots, and many felt they needed to demonstrate their loyalty to their country. They certainly succeeded.

In **Facing the Mountain: A True Story of Japanese American Heroes in World**

War II (Viking, \$30, 9780525557401), Daniel James Brown tackles this important story with the same impressive narrative talent and research that made his 2013 book, *The Boys in the Boat*, an enduring bestseller. He shares the story of issei (first-generation Japanese Americans) and nisei (second-generation Japanese Americans) who fought in World War II by focusing on four young men: three from Hawaii and the West Coast who joined the 442nd, and one, no less courageous, who went to prison for peacefully resisting what he believed were violations of the Constitution.

Brown takes us through the shock of the internment camps and the struggle for Hawaiians and mainlanders to overcome tensions and establish



internment camps and to play such a pivotal role in the defeat of the Nazis. Most are gone now, but their stories will live on in this empathetic tribute to their courage.

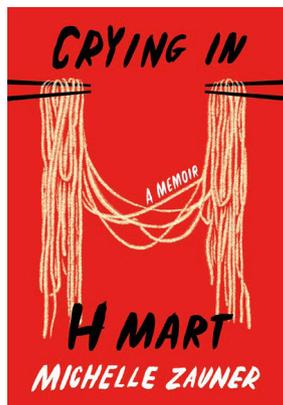
—Anne Bartlett

a cohesive fighting unit. The centerpieces of **Facing the Mountain** are the wrenching, on-the-ground descriptions of battles fought by the 442nd in Europe, most notably the uphill rescue of the "Lost Battalion" of Texans in France, in which the nisei suffered more than 800 casualties to rescue some 200 men.

Many readers will feel ashamed of the bigotry these men and their families faced—but every reader will admire the resilience that allowed these soldiers to create communities within the

★ Crying in H Mart

By Michelle Zauner



Memoir

"Ever since my mom died, I cry in H Mart." From the moment we read the opening sentence of Michelle Zauner's poignant memoir, **Crying in H Mart** (Knopf, \$26.95, 9780525657743), we're hooked. It's a

rare gift; Zauner perfectly distills the palpable ache for her mother and wraps her grief in an aromatic conjuring of her mother's presence.

The daughter of a white father and Korean mother in a rural area outside of Eugene, Oregon, Zauner felt closest to her mother when shopping for and eating food together. She shares fond memories of them prowling the aisles of H Mart, the Asian grocery store and food court where she discovered kimchi, rice cakes and tteokguk, a beef and rice cake soup. Growing up, Zauner found that her mother could be distant, but she soon learned that "food was how my mother expressed her love."

As a girl, Zauner traveled with her mother to Seoul, South Korea, where Zauner met her aunts and grandmother and celebrated life and family with hearty meals. When Zauner was in her

20s, she moved from Philadelphia back home to Oregon to take care of her mother as she died of cancer. As Zauner recounts her mother's slow, painful decline, she recalls the highs and lows of their life together, often in stories of meals shared with friends and family. After her mother's death in 2014, Zauner struggled to accept it. She writes, "Maybe we hadn't tried hard enough, hadn't believed enough, hadn't force-fed her enough blue-green algae."

Crying in H Mart hardly ends in defeat, however. As difficult as her grief is, Zauner celebrates her mother throughout the book in the very place they shared their most intimate joys, losses and pleasures: H Mart.

—Henry L. Carrigan Jr.

★ Everything Is Fine

By Vince Granata



Memoir

On July 24, 2014, while experiencing schizophrenic psychosis, 23-year-old Tim Granata murdered his beloved mother. Although Tim's mental health had been declining for several years, the family's worry was that

Tim would take his own life, not harm others.

Soon afterward, an acquaintance wrote to Tim's brother, Vince: "I hope you will eventually be able to find some peace and feel whole again, though that might be your life's work." Despite the enormity of the task, Vince Granata bravely and lovingly chronicles his family's story—before, during and after the tragedy—in his riveting memoir, **Everything Is Fine** (Atria, \$27, 9781982133443).

Tim's illness "began as a whisper" late in high school and during his first year of college, but it slowly took over his life. Repeated hospitalizations and therapy didn't help, and he refused medication. Because of his background as a champion wrestler in high school, Tim lifted weights to try and calm the cacophony of his increasingly psychotic thoughts.

Granata shut down after his mother's murder, unable to think of her without remembering her horrific death. Plagued by nightmares, he avoided sleep and turned to caffeine and alcohol. Still, he was wracked by magical thinking, wondering if he might have been able to save his mother had he been present instead of 1,000 miles away tutoring children in the Dominican Republic.

Granata writes with compassion, reflection and unsparing honesty of not only his brother's metamorphosis but also his own transformation after the crime—how he was finally able to find his way back to his life, memories and love of his brother. Some of the book's most memorable scenes take place during his visits with Tim in Connecticut's Whiting Forensic Hospital, where Tim was sent to be "restored to competency" so that he could eventually be tried for his crime.

Anyone trying to better understand the cruel

grip of psychosis will learn much from **Everything Is Fine**. As Granata concludes, “We can only conquer terror when we drag what scares us into the light. We only understand horror when we think about what we know, when we look at all the pieces.”

—Alice Cary

White Magic

By Elissa Washuta



Essays

White Magic (Tin House, \$26.95, 9781951142391) is divine, incantatory, a riddle, an illusion. In Elissa Washuta’s hands, this collection becomes more than the sum of its parts. The subjects of these essays are parts of a bigger

story—like a spell with the intention to make whole what has been wounded. Readers of Washuta’s two previous nonfiction books will recognize some of the same terrain, but this collection creates a new narrative, a reckoning with healing and with growing up.

White Magic begins with Washuta’s urgent desire to decolonize witchcraft and other spiritual practices. For example, the Native American practice of smudging with white sage has been commodified so thoroughly that sage bundles were recently offered for sale at Sephora. Washuta, who is a member of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, wishes for “a version of the occult that isn’t built on plunder,” although she doubts whether such a thing exists.

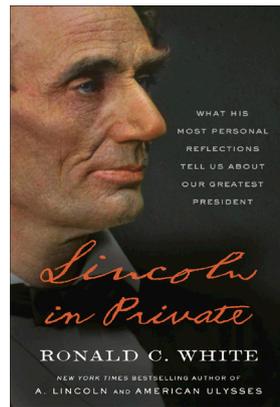
Tapping into her roots, Washuta explores the ecology of the Seattle region through Native mythology, as well as the history of the region’s colonization by white settlers. Multiple essays focus on the legacy of sexual violence against Native women, contextualized through Washuta’s own harrowing experiences. These essays move deftly between the personal, cultural and historical to create resonances across time.

Some of the best essays in **White Magic** are the most intimate, especially the ones that wrestle with the piercing sorrow of romantic attachment. Why do we love those who cannot love us back—or worse, who might kill us? Under Washuta’s dexterous touch, these questions gain symbolic weight through nuanced excursions into pop culture, from Stevie Nicks and “Twin Peaks” to the video game *Red Dead Redemption 2*. These subjects might sound disparate, but Washuta’s gift for weaving metaphorical strands across essays creates a strikingly harmonious narrative whole.

—Catherine Hollis

Lincoln in Private

By Ronald C. White



American History

Five hours after Abraham Lincoln’s assassination, his son Robert Todd Lincoln wired David Davis, one of the president’s closest friends and an associate justice of the Supreme Court, to come to

Washington “to take charge of my father’s affairs.” At the same time, Lincoln’s two devoted secretaries, John Nicolay and John Hay, assembled the president’s papers, including Lincoln’s private notes to himself, called “fragments.” In **Lincoln in Private: What His Most Personal Reflections Tell Us About Our Greatest President** (Random House, \$28, 9781984855091), Lincoln scholar Ronald C. White selects 12 of the 109 known fragments, places them in their historical context and analyzes their representations of the president’s life and thoughts.

Almost every fragment begins with a problem Lincoln was facing, and it’s fascinating to see how he grappled with each one. A few fragments may have been first drafts for speeches, but most are reflections that never reappeared elsewhere. Among the issues Lincoln examined are slavery, the birth of the Republican Party, God’s role in the Civil War and how to be a good lawyer.

Lincoln frequently tried to see things from his opponents’ points of view. In a fragment on slavery, Lincoln does this by giving three justifications for being pro-slavery. Then he shows the basic contradictions within each reason and demonstrates how race, intellect or interest could easily be turned around to make the enslaver the enslaved.

Lincoln wrestled with his decision to join the Republican Party. As a longtime Whig, he questioned the meaning, mission and challenges of the new party. To sort out his thoughts, his fragments reveal that he turned to the U.S. Constitution and the historical record, two sources he often used when analyzing a problem.

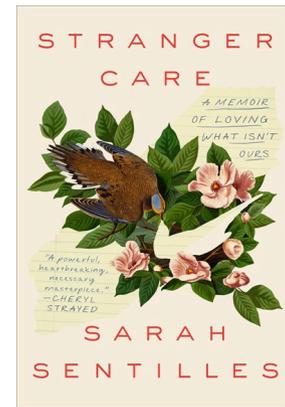
A fragment on the Civil War begins, “The will of God prevails.” Both the Union and the Confederacy claimed God was on their side, but that couldn’t be true. As Lincoln meditates on how God acts in history, he writes that “it is quite possible that God’s purpose is something different from the purpose of either party.”

These glimpses of Lincoln’s thinking offer us a fresh way to view him. White’s commentary is excellent, and anyone interested in Lincoln will want to read this book.

—Roger Bishop

★ Stranger Care

By Sarah Sentilles



Memoir

Sarah Sentilles was accustomed to letting her husband, Eric, decide most things: what to eat, where to live, why bringing a child into this beleaguered world was a bad idea. This suited her, until Sarah interrogated

her own desires and realized she wanted a baby. They decided to become foster parents, hoping for a baby who was available for adoption. Not far into her heart-searing memoir, **Stranger Care: A Memoir of Loving What Isn’t Ours** (Random House, \$28, 9780593230039), the complications begin.

After weeks of classes, interviews and home inspections, the call comes late one night: Can they take a toddler, found alone in a house not far from theirs? They want an infant, they remind the social worker. As hard as it is, they say no. More calls come in the following weeks, more desperate children they have to turn away as they hold out for a baby. Finally, Coco arrives, three days old.

Coco’s troubled mother, Evelyn (a pseudonym), has three other children, and she wants Coco back. She considers Sarah and Eric enemies, and they see her as a threat. While reunification with the biological parent is the stated goal of the state, the courts and social workers, these foster parents hope it will never happen. Evelyn’s progress toward stability and sobriety is slow, hampered by poverty and a lack of resources. As Coco grows and thrives, so does the love of her foster family. A collision seems inevitable. Sentilles wonders, “Which of us is the debris?”

If **Stranger Care** were merely a horrific indictment of the foster care system, it would be a hard read to endure. But there are deeper lessons here, as Sentilles navigates an intractable system managed by overwhelmed, all-too-human souls. Along the way, the ever expanding love between Sarah, Eric and tiny Coco redeems every page, amplified by the fragile bond growing between Sarah and Evelyn. Both mothers discover their common ground, and they learn to share it.

With a sharp eye for the details that fill their days with joy, counterweighted by the sorrows that bring the couple to their knees, Sentilles uses the sheer power of her writing to lift their story above the failures of flawed adults and to remind us of the human heart’s limitless capacity for hope.

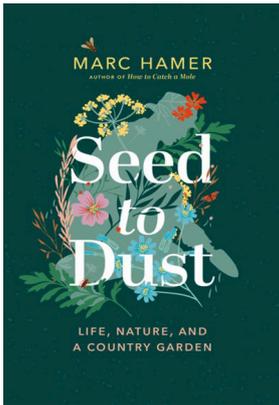
—Priscilla Kipp



Visit BookPage.com to read a Behind the Book essay by Sarah Sentilles.

Seed to Dust

By Marc Hamer



Nature

To whom does a garden belong? In his work as a gardener, Marc Hamer (*How to Catch a Mole*) has heard tales of property owners who take offense when landscapers feel some sense of ownership over their work.

Hamer's employer, whom he has dubbed Miss Cashmere, isn't so territorial.

But Hamer doesn't crave ownership. He believes a garden belongs to all who see it. "This is not my garden, but it's not hers, either," he writes. "Just paying for something doesn't make it yours. Nothing is ever yours. People who work with the earth and the people who think they own bits of it see the world in totally different ways."

In *Seed to Dust: Life, Nature, and a Country Garden* (Greystone, \$26.95, 9781771647687), Hamer showcases his intimate knowledge of the natural world. The book is organized by season, resembling a diary of a year in the garden. It's a lyrical reflection on days spent with hands in dirt and decisions based on close observation of the weather.

Marc Hamer's careful eye for detail and deep knowledge of plants create a lush landscape into which a reader can disappear.

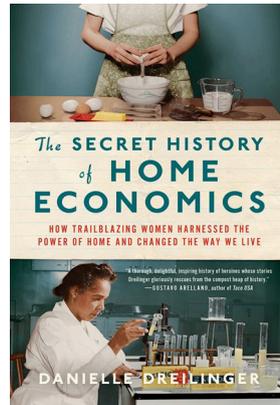
As he tends to Miss Cashmere's land, Hamer also meditates on each plant's history and place in the world. But his approach is never showy; in fact, Hamer often contemplates his own status with humility. His introspective ways led his father to devalue and dismiss him as a boy. Hamer later spent two years living without a home, and that experience colored his life, including how he approached parenting his own children, now grown.

As the year unfolds, Hamer reflects on the cycles to which all living things are bound. Little happens in the narrative, save for the dramatic living and dying of all things, but Hamer's careful eye for detail and deep knowledge of the garden's dozens upon dozens of plants are used to great effect, creating a lush landscape into which a reader can disappear. In *Seed to Dust*, Hamer invites readers to join him in quiet meditation on the earth.

—Carla Jean Whitley

The Secret History of Home Economics

By Danielle Dreilinger



American History

Whatever stereotypes we associate with the profession of home economics, Danielle Dreilinger is here to assure us that everything we think we know is wrong. As she explicates in her thoroughly entertaining book,

The Secret History of Home Economics: How Trailblazing Women Harnesssed the Power of Home and Changed the Way We Live (Norton, \$27.95, 9781324004493), home economics in the United States is much more complex than we might have imagined.

Since the time of Catharine Beecher, who published *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* in 1841, home economists have not simply reacted to societal changes and trends but have helped shape them. For starters, we have home economists to thank for things like food groups, the designation of a federal poverty level and the consumer protection movement. Home economics also opened doors for some women, including women of color, to enter careers in science that may have otherwise been closed to them.

As a journalist, Dreilinger knows the power of storytelling and makes the women from this history come to life. For example, she mines oral histories to shed light on the challenges Dr. Flemmie Kittrell faced as an African American nutritionist visiting South Africa in 1967. Dreilinger also provides overall historical context, delineating the marginalization of Black women in the home economics field.

As for the role of home economics in the 21st century, Dreilinger says the most common response she received when telling others about writing this book was, "We should bring that back." Dreilinger closes with several suggestions for doing just that, including diversifying the profession to include more people of color and teaching home economics as an interdisciplinary field that explores the connection between our homes and the world—"with an eye to addressing the root causes of problems such as hunger, homelessness, isolation, and environmental devastation."

Dreilinger, who completed her book during the COVID-19 pandemic, correctly notes that people have been thinking about the meaning of home and how homes work more than ever before. As we look toward the future, it's always good to

consider where we've been, and *The Secret History of Home Economics* helps us do that.

—Deborah Hopkinson

★ On Juneteenth

By Annette Gordon-Reed



American History

Annette Gordon-Reed opens *On Juneteenth* (Liveright, \$15.95, 9781631498831) by reflecting on her conflicted emotions about Juneteenth becoming a national celebration. It is, she notes,

a distinctly Texan holiday, since it commemorates the day in June 1865 when Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston to announce the end of legalized slavery in the United States—two months after Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox. It's also a deeply personal holiday, one that Black Texans have celebrated with family and friends ever since Granger read out his proclamation. And yet, Gordon-Reed acknowledges, it's also a profoundly American holiday, just as Texas is perhaps the most profoundly American state.

This ambivalence inspires Gordon-Reed to explore the significance of this holiday within the broader context of Texan history. *On Juneteenth* is a collection of historical essays, ranging from the Spanish conquest to the present, that investigates what it means to be Texan. Against the background of the archetypal white cowboy and the ten-gallon hat oilman, Gordon-Reed demonstrates how the history of Texas is also the history of African Americans, Native Americans and Mexican Americans. Indeed, slavery was integral to the formation of the Republic of Texas—as well as the state of Texas. Understanding this truth, Gordon-Reed argues, is key to understanding the role racism continues to play in Texas and, by extension, the nation.

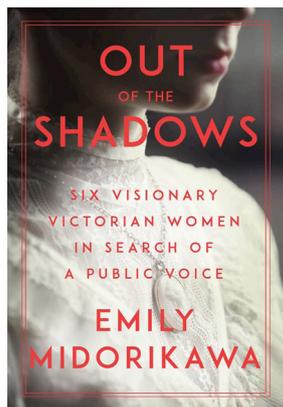
As the Carl W. Loeb Professor of history at Harvard, Gordon-Reed is no stranger to illuminating the uncomfortable truths of our past. She won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*, a groundbreaking multigenerational history of the descendants of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, an enslaved African American woman.

On Juneteenth is written on a smaller and more personal scale than her previous work, but it is no less powerful. Gordon-Reed's essays seamlessly merge history and memoir into a complex portrait of her beloved, turbulent Texas, revealing new truths about a state that, more than any other, embodies all the virtues and faults of America.

—Deborah Mason

★ Out of the Shadows

By Emily Midorikawa



History

Spirit mediums have been capturing imaginations since the rise of spiritualism in the 19th century. A veiled woman commanding the attention of a room, speaking in the voices of the beloved dead as tables

tilt, loud mysterious knocks echo from the corners and unlikely objects materialize out of thin air—such a woman is either an ethereal figure from a ghost story, or she is a charlatan, a silky smooth con artist who exploits the grief of others.

But what if there were a third option, one of revolution and rebellion? In **Out of the Shadows: Six Visionary Victorian Women in Search of a Public Voice** (Counterpoint, \$27, 9781640092303), Emily Midorikawa unveils the triumphant, tragic and deeply unconventional lives of six of the Victorian era's best known spirit mediums.

Strident orations on abolition, women's rights and suffrage suddenly gained gravitas when spoken by the all-knowing dead.

Midorikawa roots her story in both the history of spiritualism and the powerlessness of Victorian women like the Fox sisters—Leah, Maggie and Kate—who were left to grasp for influence in seemingly manipulative ways. As the book proceeds through the extraordinary lives of Emma Harding, Victoria Woodhull and Georgina Weldon, we witness women masterfully wielding the public's fascination with the revelations of the dead. They capitalized on this fascination not only to improve their own lives but also to uplift other disenfranchised people across the United States and Great Britain. Strident orations on abolition, women's rights within marriage and suffrage, which would have been ridiculous coming from a constricted and disregarded 19th-century woman, suddenly gained gravitas when spoken by the all-knowing dead.

Midorikawa breathes life into these long-ago women in ways that make them feel contemporary despite their extraordinary circumstances and distance in time. Her description of Harding enduring an incident of stalking resonates with chilling

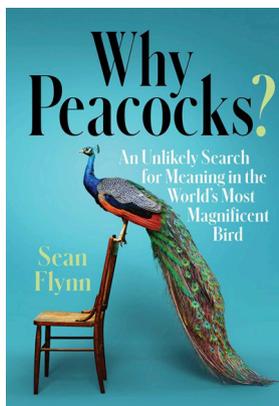
familiarity. You'll feel these women's frustration and conviction, and you'll cheer at their progressive empowerment.

It's remarkable that none of these women seems disingenuous. Throughout **Out of the Shadows**, they occupy a liminal space between genuine belief in supernatural forces and the ingenious ways they used those forces to their own ends. By the book's end, it no longer matters whether you believe these six remarkable spirit mediums were hoaxes or not; you'll certainly believe in *them*.

—Anna Spydell

★ Why Peacocks?

By Sean Flynn



Science

Have you ever thought, *What my household needs is a few peacocks?* Me neither. But that didn't stop me from enjoying Sean Flynn's **Why Peacocks? An Unlikely Search for Meaning in the World's Most Magnificent**

Bird (Simon & Schuster, \$27, 9781982101077), which details what happened after his family took on some pet peacocks. Flynn; his wife, Louise; and their two young sons already had two chickens, a dog and a cat—so when a friend asked if they wanted a peacock, they didn't immediately say no. Before long, the family had adopted three: Carl, Mr. Pickle and Ethel.

Flynn, a longtime magazine journalist, often writes about emotional subjects, such as Arizona firefighters who died battling a wildfire or the 2011 domestic terrorist attack in Norway, and he doesn't shy away from sentiment here either. Still, he approaches his subject with a science writer's eye for detail. "The noise began in the middle of April," he writes about the peacocks' mating calls, for instance. "Mr. Pickle, a rising two-note burst, E above middle C, up to G, a quick slur down to F-sharp . . . not a plaintive cry, desperate and whiny, but assertive, a robust announcement; I am here."

Flynn charts his own increasing obsession with the birds, the hours he spends each day in a lawn chair, aiming to entice the skittish peacocks to eat a blueberry out of his hand. When Carl becomes gravely ill, the endeavor to treat the peacock will be familiar to any pet owner who's pondered the price of veterinary care, and yet far stranger.

The narrative of **Why Peacocks?** alternates between this family's story and more journalistic accounts, as Flynn leads us through a natural and cultural history of peacocks, including the evolution of male peacocks' shimmering feather

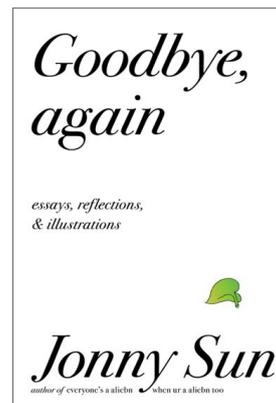
trains and the roles peacocks have played in religious traditions, making entertaining digressions along the way. He visits Palos Verdes, California, where peacocks have become a nuisance, and Dunfermline, Scotland, where a long-ago gift from Andrew Carnegie led to iconic peacocks in a public park.

Although this book is a quick read, it's well researched with an extensive bibliography. Sweet and often funny, **Why Peacocks?** is an engaging mix of memoir, history and journalism.

—Sarah McCraw Crow

★ Goodbye, Again

By Jonny Sun



Essays

What does it mean to find work that you love? To make a home in one city only to move somewhere else for a job? To be friends—real friends—in adulthood? Jonny Sun approaches these questions in his

new book, **Goodbye, Again** (Harper Perennial, \$19.99, 9780062880857). Composed of dozens of short essays and illustrations, Sun's captivating and immersive book invites readers to listen in as he thinks aloud on the page.

This book is at once sad and hopeful. It's sad about the cultural pressure to be constantly working. It's sad about the inevitability of change. It's sad about the many ways we say goodbye to each other, whether ending a visit or moving away. But it's also attentive to life and movement in unlikely places. For example, Sun contemplates house plants—their small leaves, tilting to water and warmth. They need the right kind of care for life to take root, and even when a plant seems to die, it can in fact be growing in a different direction.

Through descriptions like these, the reader feels Sun's desire for renewal. The book is hopeful as it shows how little moments from the past, something as simple as cooking an egg, can reverberate in the present. In this way, we never really say goodbye. We are still together, still remembering each other in small daily ways.

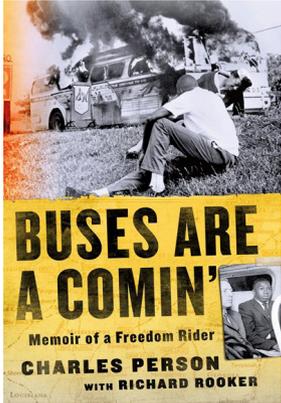
To spend time with this book is to spend time in the private world of a creative, sensitive person who finds life inviting, beautiful and rich, but also overwhelming, scary and exhausting. **Goodbye, Again** acknowledges the crushing constancy and anxiety of work, but it also celebrates the joy of creating something where nothing was before—the pleasure of being totally immersed in work and the way that work can make us come alive. By acknowledging both sides of this reality in gentle

and specific ways, Sun ultimately gives his readers license to experience their own contradictions and to be fully human.

—Kelly Blewett

★ Buses Are a Comin'

By Charles Person



Memoir

"In every era, it takes a bus of change to lead the way. . . . Thankfully, a change bus is always a comin'." So says Charles Person in his inspiring account of the 1961 Freedom Ride, **Buses Are a Comin'** (St. Mar-

tin's, \$26.99, 9781250274199). Person began taking notes when he got on his change bus at age 18. He would later lose those notes during a savage beating by a white mob in Birmingham, Alabama, but he still recalls it all vividly now that he's in his 80s.

Growing up in the Bottom, a poor Black neighborhood in Atlanta, Person was unaware of racism's reach. But when he was refused admission to Georgia Tech in 1960, despite an outstanding academic record that was good enough for MIT, he grew enraged. His grandfather prodded, "Do something!" But what could a teenager do?

Soon he knew. As a freshman at Morehouse College, Person witnessed his classmates' participation in nonviolent sit-ins at Atlanta stores that refused service to Black people. He joined in, was arrested and served 10 days in solitary confinement because he sang protest songs too loudly.

By the spring of 1961, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was recruiting people for nonviolent tests of two recent Supreme Court decisions prohibiting segregation on interstate buses and trains. Person applied, after assuring his parents he would be safe, and received nonviolence training in Washington, D.C. He admired his cohorts, including a young John Lewis, but was skeptical of their concerns about the trouble they might encounter en route. Before embarking on two weeks of Trailways and Greyhound bus rides to New Orleans, they were encouraged to write their wills. Person declined.

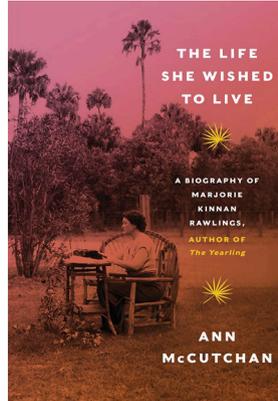
What happened on that trip almost killed these 13 riders, but their horrifying experiences brought global attention to the escalating U.S. civil rights movement. Four hundred more Freedom Riders would join them that summer, and the South would be forever changed. Person tells it all in riveting detail, with help from his friend, historian Richard Rooker.

And why tell this story now? Person writes, "Nothing will change if you, my reader, my friend, my fellow American, do not take Papa's advice and 'do something.' What change needs to happen? Get on the bus. Make it happen."

—Priscilla Kipp

The Life She Wished to Live

By Ann McCutchan



Biography

Although Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' novel *The Yearling* is well known—it won the Pulitzer Prize in 1939—its author has yet to receive the same level of attention. A contemporary and friend of Zora Ne-

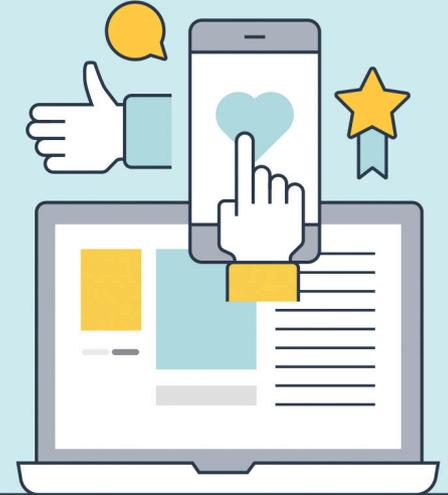
ale Hurston, Ernest Hemingway (with whom she fished) and Thomas Wolfe (with whom she shared the celebrated editor Maxwell Perkins), Rawlings captured the raw beauty and untamed wilderness of north central Florida and its denizens long before the area cut down its orange groves to make way for unbridled commercial development. Ann McCutchan offers an absorbing, affectionate and long overdue portrait of Rawlings and her writings in **The Life She Wished to Live: A Biography of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Author of *The Yearling*** (Norton, \$35, 9780393353495).

Drawing deeply on Rawlings' archives, McCutchan chronicles the details of Rawlings' life, from her childhood in Washington, D.C., where she won a prize in a writing contest for her story "The Reincarnation of Miss Hetty"; to her college years at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she edited the literary magazine and met Charles Rawlings, who would become her first husband; to her early years as a journalist in Louisville, Kentucky, and Rochester, New York; to her eventual move to Cross Creek, Florida. There, she established herself as a writer, creating enduring, memorable portraits of rural Florida and its inhabitants, both human and nonhuman.

McCutchan looks closely at Rawlings' letters, stories, novels and memoirs and mines the ways they reveal Rawlings' writerly mind. This book illuminates Rawlings' desire to probe the relationship between men and women, families and individuals, and her ability to evoke a sense of place, especially the paradise of her corner of Florida. Rawlings was also, according to McCutchan, cosmically conscious, which led her to write about the interconnections between all living things. **The Life She Wished to Live** is the biography that Rawlings has long deserved.

—Henry L. Carrigan Jr.

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STOP ALL THE CLOCKS

Printz Medalist A.S. King's deeply personal novel explores a world where time has inexplicably broken.

With a reputation for ambitious prose and surreal storytelling, A.S. King is one of the most critically acclaimed YA writers working today, as well as an accomplished author of middle grade novels published under the name Amy Sarig King. She wrote her new YA novel, *Switch* (Dutton, \$17.99, 9780525555513), after suffering an unthinkable loss and trying to find a way to “soften to life.” The book takes place in a world where time has stopped—it’s been June 23, 2020, for nine months. While working on a school project, teen javelin prodigy Truda stumbles onto a way to repair time.

Your acknowledgments reveal that this book started when you were asked to give a speech about time. Can you tell us about that speech and what exactly is going on with time at the beginning of the book?

In writing the keynote for the launch of the 2018 edition of the Johnson County, Kansas, Library’s teen literary magazine, *Elementia*, I invented a clock based on psychologist Robert Plutchik’s emotion wheel. I hadn’t thought about stopped time at all for that speech—just about the concept of the clock and how we

spend our time on Earth ignoring emotions, especially as we get older. I wanted to give everyone in the venue a new way to think about how to spend their time. A new way to look at emotions.

As for what’s happened to time at the beginning of *Switch*: It has mysteriously stopped. Or the clocks have, anyway. Seems like someone needed a break and just turned the world off. It seemed natural, in that situation, that adults would have to distract children from the whole mess with something lackluster, like a school project or an essay. This is where Plutchik’s Clock walked back through the saloon doors in the hands of our narrator, Truda Becker, and said, “Howdy, Amy.”

When did you first learn about Plutchik, and what drew you to incorporating his ideas into *Switch*?

I love Plutchik and his work. I’m unsure of exactly when I came across him, but I have read every one of his textbooks. I found him during a time in my life when I needed to be reminded that emotions are real, important and natural after a lifetime of having mine denied.

One of my favorite things to do in my books is share cool random knowledge in order to help readers make sense of their world, so in *Switch*, Tru explores psychology, from developmental to psychoevolutionary, in school. I was so excited when I wrote that speech for the library’s keynote, to introduce a few hundred people to this concept of the Plutchik’s Clock. Now I am even more excited to share the idea more broadly. Heck yes! This is what Robert Plutchik did for me. He made me want to spread the word about how smart he was—and in doing so, he has helped me help other people, which is why I was born.

Tell us about Tru. How did you develop her character and find her voice?

Tru wanted to be written. I know this because she migrated from two other books I’d been writing. She and her talent for javelin seemed to want to talk, so I let them.

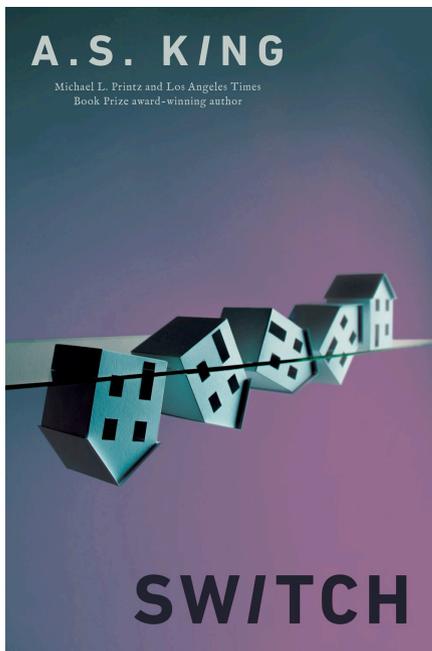
I wrote *Switch* during the hardest time in my life. My teenage daughter Gracie died in 2018, about five months after I made that speech in Kansas, and I wasn’t able to finish the book I was writing. I wasn’t able to do anything, really. I didn’t think I’d ever write another book, to be honest. But four months later, I wrote a poem about a switch, and it wouldn’t end. I sat down at the desk, threw away Tru’s original introduction and pages, and dove into this poem about her home life to see what it might yield.

I think all of my characters find their voices through experiences I have in my own life. In *Switch*, I wanted to explore how the world treats girls with skill. How their entire environment eats them without them knowing it. I wanted her to walk through that with her head up. Her confidence is what I’m most proud of. She may not be super confident, but she has the confidence to know what she is walking through and name it. That’s a huge step in healing.

Can you describe Tru’s home? Why did you choose this setting for the story?

It was the choice of the book, not me. Though I do start out telling the reader about the switch. In the house, there is a switch, but Daddy says no one is allowed to touch it. He builds boxes, often out of plywood, around the switch as a safety measure, and then he builds more and more boxes that take over rooms and hallways. As the story develops, it twists and turns and feels a bit like a tilt-a-whirl. So the house and its series of boxes become one, too.

How to describe it? Chaos, I guess. The chaos of four different people coming to terms with the same realization but on different levels and timelines. Isn’t that how every family deals with traumatic things that happen to the family unit? In *Switch*, life imitates each family member’s psychological wrestling. So their house becomes a plywood carnival. It looks great from the outside, though. Of course. Doesn’t it always?



Although *Switch* doesn't take place in our current moment, the ways its characters' lives have been reconfigured are going to feel familiar and perhaps even a bit prescient for readers. Is *Switch* a different book because of the COVID-19 pandemic? How has your thinking about the book changed, knowing that readers will bring their experiences of the past year or so to the book? I am a cosmic sort of person; I have a brain of granola and believe in astrology. So to me, this is all kismet in a very personal way. It was me who needed time to stop. When I lost Gracie, I was unable to do anything normal. I couldn't even talk or think right for months, even years. I still can't some days.

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

Once I could try to work, I started writing a book that made me stop time for eight hours a workday. Like Daddy in the book, I needed a reset. A deep breath. Anything. Like Daddy in the book, I needed to somehow access my emotions again and soften to life.

The kismet happens when a pandemic comes along, and suddenly everyone else is living in a world where they don't know what day or month it is either, and they are suddenly forced to live entirely different lives. That's just weird. The books come from personal realities. The surrealism comes from trauma. The cosmic stuff gives me a joyous shrug because it feels like a bigger puzzle, and I love puzzles; that's why I'm a writer.

But yes, I think readers who have just experienced this series of quarantines and shutdowns will relate in several ways. When humans slow down, they can usually see all the parts of their lives they are running from. That is essentially the cold open of *Switch*.

How did writing *Switch* change the way you think about time?

The reason I was invited to speak about time at Johnson County Library was because my work pretty much always deals with or plays with time. So it's what I'm thinking about most days—it's my lens. In the case of *Switch*, what you give your time and attention to is important. Growth is what the switch is.

I wager we should be flicking switches all day—finding new ways to see old things. Finding new things. Growing. That is what time is for. For a decade of my life, I grew all my food from seed in my greenhouse to harvest in the field. I know that every centimeter of growth counts. When we mistake ignoring emotionally teachable moments as valiantly “getting over it,” we skip vital cogs in the machine. The machine turns out people whose clocks are set to eat themselves. The imbalance between personal emotional learning and book or social learning is always going to show in the crop. We need to teach young humans how to nourish themselves and give them ample time to do it. Now.

I firmly believe that we need to center the mental and emotional health of children. And ourselves. If we all don't take or make time to learn how to rest and heal, we are going to continue to pass down intergenerational trauma that is only going to get worse. We need a giant reset. If I ran the world, I'd give us all a plump vacation with a Plutchik's Clock and a ton of mental health care. And some of Daddy's cooking.

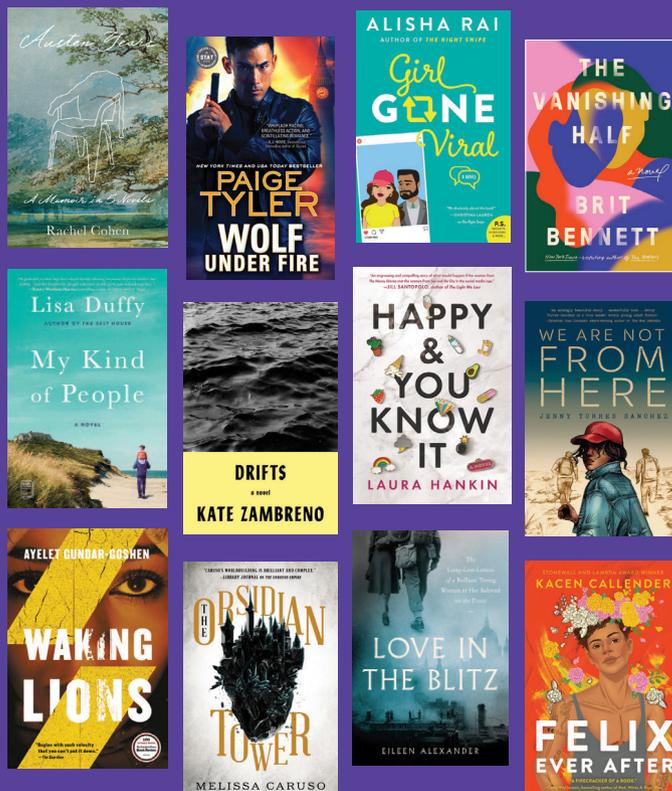
—Norah Piehl

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The Ones We're Meant to Find

By Joan He

Science Fiction

Before you read Joan He's **The Ones We're Meant to Find** (Roaring Brook, \$18.99, 9781250258564), spend a moment to appreciate its cover. Featuring an illustration by Turkish artist Aykut Aydoğdu, it depicts the faces of two young women who seem peacefully swathed in a blanket of gentle ocean spray as cotton candy clouds float above them. It's the perfect way to begin He's book, a story in which nothing is what it seems to be.

Cee has been alone on a remote island for three years, unsure of her memories and her purpose. With the help of an old robot, she collects scraps so she can build a boat and sail off to search for the only thing she is sure of: Cee has a sister, and she needs to find her. Science prodigy Kasey lives in a pollution-free eco-city, where she's grappling not just with her sister's mysterious death but also

with the politics of saving her quickly deteriorating planet. A clue leads her to Actinium, an enigmatic young man whose skills as a scientist match her own but whose intentions are murky.

He has cited Hayao Miyazaki's Academy Award-winning animated film, *Spirited Away*, as an inspiration for her writing, and it shows. Full of fantasy and mystery, this eco-science fiction romance is as epic as the ocean and seems destined for the big screen. He skillfully blends genres to create a cinematic Rorschach that puts both her characters and the reader to the test.

At the heart of the novel is this question: If we are the cause of humanity's problems, how can we



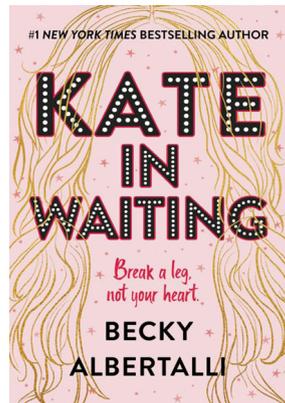
possibly be the solution? “None of us live without consequence,” says Kasey at an emotional high point. “Our personal preferences are not truly personal. One person’s needs will deny another’s. Our privileges can harm ourselves and others.” It’s heady stuff—ambitious, pointed and deeply satisfying. The plot’s twists, turns and reveals aren’t just boxes He is checking for the sake of a formulaic mystery. Instead, they’re purposeful and in service of characters who are on the brink of something greater than themselves.

Though it’s urgent and weighty, He’s sophomore novel isn’t lacking for fun. There are cute boys, high-tech marvels of the future and interpersonal drama along the way. When you reach the end, you’ll look at its gorgeous cover with new understanding. Like Kasey and Cee, there’s so much more than meets the eye.

—Luis G. Rendon

Kate in Waiting

By Becky Albertalli



Fiction

Kate and Andy have always loved having crushes on the same boys. After all, what could be more fun than spending time with your best friend dissecting every glance, word and text message for hidden signs of reciprocation from the object of your mutual affection? But when their summer theater camp crush, Matt, shows up at their school on the first day of junior year, their lighthearted attraction to him suddenly becomes a little too real. As Kate navigates her feelings for Matt—not to mention the stress of the fall musical—she wonders if her friendship with Andy can withstand first love.

Though Kate’s and Andy’s competing crushes on Matt take center stage for much of the book, **Kate in Waiting** (Balzer + Bray, \$18.99, 9780062643834) celebrates love in all its forms, including friendship, family, unrequited attractions and new romances. Kate’s BFF-ship with Andy is fierce, flawed and extremely relatable, as is her sibling dynamic with her older brother, Ryan, and her budding flirtation with Ryan’s best friend, Noah.

Becky Albertalli creates a colorful, true-to-life

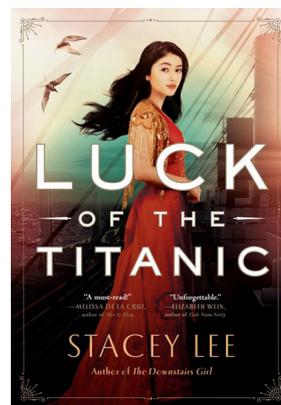
cast of supporting characters, from “the squad” of Kate’s theater friends to their jock antagonists, “the f-boys.” Although these tropes can be found in any teen movie, Albertalli makes them entirely her own, transforming theater kids and jocks alike into fully developed characters who blur the lines between their cliques.

Fans of Albertalli’s Creekwood novels (*Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*, et al.) will feel right at home with **Kate in Waiting**, which encapsulates all the joys and anxieties of the high school experience, with special attention paid to the strange and wonderful electricity of the theater. The result will make both loyal Albertalli fans and newcomers alike give **Kate in Waiting** a standing ovation.

—Sarah Welch

Luck of the Titanic

By Stacey Lee



Historical Fiction

Stacey Lee has earned critical acclaim and a loyal readership for intricately plotted fiction featuring Chinese characters amid memorable historical settings. Her new book, **Luck of the Titanic** (Putnam, \$18.99, 9781524740986), was prompted

by a little-known fact: Of the eight Chinese passengers aboard the *Titanic*, six survived, but they were deported within 24 hours of arriving in the United States.

The novel opens with a mesmerizing action scene as Valora Luck, a trained acrobat, catapults her way on board the doomed ship. Although she has a valid first-class ticket, an officer has refused to let her board, claiming she lacks proper documentation. But Valora is determined to join her twin brother, Jamie, who has already boarded in third class for the first leg of a journey to Cuba. They haven’t seen each other for two years, and Valora has a scheme to reunite them: She wants to convince a circus executive who’s also on board to hire them both as acrobats for the Ringling Brothers.

Lee’s characters often adopt disguises, and Valora alternately poses as a male laborer alongside Jamie below decks and as a fashionable first-class widow who turns heads with her confidence and style. As Valora navigates the highly class-conscious world of the ship, readers witness the stark discrepancies between rich and poor, as well as some of the racist behavior of its passengers. “The English love all things Chinese—silk, tea, plates—just not if it comes with a beating heart,” Valora observes.

The narrative builds slowly toward the looming, inevitable tragedy. Once the ship strikes the iceberg, Lee unspools one heartbreaking scene after another as Valora, Jamie and their friends struggle to find each other and reach safety.

From the start, readers are aware that two of the book’s Chinese characters will die. When one succumbs early in the disaster, the remainder of the

Short and sweet

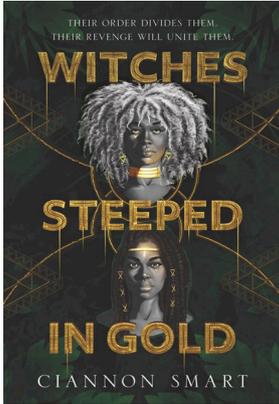
Chapter books offer engaging opportunities for children to become confident, independent young readers.

novel becomes a superbly choreographed guessing game of who the second victim will be. Despite the hardships its characters encounter, **Luck of the Titanic** is anchored by its energetic and empowered heroine. This novel is an admirable and engaging addition to the annals of fictional *Titanic* lore.

—Alice Cary

Witches Steeped in Gold

By Ciannon Smart



Fantasy

Jazmyne Cariot's queen mother, Judair, rules with an iron fist, but even as Jazmyne joins a rebellion that's planning the queen's assassination, she fears that she isn't prepared to lead after her mother's death.

Far away in a heavily guarded prison, Iraya plots an uprising with her fellow cellmates, then uses their escape to move toward her true goal: revenge on the royal family. When these two witches from warring clans discover they share a target, they must form an unprecedented alliance. By combining their power, they're sure to succeed—if they don't destroy each other first.

Ciannon Smart's debut YA novel, **Witches Steeped in Gold** (HarperTeen, \$18.99, 9780062945983), is a thrilling story that unfolds against a vivid island backdrop inspired by Jamaican culture, history and folklore. Smart plunges readers into a sprawling world of fantasy and mystery that's dripping with political intrigue, lore stretching back generations and a fully realized magic system.

Chapters that alternate between Jazmyne and Iraya offer two strikingly different perspectives on the action, yet each girl's distinct voice rings clear. Jazmyne is thoughtful, deliberate and cautious, while Iraya is spirited, passionate and impetuous.

Smart offers an honest, character-driven exploration of the relationship between the personal and the political. Jazmyne and Iraya were both born into the roles they must eventually inhabit, willingly or not. Smart highlights not only their personal motivations, hesitations and emotions but also the broader societal consequences of their choices—to kill, to save, to ally, to betray. Ultimately, the narrative blurs the line between good and evil, and readers will find themselves rooting for different characters throughout the book.

Full of twists and turns, **Witches Steeped in Gold** is a complex and powerful read featuring two heroines who are unafraid to venture into the unexpected.

—Tami Orendain

Two new chapter books, each the first in a planned series, combine all the heart and narrative complexity of middle grade novels with the brevity and supportive illustrations that are the hallmarks of great chapter books.

Newbery Medalist Erin Entrada Kelly's first chapter book, **Maybe Maybe Marisol Rainey** (Greenwillow, \$16.99, 9780062970428, ages 7 to 10), introduces an endearing heroine that readers will root for from the very first page.

Marisol longs to climb the big magnolia tree in her backyard, which she has named Peppina. (Marisol believes in the importance of naming objects, from Buster Keaton the refrigerator to Charlie the family car.) Though Peppina seems like a perfect climbing tree, Marisol wouldn't know because she's afraid of heights. Marisol's best friend, Jada, loves to climb Peppina, and so does Oz, Marisol's big brother. But all Marisol can do is gaze at Peppina, imagine what it would be like to see the world from on high and wonder why she feels so scared.

As Peppina looms in her thoughts, Marisol plays with Jada, tolerates the dual annoyances of Oz and a nemesis at school and thrives under the care of her loving mother, a Filipina immigrant, and her father, who works far away but visits via the computer screen.

Kelly's third-person narration is simple and clear as it captures Marisol's perspective, allowing readers to see the world through her eyes. Black-and-white illustrations



ILLUSTRATION FROM **JO JO MAKOONS** © 2021 BY TARA AUDIBERT (WOLASTOQEY). REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF HEARTDRUM.

illustrations for additional textual engagement. **Maybe Maybe Marisol Rainey** will encourage readers who fear the possibility of failure to look forward to a brighter future.

In **Jo Jo Makoons: The Used-to-Be Best Friend** (Heartdrum,

\$15.99, 9780063015371, ages 6 to 10), author Dawn Quigley creates a sparkling portrait of an Ojibwe girl and her life on a fictional reservation. Full of personality, Jo Jo is frank about her strengths (math and drawing) and her weaknesses (language arts), but her biggest challenge is feeling secure in her friendships. Her first best friend is her cat, Mimi, whom she hopes to protect

from the veterinarian. Her second best friend is her classmate Fern, but since Fern hasn't been sitting with her at lunch lately, Jo Jo is afraid that Fern doesn't want to be best friends anymore.

Over the course of an adventurous day, readers come to know Jo Jo's quirky perspective, her insecurities and her cultural identity, which informs how she sees the world. Jo Jo's sense of humor, playful attitude

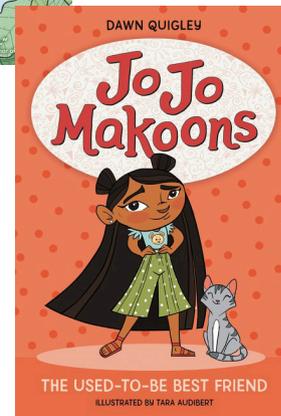
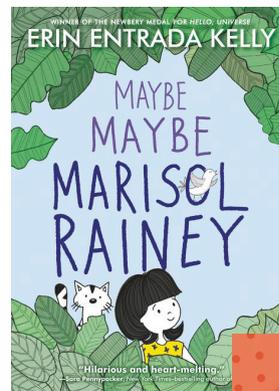
and frequent misinterpretations of dialogue and body language are sure to lead to plenty of giggles. Jo Jo's family, teachers and friends keep her on her toes, learning and growing.

Quigley's first-person narration is fast paced, witty and engaging, while illustrator Tara Audibert's black-and-white cartoon-style illustrations assist with character development and deepen the story's setting. An author's note and glossary provide context about the Ojibwe people and the Ojibwe and Michif words used in the text, which will be familiar to readers once they've finished reading this delightful book.

—Autumn Allen



ILLUSTRATION FROM **MAYBE MAYBE MARISOL RAINEY** © 2021 BY ERIN ENTRADA KELLY. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF GREENWILLOW BOOKS.



Your Mama

By NoNieqa Ramos
Illustrated by Jacqueline Alcántara

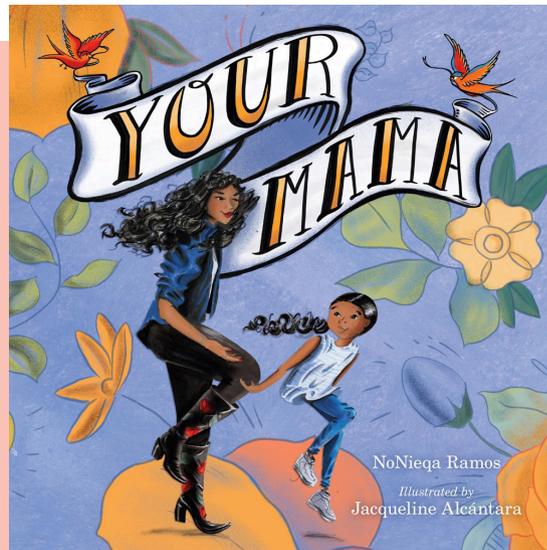
Picture Book

What does it take to be a modern mom? **Your Mama** (Versify, \$17.99, 9781328631886, ages 4 to 7) is an exuberant ode to supermoms everywhere. Author NoNieqa Ramos transforms “your mama” jokes into a series of poetic tributes from a daughter to her mom. For instance, “Your mama so strong, she like a marine. Up three flights of stairs, carries the groceries.”

Indeed, this cool mama is as comfortable showing her daughter how to fly a drone as she is wearing a flowing dress and high heels at parents’ night at school. She can sew costumes, plan spectacular parties and become a tour guide on rip-roaring road trips. Her adoring daughter knows all too well that this mama is her “A-Team.”

Ramos never forgets to include reality amid all the adulation. Even after the daughter messes with her mother’s makeup, uses the couch as a trampoline and makes her mother “cray cray,” her mama is still “so forgiving, she lets you keep on living.” Mama also instills important values in her daughter, taking her along every time she votes and reminding her that true wealth means “rollin’ in” friends, family and “you, her gold.”

Jacqueline Alcántara’s illustrations are as lively as Ramos’ text. They burst with bright colors,



the cinnamon to your tembleque, the tres leches to your cake.”

Your Mama hits the perfect note of sweetness, without an ounce of treacle.

—Alice Cary

★ Wishes

By Mượn Thị Văn
Illustrated by Victo Ngai



Picture Book

Wishes (Orchard, \$18.99, 9781338305890, ages 4 to 8) begins as a mother and her three children

pack in the middle of the night. They say a tearful goodbye to the family members who will remain behind, then wait in a long line to board a small boat for a perilous journey across the ocean. They survive crowded conditions, hard winds and rain, the turbulent sea and the searing sun, all in the hope of a new life.

Author Mượn Thị Văn structures this tale as a poetic series of wishes made by one of the children. As the girl watches her family pack food into a yellow knapsack, she imagines that “the bag wished it was deeper.” As a storm tosses the tiny boat, “the sea wished it was calmer.” The child herself holds dear a poignant and heart-rending wish: “And I wished . . . I didn’t have to wish . . . anymore.” This wish is revealed over the course of four spreads set against a brightening sky as a large vessel spots their boat, welcomes its passengers aboard and takes them to the shoreline of a grand, gleaming city.

Victo Ngai’s illustrations do much of the heavy lifting here, extending Văn’s spare, lyrical text in concrete, cinematic ways. Ngai doesn’t hold back, never once shying away from the journey’s traumatic elements. Sorrow, fear, distress, life-threatening danger: It’s all here. One spread,

drenched in washes of red, puts readers right on the boat as people cling to one another, the narrator embracing her family with tears in her eyes. “The heart wished it was stronger,” Văn writes.

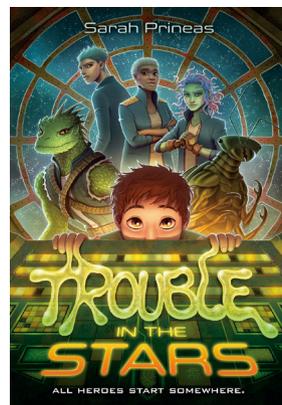
A closing note reveals that this powerful story is personal for Văn. As a child, she left her grandfather behind and traveled with the rest of her family from southern Vietnam to a refugee camp in Hong Kong, eventually settling in the United States.

This rich and nuanced tale illuminates the closely held wishes of refugees the world over. It’s unforgettable.

—Julie Danielson

Trouble in the Stars

By Sarah Prineas



Middle Grade

As an amnesiac shape-shifter, there are a lot of things Trouble does not know. They don’t know where they came from, or why the StarLeague is hunting them down and keeps calling them a dangerous

escaped criminal. They don’t know the meaning of basic concepts like cows, lunch or art. But when Trouble stows away on the smuggler ship *Hindsight*, they make some important discoveries, including words like *family*, *smile* and *home*.

In Sarah Prineas’ **Trouble in the Stars** (Philomel, \$17.99, 9780593204283, ages 8 to 12), readers

join Trouble and the multispecies crew of the *Hindsight* as they evade the StarLeague’s relentless General Smag and his warship, the *Peacemaker*. *Hindsight*’s crew initially doesn’t trust their stowaway, and Trouble spends much of the book pretending to be a human boy and concealing their shape-shifting abilities. However, amid midnight snacks with Captain Astra, strategy games with the gruff lizardian Reetha and vegetarian meals with tasked cargo manager Telly, Trouble and the crew begin to bond. As Trouble’s relentlessly good nature wins everyone over, a sweet and natural family dynamic forms.

A spaceship gains a shape-shifting stowaway in Sarah Prineas’ hilarious, action-packed tale.

Trouble’s ability to shape-shift makes them an entertaining narrator. They take many forms throughout the book, and each results in a new set of senses. They evocatively describe navigating by smell while in rat form and surviving the vacuum of space in the form of a blob of goo. They’re quick to point out the quirks of the human form, such as the way human eyes leak when they’re miserable.

Trouble’s shape-shifting also introduces unpredictability to the book’s many action scenes, as they find themselves in a range of high-stakes situations that can only be solved through the clever use of Trouble’s ability. Escapes, chases and one fantastically elaborate heist keep the plot moving at a thrilling pace.

Trouble is skeptical when Captain Astra tells them that the stars sing if you “know how to listen.” But as they learn more about themselves and the universe, their remarkable empathy helps them discover endless ways to listen, to see and to connect with others. **Trouble in the Stars** is a hilarious and heartwarming look at what it means to be human, have a home and hear the stars sing.

—K.J. Witherow

★Have You Ever Seen a Flower?

By Shawn Harris



Picture Book

Some books provide a chance to escape, while others offer space for contemplation and reflection. It's the rare book that does

both. Bursting with insight, Shawn Harris' **Have**

You Ever Seen a Flower? (Chronicle, \$17.99, 9781452182704, ages 3 to 6) transforms a trip to the mountains into a spirited voyage into our very consciousness.

Have You Ever Seen a Flower? is an invitation to pause and imagine the worlds around us and inside us.

The book begins with a tiny, colorful child, the only pop of brightness amid an intricate graphite city. Buildings tower around her, looming and glum. When the girl gets in a car and travels down a dark road away from the city, gray buildings give way to white emptiness before the book explodes with color. The vibrant hues that once gilded only the girl now surround her, with fields of warm-toned flowers and triangular mountains filled with all the shades of the rainbow. The illustrations grow and bloom surrealistically, as outstretched arms

become the leaves of flowers, reaching toward the sun, and a drop of blood from a pricked finger becomes a meadow of crimson blossoms.

All the while, Harris addresses readers in a series of wide-eyed observations and imaginative questions. “Have you ever seen a flower using nothing but your nose? Breathe deep . . . what do you see?” His playful language is sprinkled with subtle moments of alliteration and assonance.

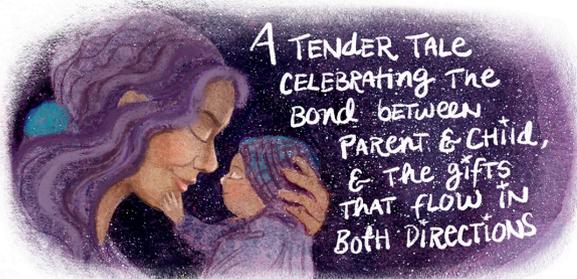
Composed of sweeping colored pencil strokes, Harris' art has a simplicity that belies its expert use of negative space and perspective. The illustrations don't just carry the book's narrative; they also deliver a beautiful metaphor as **Have You Ever Seen a Flower?** builds to an astonishing, all-encompassing declaration of connectedness: We are all flowers.

Have You Ever Seen a Flower? is an invitation to pause and take a moment to feel, imagine and experience the worlds around us and inside us. Its joy, color and hopefulness will ignite the imagination of anyone lucky enough to experience its magic.

—Jill Lorenzini

meet MICHAELA GOADE

How would you describe your book?



Who has been the biggest influence on your work?



Who was your childhood hero?



What books did you enjoy as a child?



What one thing would you like to learn to do?



What message would you like to send to young readers?



Written by Tasha Spillett-Sumner, **I Sang You Down From the Stars** (Little, Brown, \$18.99, 9780316493161, ages 4 to 8) is a heartfelt ode to expectation and joy. Illustrator Michaela Goade won the 2021 Caldecott Medal for *We Are Water Protectors*, written by Carole Lindstrom. An enrolled member of the Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, Goade lives in Sheet'ká (Sitka), Alaska.



MAY 2021



Great Circle: A Novel

By Maggie Shipstead

(Knopf, 9780525656975, \$28.95, May 4, 2021, Fiction/Literary)

"Great Circle is about two women 100 years apart: pilot Marian Graves and Hadley Baxter, the actress cast to play the famous pilot. This epic novel is fascinating, adventurous, and well-written, with great characters, historical details, and fantastic settings. Don't miss this journey!"

—Kathy Morrison, Newtown Bookshop, Newtown, PA



Project Hail Mary: A Novel

By Andy Weir

(Ballantine Books, 9780593135204, \$28.99, May 4, 2021, Science Fiction/Action & Adventure)

"Remember how much you loved *The Martian*? Prepare to love this book even more. I found myself engrossed from the very beginning, and every page brings a new delight. Weir writes incredible characters that leave a mark you'll feel long after you're done."

—Mattie Shepard, Gramercy Books, Bexley, OH



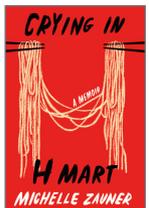
People We Meet on Vacation: A Novel

By Emily Henry

(Berkley, 9781984806758, trade paper, \$16, May 11, 2021, Romance/Romantic Comedy)

"What fun! This delightful book should be in every beach bag this summer. A hilariously comedic rom-com with memorable characters, set in varied vacation spots in various years. I enjoyed the changing timeline and seeing the relationship as it grew through the years."

—Shelley Lowe, Monkey and Dog Books, Fort Worth, TX



Crying in H Mart: A Memoir

By Michelle Zauner

(Knopf, 9780525657743, \$26.95, April 20, 2021, Biography & Autobiography/Memoir)

"I was struck by just how much I loved this book for how it walks through grief not as a way to leave it behind, but as a way to remember its exact shape. I'm grateful for its funny, self-deprecating, and wise observations, and for its difficult beauty."

—Steve Haruch, Parnassus Books, Nashville, TN



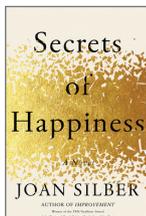
The Last Thing He Told Me: A Novel

By Laura Dave

(Simon & Schuster, 9781501171345, \$27, May 4, 2021, Fiction/Women)

"I adore Laura Dave and absolutely loved *The Last Thing He Told Me*. Wonderful characters, amazing writing, and a twisty plot kept me turning the pages as fast as I could. Truly unputdownable and a thoroughly enjoyable read!"

—Kaitlin Smith, Copperfield's Books, Healdsburg, CA



Secrets of Happiness: A Novel

By Joan Silber

(Counterpoint, 9781640094451, \$27, May 4, 2021, Fiction/Women)

"No one is better than Joan Silber at revealing the hidden links that connect people. The small, human details in

Secrets of Happiness feel at first like ripples in a pond, but they prove in the end to be mighty waves in an ocean the size of the world."

—James Crossley, Madison Books, Seattle, WA



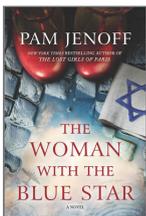
Mary Jane: A Novel

By Jessica Anya Blau

(Custom House, 9780063052291, \$27.99, May 11, 2021, Fiction/Literary)

"Mary Jane is 14 in 1975 and her summer nannying job is filled with surprises, spontaneity, and love as she is pulled into the family of the little girl she watches. A sweet and funny story of discovering yourself, your loved ones, and where you fit in. It really hit home for me."

—Courtney Boches, Reads & Company, Phoenixville, PA



The Woman with the Blue Star: A Novel

By Pam Jenoff

(Park Row, 9780778311546, \$28.99, May 4, 2021, Fiction/Historical/World War II)

"In *The Woman With the Blue Star*, Jenoff continues to showcase herself as one of the masters of historical

fiction, deftly intertwining emotional power with historical accuracy. Much like *The Lost Girls of Paris*, this is one our customers will be coming back for again and again."

—Alex Brubaker, Midtown Scholar Bookstore, Harrisburg, PA



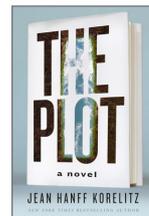
Mirrorland: A Novel

By Carole Johnstone

(Scribner, 9781982136352, \$27, April 20, 2021, Fiction/Thrillers/Psychological)

"You will tie yourself in knots trying to figure out what's happening in *Mirrorland*, the story of two sisters growing up with different stories attached to the games they play, stories that take on a life of their own years later as buried memories come to the fore."

—Pete Mock, McIntyre's Fine Books, Pittsboro, NC



The Plot: A Novel

By Jean Hanff Korelitz

(Celadon Books, 9781250790767, \$28, May 11, 2021, Fiction/Thrillers/Psychological)

"I devoured this smart, suspenseful novel about a failed novelist who reignites his career with a stolen plot and gains fame and notoriety. Korelitz's depiction of the book world is a treat for those of us in it, but her twisty, psychologically astute plotting will hold broad appeal."

—Becky Dayton, The Vermont Book Shop, Middlebury, VT



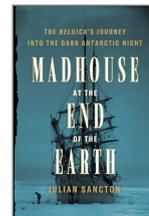
Ariadne: A Novel

By Jennifer Saint

(Flatiron Books, 9781250773586, \$26.99, May 4, 2021, Fiction/Literary)

"Satisfying the need for more Greek/Roman transformational myths from much-needed other viewpoints, Jennifer Saint delivers tales of Ariadne and her sister Phaedra's life on Crete and beyond. Less heroic yarn and more character inquisitiveness—a refreshing addition."

—Michelle Bear, Edmonds Bookshop, Edmonds, WA



Madhouse at the End of the Earth: The Belgica's Journey Into the Dark Antarctic Night

By Julian Sancton

(Crown, 9781984824332, \$30, May 4, 2021, Biography & Autobiography/Survival)

"What I love about polar expedition stories is imagining surviving the same situation. *Madhouse at the End of the Earth* is a fascinating study of chasing fame at any cost and the price paid when things go horribly wrong. A worthy addition to the canon of polar expedition history."

—Tom Beans, Dudley's Bookshop Café, Bend, OR



The Music of Bees: A Novel

By Eileen Garvin

(Dutton, 9780593183922, \$26, April 27, 2021, Fiction/Friendship)

"Comparing this book to *Eleanor Oliphant* left me a bit skeptical, but the comparison is fair and I'd even say that *The Music of Bees* stands on its own beautifully. Add in some interesting facts on bees and heartwarming stories of lovable, offbeat characters and you have a winner."

—Pat Rudebusch, Orinda Books, Orinda, CA