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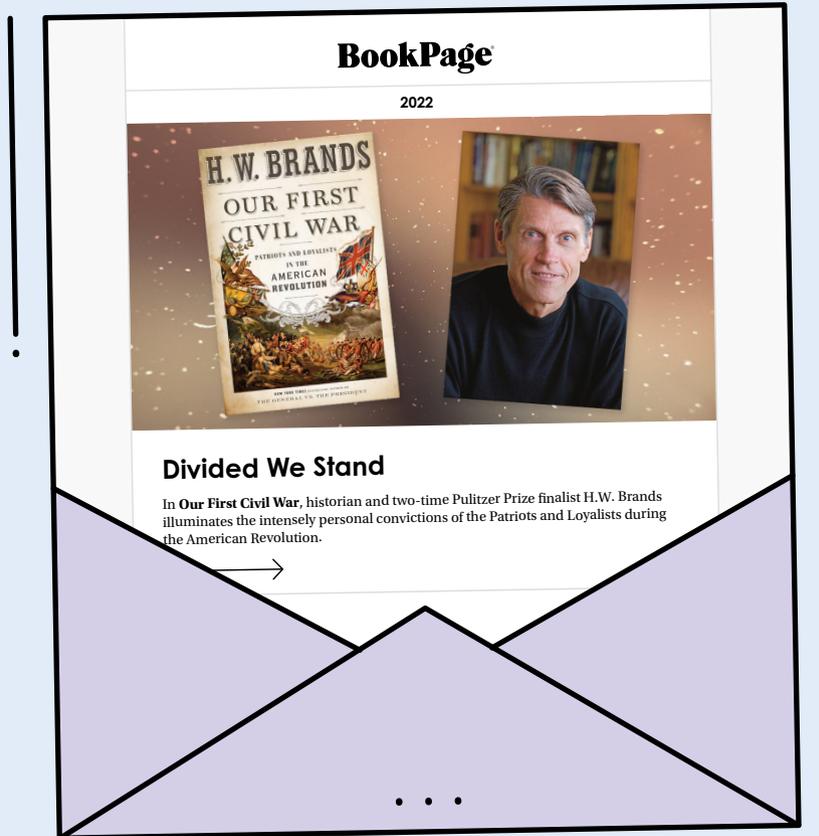
GET COZY

Snuggle up with a flurry of snowy picture books, including Donna Jo Napoli and Naoko Stoop's *Words to Make a Friend*.

ALSO INSIDE: Tips for upping your emotional intelligence and finding fun in 2022

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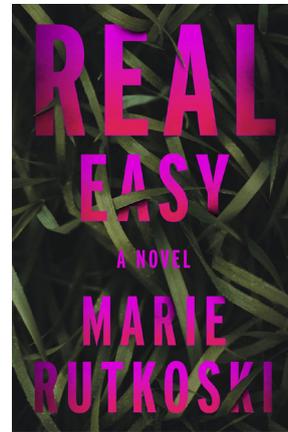
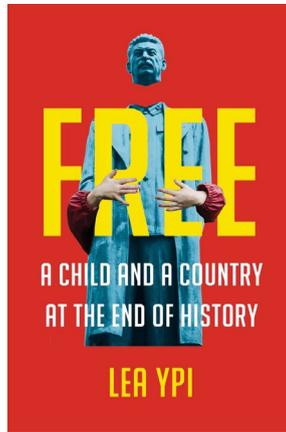
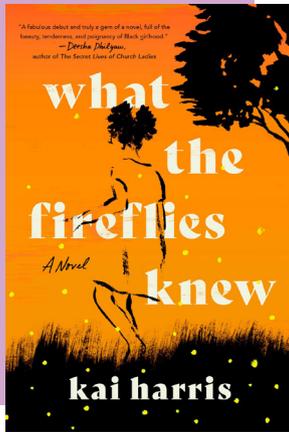
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Coming soon to a reading chair near you

We hope you're all caught up on 2021 reading, because 2022 is ready and raring to topple your TBR. The year is young and our most anticipated lists are long, but here's a glimpse at a few of the titles we're excited to check out this winter.

What the Fireflies Knew

Last year, multihyphenate Phoebe Robinson launched a new publishing imprint—with the greatest name, Tiny Reparations Books—and its first fiction title drops this February. Kai Harris' debut novel unfolds from the perspective of an 11-year-old girl who, after her father dies and mother disappears, spends a life-changing summer with her sister and estranged grandfather. Harris' artist statement is giving us uplifting, healing energy, which is always what I'm here for: "My goal is to write something (or some things) that matter," she writes. "I want my words to be a safe space, a retreat, a giant bowl of comfort food (with ice cream on top). I want my words to be truth and light. Trauma and joy." Will **What the Fireflies Knew** be *The Secret Life of Bees* of Black girlhood? I have high hopes, especially because novels that remind us to take special care of our inner child, through everything they have been through, are always at the top of my list.

—Cat, Deputy Editor

Delilah Green Doesn't Care

First of all, just look at that cover. Behold it. Just by looking at it, you already know who both of those women are, and you probably can't wait to see what they're like together. Even if you're not a fan of small-town romances (*especially* if you're not a fan of small-town romances), you'll want to make an exception for Ashley Herring Blake's take on the subgenre. Through telling details and character-revealing grace notes, Blake engenders empathy for the titular photographer, who fled Bright Falls, Oregon, after a lonely childhood; Claire, Delilah's crush from her teenage years who stayed in town and is now a bookseller and single mother; and practically everyone in their orbit. Blake's Bright Falls isn't a tiny Utopia, and there are no contrived plots or broad characterizations. It's just a town like any other, full of people who are both victim and victimizer, both cruel and kind, all depending on the kind of light you view them in.

—Savanna, Associate Editor

Free

Let me begin with a behind-the-scenes secret: I read the first couple chapters of a lot of books. Like, a *lot* of books. As I plow through piles of advance review copies each month, looking for the most exciting new reads to recommend, it's rare that I get to spend more than half an hour with a book before I have to keep moving. Within four pages of Lea Ypi's **Free: A Child and a Country at the End of History**, however, I desperately wanted to make an exception. Ypi grew up in Communist Albania, and her debut memoir chronicles the year her country's identity began to shift and the personal and political fallout that rattled the rest of her adolescence. The writing is crisp, surprising and funny. The ruminations on freedom are stimulating and provocative. The tone is exactly dry enough to temper the narrator's naive childhood perspective. I reluctantly sent my copy to a reviewer, but at least now I have an excuse to visit a bookstore when **Free** is published at the end of January.

—Christy, Associate Editor

Real Easy

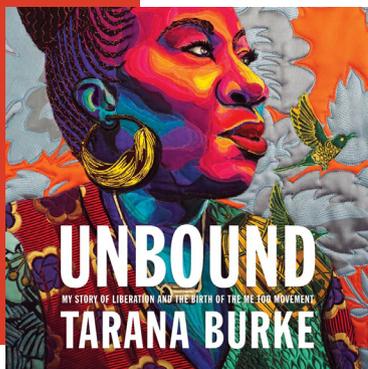
I first came across **Real Easy** by Marie Rutkoski months ago while scrolling through Pinterest looking at book covers, and my eye was immediately drawn to the dark, moody backdrop juxtaposed against the bold, neon pink text. Just like its cover, Rutkoski's first novel for adult readers is magnetic from the very beginning. The setting—a Midwestern strip club—and all the complications that swirl around it are established rapidly and then propel the story along while injecting it with suspense. Each character whose point of view rotates through the narrative is richly multifaceted, and this enabled me to sympathize with them even when they shocked, frustrated or angered me. On multiple occasions, I've found myself thinking about this book when I wasn't reading it—and with a murder, a kidnapping and an entire array of unreliable narrators still on my mind, I know I'll be first in line to buy a copy when it's available later this month.

—Jessie, Editorial Intern

Great or Nothing

How many reimaginings and adaptations of Louisa May Alcott's beloved novel *Little Women* is too many for me? To quote an iconic scene from the 2004 teen comedy *Mean Girls*, the limit does not exist. I regularly sing along to the soundtrack of the 2005 Broadway show while driving to work. I inhaled Bethany C. Morrow's 2021 remix, *So Many Beginnings*, set in 1863 in a Virginia colony of newly emancipated people. Greta Gerwig's 2019 adaptation was the last movie I saw in a theater before the pandemic. (I loved it, obviously.) So I truly cannot wait to see what this reimagining will hold. The details are already tantalizing: It's set in 1942, with each March sister's perspective written by a different YA author. Jo builds planes! Laurie is an army pilot! Amy is a Red Cross volunteer in London! Beth's point of view will be in verse! I look forward to swooning, sighing and ugly-crying all over again when it hits shelves in March.

—Stephanie, Associate Editor



★ **Unbound**

As the founder of the #MeToo movement, Tarana Burke reacted to the use of the hashtag on social media in 2017—initially without her awareness or involvement—with alarm and dismay. But she soon moved beyond her protective instinct to a place of gratitude and openness, as she recognized how people were benefiting from the phrase’s transformative power. The pain, confusion, vulner-

ability and, ultimately, strength in her memoir, **Unbound** (Macmillan Audio, 7 hours), are rendered all the more potent and compelling by her confident voice, distinguishing Burke as a woman who has found her path to help others heal.

—Autumn Allen

★ **A Calling for Charlie Barnes**

Charlie Barnes, the hero of Joshua Ferris’ novel **A Calling for Charlie Barnes** (Hachette Audio, 11.5 hours), is a con man and a liar. The task of discovering the true Charlie falls to his novelist son, Jake, the narrator of this hilarious and tragic story of love, failure and redemption. Nick Offerman, best known as laconic misanthrope Ron Swanson on “Parks and Recreation,” delivers a powerful performance as Jake, convincing the listener that Charlie’s son has the strength necessary to understand and forgive the unforgivable.

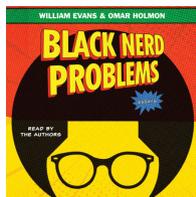
—Deborah Mason



Black Nerd Problems

The essay collection **Black Nerd Problems** (Simon & Schuster Audio, 8 hours) presents the opinions of William Evans and Omar Holmon, creators of the website by the same name. Evans and Holmon deliver high-energy performances with humor and verve, making this audiobook a real treat for fans of pop culture critique.

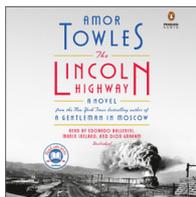
—Autumn Allen



★ **The Lincoln Highway**

Amor Towles’ novel **The Lincoln Highway** (Penguin Audio, 16.5 hours) follows Emmet Watson, his kid brother, Billy, and their friends Duchess and Woolly on an epic road trip from Nebraska to New York. Edoardo Galleoni narrates as all but two of the characters, and his reading of Billy’s perspective is especially convincing as he captures the wistfulness and vulnerability of a young boy far from home. Marin Ireland is gloriously brassy and brittle as Sally, a Penelope figure who refuses to stay home, and Dion Graham imbues Ulysses, an African American veteran doomed to crisscross America, with weary dignity and courage.

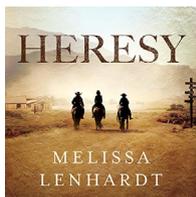
—Deborah Mason



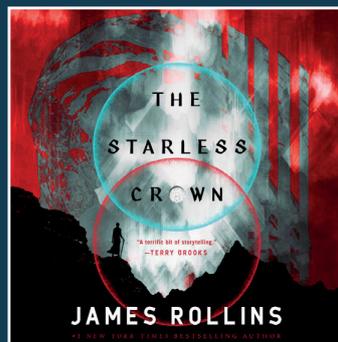
Heresy

The new audiobook of Melissa Lenhardt’s groundbreaking 2018 novel, **Heresy** (Hachette Audio, 14 hours), will transport you to the Old West of the 1870s. Seven seasoned narrators (Barrie Kreinik, Bailey Carr, Ella Turenne, Nikki Massoud, Natalie Naudus, Imani Jade Powers and James Fouhey) bring their characters to life as they tell the tale of a gang of female bandits.

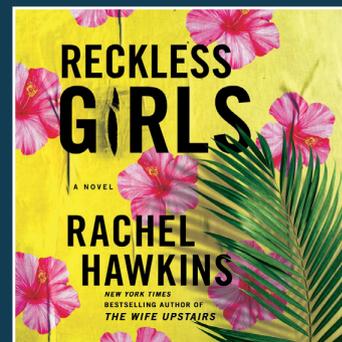
—Anna Zeitlin



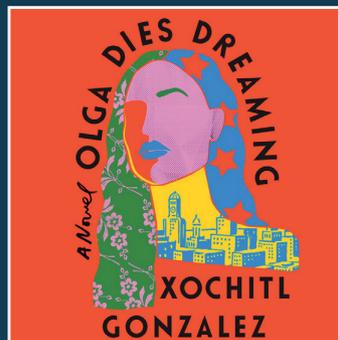
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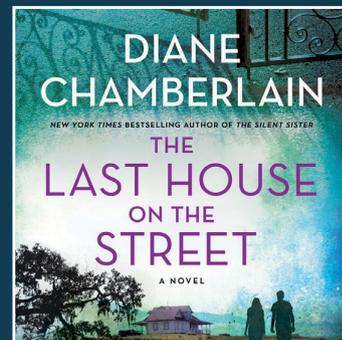
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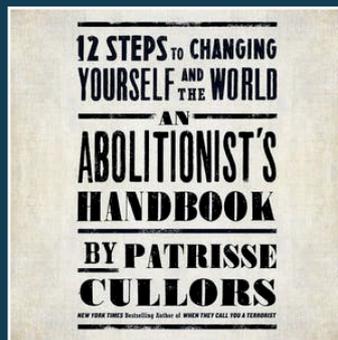
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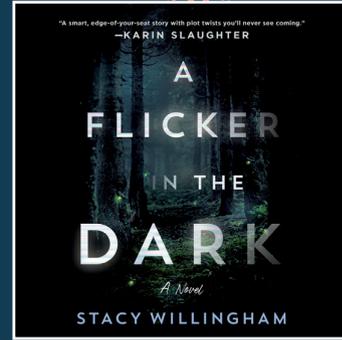
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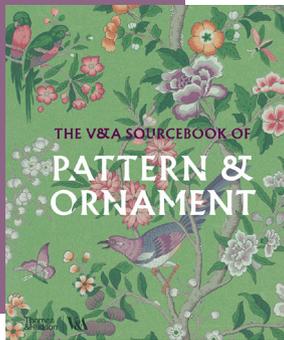


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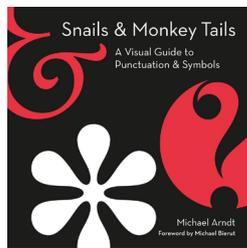




★ The V&A Sourcebook of Pattern and Ornament

I like to imagine the process of assembling the exquisite compendium that is **The V&A Sourcebook of Pattern and Ornament** (Thames & Hudson, \$60, 9780500480724). What a dizzying and delightful task! London's Victoria & Albert Museum is home to one of the world's largest collections of decorative

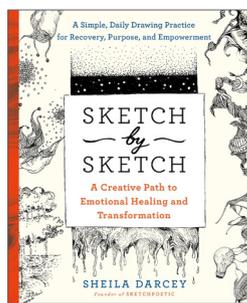
and designed objects in the world, and in this tome, one can peruse thousands upon thousands of images adapted from the museum's holdings. Spanning pottery, textiles, paintings, wallpaper, sculpture and pretty much any other patterned thing you can imagine, the contents are arranged into four categories—plants; animals; earth and the universe; and abstract patterns—with most pages featuring a grid of three or more images and a succinct set of captions identifying the source objects and their makers. As you page through swiftly or slowly, the effect is kaleidoscopic. It's a veritable feast of patterns for the eyes and mind, full of color, intricate details and beautiful repetition. You'll wish for two copies: one to keep and savor; one to cut up for collage art. Frankly, I'm besotted.



Snails & Monkey Tails

Speaking of details . . . it's an interesting time for punctuation, isn't it? Texting has completely upended the rules, such that a period now suggests a hostile vibe to some (my teenager confirms this), and even the meaning of certain emoticons seems to be shifting with the generations. But these symbols persist in print matter, and they are lovingly and

fetchingly celebrated in **Snails & Monkey Tails** (Harper Design, \$19.99, 9780063061248), graphic designer Michael Arndt's spiffy salute to the "tiny designs that run interference among the letterforms." If you don't know what a gawlix is, you sure as \$@%!* will if you read this book. Afterward, you may never call @ an "at" symbol again. Rather, try "little duck" as they do in Finland, or "cinnamon bun" like the Swedes. From silcrows to pilcrows to guillemets and the dinkus, Arndt's book will up your word-nerd quotient, and it will do so with impeccable style.

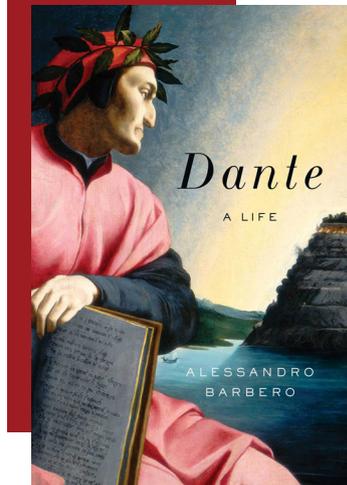


Sketch by Sketch

I recently purchased my first iPad and began exploring Procreate, a digital tool that, when paired with the Apple Pencil, opens one up to a new realm of two-dimensional artmaking. I'm finding a daily drawing practice to be a profoundly joyful and meditative pursuit. Sheila Darcey, founder of the SketchPoetic community on Instagram (@sketchpoetic), knows all about the therapeutic potential of low-stakes sketching, and in **Sketch**

by Sketch (St. Martin's Essentials, \$19.99, 9781250773876), she encourages readers to try 21 exercises designed to help them dig deep internally and work through difficult emotions. Darcey doesn't care how well you draw, and her exercises are not meant to build artistic skill. If you create something that makes you smile, all the better, but self-discovery, not technical mastery, is the goal. "This is not art," she writes. "It is a visual learner's version of freewriting." Testimonials throughout from SketchPoetic acolytes demonstrate how the process has worked for others.

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



Dante

"Dante and Shakespeare divide the modern world between them; there is no third," T.S. Eliot said. James Joyce called Dante Alighieri "my spiritual food," and Russian poet Anna Akhmatova learned Italian just to read him. The influence of Dante and his *Divine Comedy* permeates Western history and literature—and, clearly, the consciousness of even the most modern writers. And yet the 700th anniversary of his death in September 2021 went largely unmarked, at least in the United States. Just a few months tardy, Alessandro Barbero's **Dante: A Life**

(Pegasus, \$28.95, 9781643139135) arrives on these shores, translated from the Italian by Allan Cameron. Surprisingly, this is the first book by Barbero, a highly regarded historian and novelist in his native country, to be published in the United States.

Many of the details of Dante's life, even the date of his birth, are lost to time, but Barbero is an indefatigable detective when it comes to piecing together

Seven hundred years after Dante Alighieri's death, a new biography parses the elusive life of one of civilization's greatest poets.

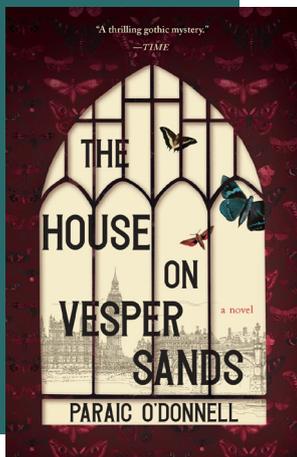
a narrative from the historical record. His mission is not merely to sketch the possibilities of Dante's private life but, per-

haps even more so, to place Dante within the context of his times. The end of the 13th century was a turbulent age on the Italian peninsula, and Dante was a native son of Florence, that most powerful city-state. Though likely of humble origins, the Alighieri clan had high aspirations, and Dante ambitiously immersed himself in the politics of the day. He aligned himself with the Guelphs, a political faction that supported the Pope, against the Holy Roman Emperor-supporting Ghibellines. This divisiveness further fractured as the Guelphs themselves split into more granular warring factions, which eventually led to Dante being banished from his beloved city. He lost his land, social status and wife and ultimately spent the last 20 years of his life in exile in northern Italy.

Dante's literary legend has long been tied to his muse, Beatrice—a young woman whom he only encountered on two occasions, nine years apart. Again, Barbero plumbs the historical record to flesh out Beatrice's story and discern how her veritable non-relationship with Dante nonetheless inspired some of the world's great love poetry, such as *La Vita Nuova*. In what might be viewed as an early form of metafiction, Dante made himself a character in the *Divine Comedy* (Beatrice also makes an appearance), and so Barbero seeks clues to his familial and political relationships from within the pages of the epic poem, as well.

Still, given the considerable gaps in the record, Barbero's **Dante** is less biography or literary study and more medieval history as seen through the foggy lens of one seminal man's life. It raises the inevitable question that always surrounds genius: From where did this ordinary man spring, only to go on to create one of humanity's enduring masterpieces? Despite his erudition, Barbero is no better equipped to answer that question than his predecessors, but his well-timed work reminds us of Dante's greatness and, perhaps, will send us back to the original source material to puzzle out the answer for ourselves.

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.



Candelabras and crooked staircases

Set in 1893 London, Paraic O'Donnell's **The House on Vesper Sands** (Tin House, \$17.95, 9781951142988) follows an appealing cast of characters as they try to unravel a mystery involving missing working-class women and a menacing group called the Spiriters. Inspector Cutter of Scotland Yard takes on the case, and his investigative efforts are shared by journalist Octavia Hillingdon, who's on the hunt for a good story, and university student Gideon Bliss, who's romantically linked to one of the missing

girls. Readers will enjoy losing themselves in O'Donnell's atmospheric adventure, which explores themes of feminism, class and Victorian mores.

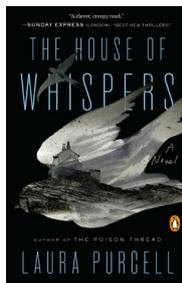
Clare Beams' **The Illness Lesson** (Anchor, \$16, 9780525565475) takes place in 1800s Massachusetts, where Samuel Hood and his daughter, Caroline, open a progressive girls' school after his dream of establishing a Utopian community fails to bear fruit. Trouble brews when Eliza, a smart, inquisitive student, starts experiencing seizures and episodes of mania. After Caroline and other students experience similar symptoms, Samuel enlists the help of a doctor who proposes an unusual treatment. Beams' ominous historical thriller is rich in period detail and

These atmospheric thrillers—quintessentially gothic and decidedly unsettling—are perfect winter book club picks.

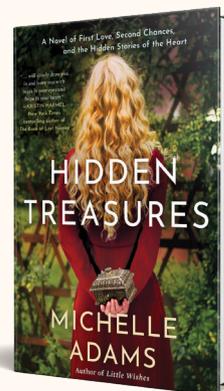
brimming with tension, and its questions concerning gender and female agency will inspire great reading group discussions.

A Black teacher encounters ghosts both spiritual and emotional on a visit to her hometown in LaTanya McQueen's **When the Reckoning Comes** (Harper Perennial, \$17, 9780063035041). Mira is in town for her best friend's wedding, which is taking place at the Woodsman, a renovated tobacco plantation that's supposedly haunted by the ghosts of the enslaved people who were forced to work there. Mira hopes to see her old friend, Jesse, who was arrested for murder years ago. But events take a terrifying twist, and Mira is forced to come to terms with the past. Reading groups will savor McQueen's well-crafted suspense and enjoy digging into topics like historical accountability and the weight of memory.

The House of Whispers (Penguin, \$17, 9780143135531) by Laura Purcell tells the story of a 19th-century maid named Hester who goes to work for Louise Pinecroft, a mute older woman who owns Morvoren House, a lonely estate in Cornwall. Staff members at the house harbor strange beliefs related to fairies, superstitions that are somehow connected to Louise's late father, a physician whose questionable work with patients took place in caves thought to be haunted. Beyond its eerie aura and propulsive plot, **The House of Whispers** boasts many rich talking points, such as Purcell's use of Cornish legends and her ability to create—and sustain—a mood of omnipresent foreboding.



BOOK CLUB READS FOR THE NEW YEAR



HIDDEN TREASURES

by Michelle Adams

"Michelle Adams's lovely, luminous writing is a beacon that draws readers closer and brings them home to the lasting truths about life and love."

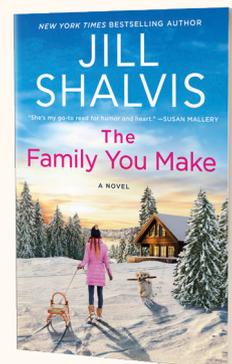
—MARIE BOSTWICK,

New York Times bestselling author of *The Restoration of Celia Fairchild*

THE FAMILY YOU MAKE

by Jill Shalvis

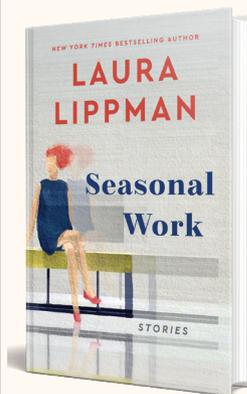
Beloved *New York Times* bestselling author Jill Shalvis begins a new series—Sunrise Cove—set near beautiful Lake Tahoe, with a heartwarming story of found family and love.



SEASONAL WORK

by Laura Lippman

In a suspenseful collection of stories featuring fierce women—including one never-before-published novella—*New York Times* bestseller Laura Lippman showcases why she is one of today's top crime writers.

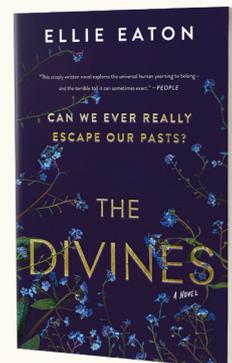


THE DIVINES

by Ellie Eaton

"For when you want a coming-of-age novel with a dark twist. In this provocative novel, the past isn't always as far away as you think."

—THE SKIMM



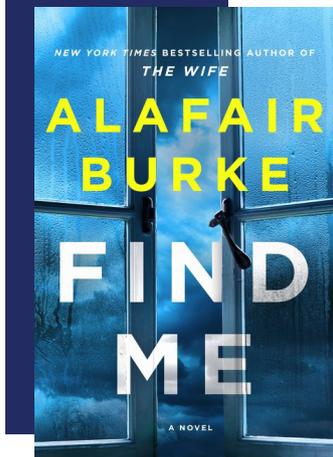
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A BookPage reviewer since 2003, Julie Hale recommends the best paperback books to spark discussion in your reading group.

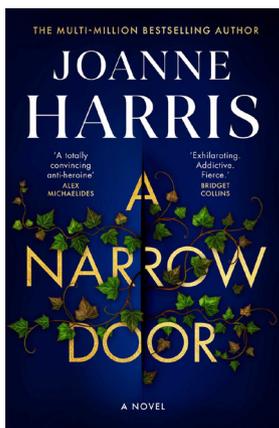


Find Me

Three women take center stage in Alafair Burke's latest thriller, **Find Me** (Harper, \$26.99, 9780062853363): NYPD detective Ellie Hatcher, attorney Lindsay Kelly and amnesiac Hope Miller, who remembers nothing of her life prior to a devastating car crash she survived 15 years ago—or so she says. Now, sans ID or history, Hope works under the radar for a real estate agent, getting paid under the table to stage houses for prospective buyers. Then, as often happens in novels about amnesiacs, a random aha! moment triggers a memory, and we're off to the races. Hope disappears, blood is spilled and the DNA found at her last-known location matches that of unidentified blood found at an old crime scene halfway across the country.

The crime in question is one of a spate of killings thought to be the work of a serial killer, and the case was supposedly solved 15 years ago. Lindsay, who has been Hope's friend ever since her accident, begins to investigate her disappearance and eventually draws Ellie into the fray. Ellie's father, who was also a cop, was assigned to the same serial killer case that's somehow connected with Hope's disappearance. The two women feverishly piece together the disparate parts of the story, and Burke's masterful control over pacing and plot reveals will make readers just as anxious to uncover the truth.

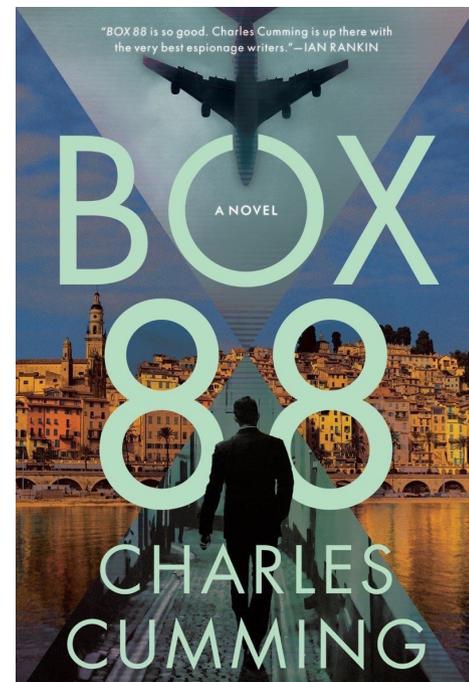
who was also a cop, was assigned to the same serial killer case that's somehow connected with Hope's disappearance. The two women feverishly piece together the disparate parts of the story, and Burke's masterful control over pacing and plot reveals will make readers just as anxious to uncover the truth.



★ A Narrow Door

Joanne Harris' darkly humorous and deliciously evil **A Narrow Door** (Pegasus, \$26.95, 9781643139050) is a quintessential and unputdownable English mystery. Rebecca Buckfast, headmistress of noted Yorkshire boarding school St. Oswald's and one of the first-person narrators of this tale, is nothing if not straightforward. She recounts the steps she had to take to become the first female head of the school in its 500-year history. Rebecca doesn't sugarcoat anything, including the two murders she committed ("one a crime of passion, the other, a crime of convenience"), and yet it is difficult not to respect her motivations and even like her. Sort of. Meanwhile, a parallel tale is offered up by St. Oswald's teacher Roy Straitley, in the form of a diary that outlines the discovery of what appears to be human remains in a construction site on the school grounds. As Roy's and Rebecca's stories unfold, both of the narrators take satisfaction in the secrets they are hiding from each other—or, more

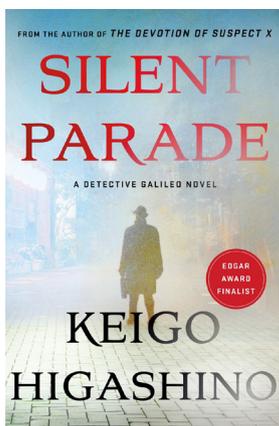
precisely, the secrets they *think* they are successfully concealing. **A Narrow Door** is an exceptionally good novel, such a masterpiece of storytelling that when Rebecca likens herself to a modern-day Scheherazade, it doesn't feel like hyperbole in the slightest.



★ BOX 88

The title of Charles Cumming's latest espionage thriller, **BOX 88** (Mysterious Press, \$27.95, 9781613162736), refers to a fictional clandestine ops organization that is jointly operated by the United States and the United Kingdom. BOX 88 does not possess a license to kill a la James Bond, but the management certainly utilizes a "license to look the other way" on occasions when wet-work is required. **BOX 88** begins a series starring Scottish spy Lachlan Kite, who in this book must come to grips with a very cold case: the 1988 downing of PanAm Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. Close to half the narrative consists of flashbacks to immediately after the plane crash, when Lachlan was a green recruit. In the present day, Lachlan lets down his guard at the funeral of his old friend, with disastrous results. He is kidnapped by an urbane-seeming Iranian man who turns out to be anything but urbane when it comes to securing intelligence from a perceived enemy combatant. Worse yet, the kidnapper's team has also captured Lachlan's very pregnant wife. If torture will not get them what they want, perhaps threats to Lachlan's family will do the trick. Despite his mistake at the funeral, Lachlan is a seasoned operative and, if anything, more dangerous to his captors than they are to him. Meanwhile, British intelligence agency MI5 is in hot pursuit, not to help Lachlan but rather to out him as an operative of a rogue agency. The suspense is palpable, the characters flawed but sympathetic in their own ways and the story gripping. In a month of really excellent reads, **BOX 88** is a clear standout.

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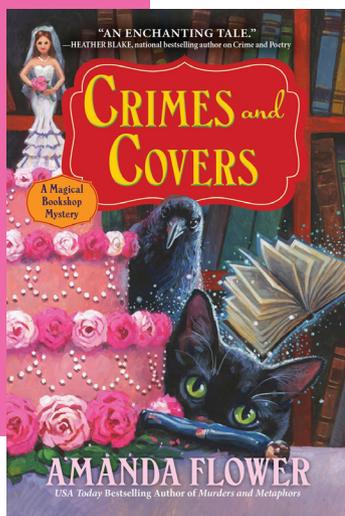


Silent Parade

By all accounts, 19-year-old Saori Namiki was on track to become the next big thing in the world of J-pop music. And then, inexplicably, she vanished, and stayed missing until her remains were discovered three years later in a suburban Tokyo neighborhood. Another body is found at the same place: Yoshie Hasunuma, an unremarkable woman save for her stepson, Kanichi, who is widely believed to have skated away from a murder charge years ago and looks pretty good for this latest double homicide as well. In the same way that Scotland Yard Inspector Lestrade often sought the assistance of supersleuth Sherlock Holmes, Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department Chief Inspector Kusanagi regularly summons brainiac physicist Manabu Yukawa, known as Detective Galileo, to consult on particularly difficult homicides. Keigo Higashino's **Silent Parade** (Minotaur, \$27.99, 9781250624819) showcases the fourth such pairing, and is in many ways the most intricate. Detective Galileo must reconsider his theory

of the crime again and again, tweaking it repeatedly until he is more or less satisfied with his assessment. He is a very clever man, smart enough to stay a step or two ahead of the police department, the perpetrator (or perpetrators?) and the reader, and that is no mean feat.

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.

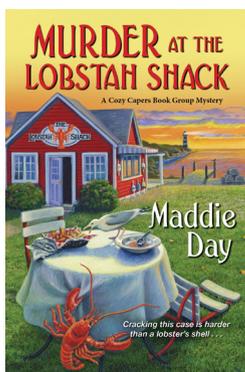


Crimes and Covers

Amanda Flower's **Crimes and Covers** (Crooked Lane, \$26.99, 9781643855967) begins with the Christmastime union of Violet Waverly, owner of Charming Books, to the drop-dead gorgeous local police chief, David Rainwater. But alas, murder most rude pushes all else aside. The murder victim is a strange woman who tried to sell Violet a signed first edition of *Walden*. Violet is able to discern that the book actually belonged to someone else, Imogene "Thoreau," whose life is devoted to establishing her blood relationship to the author. **Crimes and Covers** hits the right cozy notes: an appealing setting

(with snow to boot!), a close community and a credible yet unchallenging plot that includes romance and deaths that break few hearts. The whimsical bookshop setting is skillfully balanced by plot lines with more gravitas, and Violet herself is a winning character and narrator: warm, witty, principled and smart, someone you'd enjoy meeting again.

—Maureen Ellen O'Leary

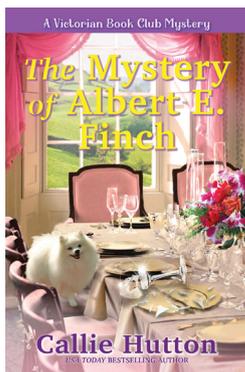


Murder at the Lobstah Shack

In the Cape Cod town of Westham, Massachusetts, Mackenzie "Mac" Almeida gets a nightmarish wake-up call. When her friend and fellow Cozy Capers Book Group member Tulia Peters arrived at her restaurant early that morning, she found more than just tubs of lobster bisque stock waiting to be boiled. On the floor of her walk-in freezer, former beauty queen Annette DiCicero was lying dead among the pickle jars. Tulia, who is a member of the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe, had recently been seen arguing with Annette about changing

Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day. But as Mac starts digging, she discovers plenty of other townspeople have surprising connections to the victim. **Murder at the Lobstah Shack** (Kensington, \$8.99, 9781496715104) mixes up a satisfying recipe of good-hearted characters, brain-teasing mysteries and evocative writing.

—Christy Lynch



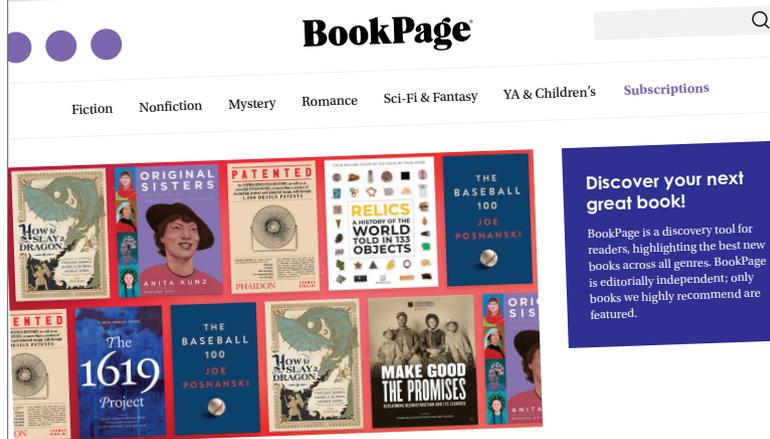
The Mystery of Albert E. Finch

Mystery novelist and amateur sleuth Lady Amy Lovell is back in **The Mystery of Albert E. Finch** (Crooked Lane, \$26.99, 9781643858029), the latest installment in Callie Hutton's Victorian Book Club Mystery series. During Amy's wedding to Lord William Wethington, her cousin, Alice Finch, is poisoned and collapses face-first into her meal. Local detectives charge Mrs. Finch's husband, Albert, with her murder, but Amy isn't sure that he's guilty. With their honeymoon on hold, Amy and William put their sleuthing skills to the test and begin their

own investigation. Hutton's Victorian-era Bath is a delightful setting, and it's easy to root for the newlywed sleuths, whose relationship is clearly rooted in friendship and respect. **The Mystery of Albert E. Finch** also addresses issues like misogyny and classism with grace and heart.

—Jamie Orsini

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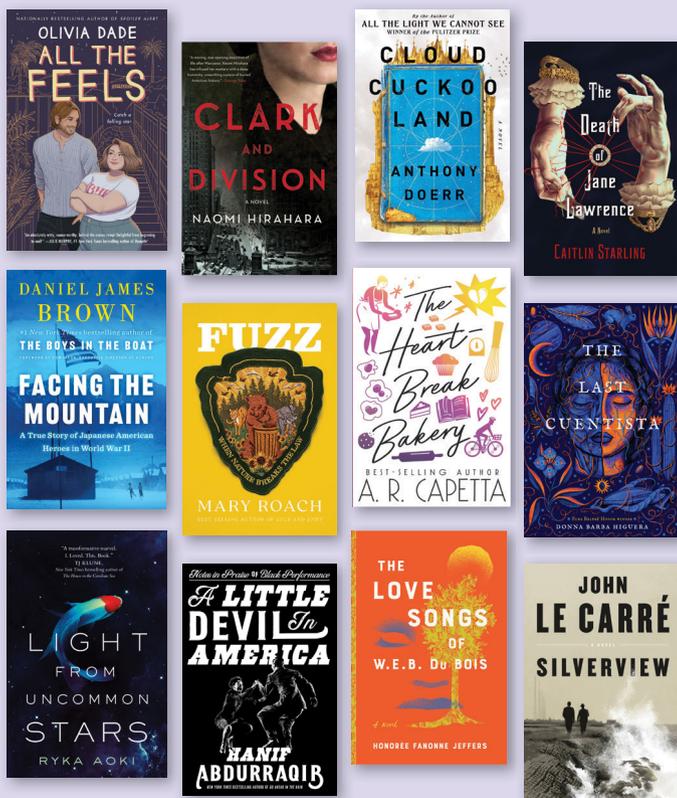
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Bad romance

In these books, relationships are terrifying
in more ways than one.

Love gone terribly wrong is at the heart of two paranoid thrillers whose female protagonists contend with corrosive lies, nefarious intentions and gaslighting galore as they struggle to drag long-buried secrets into the light.

Elisa Wright, the narrator of Darby Kane's **The Replacement Wife** (William Morrow, \$16.99, 9780063117808), is still reeling from a horrific event at her workplace 11 months ago. She's focusing on caring for her son, Nate, and has even ventured out of the house for an occasional errand or lunch with her husband, Harris.

Despite these improvements, Elisa grapples with a disturbing question that her gut won't let her push aside. Is her brother-in-law Josh a good guy with very bad luck . . . or is he a charming sociopath with a penchant for murdering women he professes to love?

Elisa knows it's a wild-sounding train of thought, one Harris is extra-loath to entertain because his and Josh's lives are so enmeshed. But she's always wondered if there was more to the story Josh told them when his fiancée, Abby, disappeared seven months ago, leaving without a goodbye to Elisa, her close friend. Now Josh has a new girlfriend named Rachel with whom he's already quite serious. Does Rachel know about Abby—or Candace, Josh's wife who died in an accident at home?

Determined to protect Rachel, Elisa struggles to appear supportive of the new relationship while searching for clues. It isn't easy, especially with everyone looking askance at her whenever she wants privacy (read: an opportunity for serious snooping). She can't tell if she's paranoid or getting close to a

terrible reality. Kane has created a compellingly claustrophobic thriller rife with gleeful misdirections and plenty of damaging secrets. Readers will feel dizzy and disoriented right

along with Elisa, all while hoping against hope that she'll figure it out before it's too late for Rachel—or herself.

The three women in Leah Konen's **The Perfect Escape** (Putnam, \$17, 9780593085448) venture farther from home than Elisa does, but not as far as they'd like.

Sam, Margaret and Diana don't know each other that well, but they've bonded over intense venting and drinking sessions concerning the sad state of their respective relationships. A Saratoga Springs girls' weekend, complete with spa treatments and margaritas, sounds like a logical next step in their

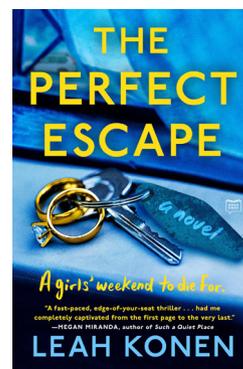
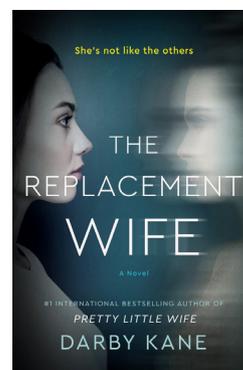
quest to shake off the tarnish left by love's demise. What could go wrong?

The trio sets off from New York City, but just a couple of hours north in the small town of Catskill, Margaret loses the keys to their rental car. Diana suggests they rent a house for the night, go out for some fun and figure out the rest of their trip in the morning. They go to a local bar called Eamon's for booze and adventure.

The next morning, Sam and Margaret awake to hangovers and confusion as they realize Diana is missing. To their horror, they learn that blood has been found at the bar.

This twisty and increasingly disturbing story has a delicious, unhinged energy, hinting at all manner of suspects as the women's motives are gradually revealed to be even deeper—and perhaps darker—than they first seemed.

—Linda M. Castelltito



Fly on the wall

Author Hannah Morrissey explores how her former day job gave her the perfect perspective for her debut novel.

Must have typing speed of 55 words per minute. Must not be emotionally affected by violent or traumatic reports. All hired candidates will be required to swear an oath of confidentiality.

When I first read the job description for a police transcriber, I could hardly believe it was legit. This suspended belief percolated within me even as I applied, tested, interviewed, got hired and sat down to type my first report.

Hello, Transcriber.

Those two words welcomed me into a world I'd never been privy to before—a world rife with death and derelicts and drugs. So many drugs. In my two years of having lived in an industrial Wisconsin city, I'd been oblivious to the underground economy that flourished there, the biggest players being heroin and crack cocaine. Sometimes prescription pills made their way into the mix. Suddenly, I knew every bad thing that happened before it hit the news. *If it hit the news.*

In the weeks that transpired as I transcribed case after case—suspects in interview rooms, search warrants, homicide investigations, cell phone logs—I realized I had become the proverbial fly on the wall. I was a nameless, bodiless thing who stole into the police department at 10 p.m. and left before most people punched in for the morning, the only trace of my having been there a stack of perfectly typed reports and completed arrest paperwork.

I slept by day and typed by night, utilizing my in-between hours to write another novel that would ultimately go nowhere. But if nothing else, it kept me afloat during a time when I was untethered and adrift. This dream of becoming a published author was my lighthouse when I feared I might never find my way out of the dark.

My office was a terrarium, a narrow space with an outside wall that was a sheet of glass—the only shield between me and the horrors I typed up every night. I learned more in that small space, in that small slice of time, than I learned during any other period of my life.

I awakened to the fact that I now existed in two parallel realities: one in which I was oblivious

to the murders that happened just a few houses down from mine, the drug deals on the sidewalk, the car chases down Main Street; and the other in which I was the conduit between an investigator's report and a criminal going to jail. I learned that just because the police arrest a violent criminal one day, it doesn't mean they won't be walking the streets the next.

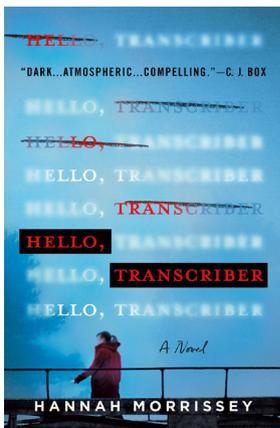
I also learned that people are people, regardless of which role they're assigned in a report (police officer, victim, suspect, etc.). The word *sonder* is a neologism from John Koenig's *Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows* that he defines as "the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own." I think that's important for writers and human beings in general, having the ability to see things through a different lens. When you do that, you realize how fragile your own circumstances are.

I picked up a lot of spontaneous knowledge, too, such as learning people by voice instead of face and knowing their pet words; *thus*, *however* and *indicative* are a handful that come to mind. I memorized badge numbers for all 216 sworn personnel, and I could guess the nature of the crime based on the length of the report. Car thefts were generally only a few minutes long, and your average search warrants were in the 7- to 12-minute range, unless you got stuck typing the report for the evidence technician. That could land you upward of 40 minutes. Homicides tended to be longer, especially if there were

interviews or a neighborhood canvas involved. And so on and so on.

Finally, I recognized that I had accidentally landed in a writer's dream position: a unique job with behind-the-scenes access to fascinating stories and all the quiet time in the world to come up with a story of my own. This was the spark for **Hello, Transcriber**, a book that explores this unique and crepuscular work. Contrary to popular belief, there are professions much more solitary than being a writer. Take it from a former fly on the wall.

—Hannah Morrissey



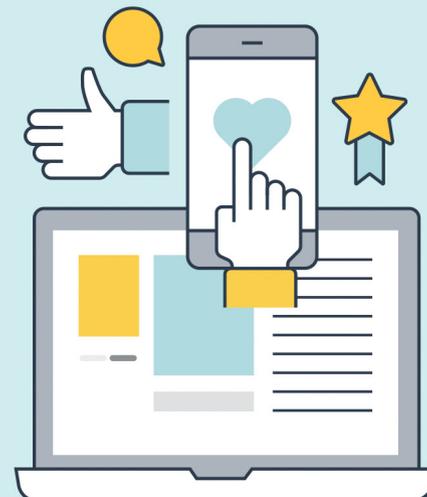
Hello, Transcriber
Minotaur, \$27.99
9781250795953

Mystery



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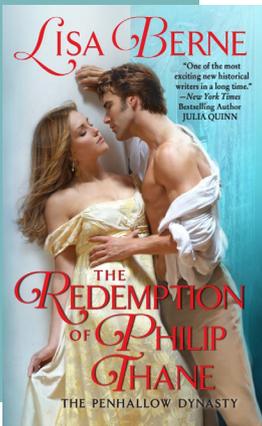


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★ The Redemption of Philip Thane

A self-described wastrel gets a chance to change in **The Redemption of Philip Thane** (Avon, \$8.99, 9780062852403) by Lisa Berne. In exchange for a hefty sum, the low-on-funds titular character agrees to deliver a speech on his wealthy aunt's behalf during Plough Day, a local holiday in the small village of Whittlesey. On the journey there, he picks up the beautiful and brainy Margaret Allen, who does not succumb to his wiles. After giving his speech, Philip can't wait to leave town . . . but then he

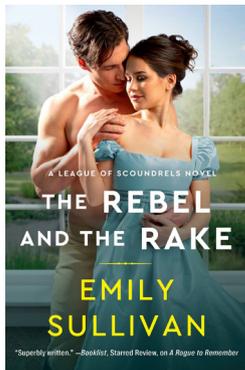
wakes up the next morning and discovers that it's Plough Day all over again. And again. And again. In this *Groundhog Day*-style story, Philip realizes he's fated to repeat both the speech and his attempts to woo Margaret, all without success unless he can mend his selfish and arrogant ways. Berne has penned an extremely clever and entertaining addition to the canon of "rake redemption" romances, and readers are bound to find it smart, tender and surprisingly sweet.



★ Weather Girl

Matchmaking goes awry in **Weather Girl** (Berkley, \$16, 9780593200148) by Rachel Lynn Solomon. Meteorologist Ari Abrams teams up with sports reporter Russell Barringer to bring together their feuding bosses, who are also ex-spouses. But as they work to spark a do-over for the pair, they find themselves also feeling a little amorous—toward each other. The gun-shy Ari, who's recently broken off an engagement and is unsure how to share her experiences with depression, begins to take a chance on single dad Russell, but can they stay the course and

really commit? This is mainly Ari's story, and it's told in her engaging first-person voice, with Russell filling the role of the wonderful guy who hopefully isn't too good to be true. Secondary characters add sparkle and fun, and there are brief but deeply enjoyable glimpses of newsroom life in this delightful romance.



The Rebel and the Rake

An aristocrat and a lady's companion try to maintain their distance—and their disguises—in Emily Sullivan's Victorian romance **The Rebel and the Rake** (Forever, \$8.99, 9781538737347). Rafe Davies plays the role of charming dilettante while actually spying for the Crown. His latest mission is to discover the source of anonymous threats made to John Wardale, a wealthy self-made man, while attending a house party at Wardale's Castle Blackwood in the Scottish Lowlands. Posing as a rogue has never bothered Rafe before, but then he meets Sylvia

Sparrow, a quiet bluestocking whom he wishes to impress with more than his good looks and facile conversation. Sylvia is similarly attracted to Rafe, but she knows nothing can come of a relationship. She's hiding aspects of herself, the most damning of which is that she was once imprisoned on suspicion of being an anarchist. But the pair are soon sharing steamy love scenes while their true natures are gradually revealed. Danger and desire intertwine in this engrossing romance between two characters who fully deserve their happily ever after.

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

School is in session

Two teacher heroines give their respective heroes lessons in love.

In romance, the teaching occupation transcends time and subgenres. Reasoning with a kid, whether it's a toddler or a teen, can require some unshakable persistence. It's no wonder that when faced with these determined women, two guarded heroes finally take a chance on love.

Marie Harte's **Hot for You** (Sourcebooks Casablanca, \$8.99, 9781492696926) finds multiple meanings in the phrase "hot for teacher" as a love-shy firefighter meets a charming teacher and her daughter amid disastrous circumstances.

Firefighter Reggie Morgan first encounters Maggie Swanson when she's lying unconscious on the side of the road. Maggie and her 6-year-old daughter, Emily, had stopped to rescue a stray puppy, and the young teacher was clipped by a passing car.

Maggie's injuries aren't serious, but thanks to a fracture, her dominant arm has to be in a sling for several weeks. Reggie can't help but check up on her, which puts him at risk of breaking his personal rules about avoiding serious romantic relationships. Maggie, on the other hand, is quickly and uncomplicatedly attracted to Reggie. He made quite an impressive knight in shining armor, and Emily and Reggie get on like a house on fire. But Maggie senses there is something beneath the affable firefighter's exterior that holds him back.

Reggie is an attentive and kind hero whose previous relationship with another single mother ended with him nursing a seriously broken heart. Maggie slowly coaxes him to trust her and their feelings for each other, giving this tender love story an emotionally resonant arc as Reggie

learns to be vulnerable again.

Author Anna Bennett offers a Regency take on the teacher heroine and kicks off a new series with **Girls Before Earls** (St. Martin's, \$8.99, 9781250793911), an angsty historical romance between a headmistress and a slightly curmudgeonly earl.

Gabriel "Blade" Beckett, Earl of Bladenton, has had it with his teenage niece, Kitty, who has been kicked out of several schools. He hopes to find her another school, far away from his life in London, and sets his sights on Bellehaven Academy.

Hazel Lively, the headmistress of Bellehaven, has settled into her spinsterhood (she's practically ancient, having reached her late 20s) and dreams of turning her struggling school into a success. Hazel

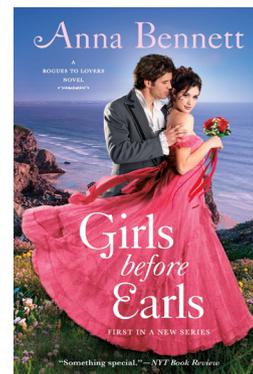
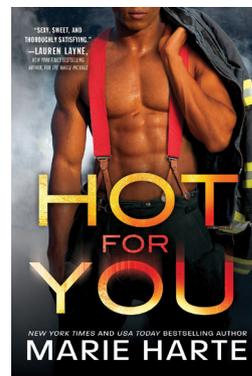
correctly senses that Kitty is acting out because of her distant relationship with her uncle. She declares that she'll agree to admit Kitty on one condition: Blade must visit every two weeks.

Readers who love a bit of banter and antagonism between the leads

will especially love this romance. Hazel is a dreamer who wants to nurture the minds of young women and help them on their paths to greatness. Meanwhile, Blade is pragmatic and dry, with a mind for business and structure. It's quite the uphill battle to happily ever after, but despite her lofty ideals, Hazel is a tenacious force to be reckoned with. Blade may be stubborn, but he never stood a chance against a headmistress who dedicates her time to teenage girls.

The entertaining **Girls Before Earls** is an utter delight until the very last page.

—Amanda Diehl



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YOUR NEW YEAR'S PRESCRIPTION: JUST ADD FUN

Popular science writer Catherine Price says to stop scrolling, put down your phone and play.

When life handed the world lemons in the form of a global pandemic, Catherine Price found a way to make lemonade. She began researching and writing a book that would help readers define, prioritize and add more fun to their lives. For anyone hoping to make 2022 a banner year, **The Power of Fun: How to Feel Alive Again** provides the perfect jump-start. Instead of trying to corral the willpower and restraint that's key to so many self-improvement plans, Price prioritizes fun, a strategy she compares to "going on a diet that requires you to eat more foods that you love."

"We go into this self-restriction phase after the indulgence of the holidays," Price says, speaking by phone from her Philadelphia home. "But you can make positive change in your life *and* have fun. In January, we feel like we have to make up for anything we did in December, instead of realizing that this is a wonderful opportunity to set a good tone for the new year by doing things that make us happier."

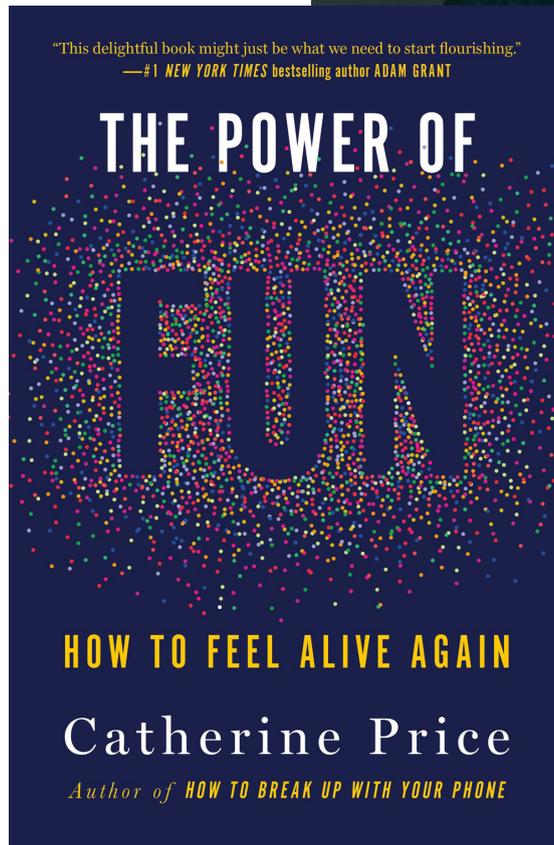
Price notes that millions of people devote time and therapy to reducing stress and anxiety, but most of us contemplate fun only as an afterthought. "I've drunk my own Kool-Aid," Price admits, her voice brimming with enthusiasm. "Really, fun is one of the most important things in life, and the more fun we have and the more we prioritize fun, the happier and healthier we will be." As she writes in **The Power of Fun**, "It should be our guiding star."

Price's latest book is a natural sequel to her 2018 book, *How to Break Up With Your Phone*, which she wrote after realizing that she was spending hours mindlessly scrolling on her smartphone while ignoring her infant daughter. By limiting her screen time, Price created more free time—but then she didn't know what she actually wanted to do with that time.

For Price, her most vivid experiences of fun occurred while learning to play the guitar. Once she realized that, one thing led to another: She formed a small band, began performing at open mic nights, started drum lessons and made new friends—activities she particularly relished because her work as a freelance writer is so solitary. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Price and her

musical friends had numerous outside jam sessions, sometimes in bone-chilling weather. "We did this for the entire winter," she says, reminiscing about a keyboard that is probably still covered in campfire ashes. "The fact that all of us committed to this source of fun was so meaningful. We went beyond playmates and became friends. And it all came from having a couple other people in my life who also prioritized fun."

"This is a wonderful opportunity to set a good tone for the new year by doing things that make us happier."



The Power of Fun
Dial, \$27, 9780593241400

Self-Help



Visit [BookPage.com](https://www.bookpage.com) to read our starred review of *The Power of Fun*.

For **The Power of Fun**, Price surveyed numerous people in detail about their own fun experiences and how they felt during those moments. She calls her writing "science-backed self-help," explaining, "I don't like the sort of self-help that's just platitudes. I really want there to be some evidence. I want to know exactly why I'm doing something." However, as she dug into the material, she was shocked to discover that there wasn't even an agreed-upon definition of *fun*, nor was there much research on the subject.

Price eventually decided to label passive entertainment, like watching TV for hours at a time, as Fake Fun and to create her own definition for True Fun—moments of what she calls "playful, connected flow" in which someone connects with other people in a meaningful way and becomes

so fully engrossed in the moment that they lose track of time. There's a lot of middle ground between these two poles, Price notes, full of enjoyable, worthwhile pastimes that simply don't reach peak fun. Luckily, **The Power of Fun** includes a Fun Audit, which Price developed to help readers identify the activities most likely to spark inner joy.

Price stresses that it's equally important for each person to recognize activities that *aren't* personally fun. For instance, Price knows that she doesn't like charades or performing improv comedy, and that while she enjoys being part of musical groups, she's not a solo performer. "If you've tried something a number of times and it never generates fun for you, then maybe it's OK to move on to the next thing," she says. "By

saying no to that, you might open up a new opportunity that's actually fun."

Speaking of things that aren't personally fun—Price faced multiple challenges as she wrote about this joyful magic ingredient "during an objectively not-fun period of history." One moment was especially memorable, when she found herself alone for several days in the midst of the pandemic. "Imagine, if you will," she writes in the book, "me slouched in front of my laptop with about fifteen browser windows open, each containing a different research paper about the horrible health effects of loneliness and isolation, as I sat on the couch, isolated and alone."

"At the same time," Price says, "the project had a powerfully positive effect on my own life. It allowed me to weather a difficult time with my sanity intact—and in fact, with my cheerfulness intact. It gave me something positive to focus on."

"Fun brings people together. . . . You're embracing your shared humanity."

At the start of the 2020 lockdown, Price, her husband and their young daughter headed to Price's childhood home in New Jersey, where her parents could help with child care. "It was interesting to see my daughter playing in some of the very same places that I had played as a kid. But it was also interesting to reflect on what play means as an adult," Price says. "Having a 5-year-old is very useful for reminding yourself that there are opportunities for playfulness and connection and flow around us all the time. We just need to learn to tune into them."

This change of focus even improved Price's marriage. "[My husband and I] were very playful people to begin with," she says, "but it's been really useful for us to reframe our own experience through the lens of fun and treat it as a priority, both as a couple and individually."

In addition to improving interpersonal relationships, Price believes this process could even heal some of the nation's divides. "Fun brings people together," she says. "If you're having fun with people, you're not yelling at them, you're not emphasizing your political differences. You're embracing your shared humanity."

Price became a science writer somewhat by accident. In high school, she believed science classes were boring, hard and irrelevant. That feeling changed at age 22, when she was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes. "That moment of having to take control of my own blood sugar for the rest of my life, lest I suffer devastating consequences, like blindness or amputation or stroke or kidney failure, was a big turning point," she recalls.

An added influence was Michael Pollan, Price's mentor at the University of California, Berkeley, journalism program, who helped her discover that she likes "writing about health and science in a quirky, personal, fun way." For one assignment, Price wrote about being diagnosed with diabetes, which led to the *New York Times* publishing her essay "Thinking About Diabetes With Every Bite" in 2009. Eventually, she even wrote a book about nutrition called *Vitamina: How Vitamins Revolutionized the Way We Think About Food*.

For years Price has contemplated writing a book about hormones, a subject that fascinates her, but now she thinks she'll choose a different topic for her next project. "I want to really lean into this fun thing," she says. "I personally feel that my books come most alive whenever I'm telling a personal anecdote, and I love writing that way. Writing this book made me tune into what made me want to become a writer to begin with."

Price hopes **The Power of Fun** will likewise help readers gather with friends and "spend January or February staging their own kind of 'funterventions.'" Once you start noticing tiny, everyday moments, she says, "it brightens up your life, and, in turn, that buoyancy can help energize you so that you can start to seek out even bigger moments of playful, connected flow. I see it as a very self-perpetuating, self-reinforcing cycle with innumerable positive effects."

These lessons have led to a very different life, Price explains. "Realizing what I really want to prioritize as fun has been truly life-changing. And I'm so excited to share that message with the world."

—Alice Cary

Increase your EQ

If you've resolved to get in touch with your feelings in 2022, then we have the books for you.

Focusing on emotional intelligence and self-awareness, these titles offer insight for managing emotions, handling stress and boosting communication skills.

Readers looking to cultivate a more peaceful mindset will find helpful strategies in Julie Smith's **Why Has Nobody Told Me This Before?** (HarperOne, \$27.99, 9780063227934). Smith is a clinical psychologist, educator and writer who, after gaining a robust social media following with her content about mental health, decided to write a book so that she could delve deeper into some of the issues she often addresses with her patients in therapy.

In her warm, welcoming book, Smith focuses on weighty topics that we all contend with, such as stress, grief, fear and self-doubt, and provides suggestions for how to work through these feelings. She also encourages readers to find out what motivates them so they can use it to implement life changes. Throughout, she takes a proactive approach, offering methods for dissolving anxiety, using stress for positive ends and managing low moods. She includes writing prompts and easy-to-do exercises to help readers explore how they respond to criticism, how they can confront anxious thoughts and more.

Why Has Nobody Told Me This Before? is briskly written and seasoned with compassionate insights. "When we understand a little about how our minds work and we have some guideposts on how to deal with our emotions in a healthy way," Smith writes, "we can not only build resilience, but we can thrive and, over time, find a sense of growth." Readers who are eager to achieve emotional balance and

make a fresh start in 2022 will find the direction they need in Smith's empowering book.

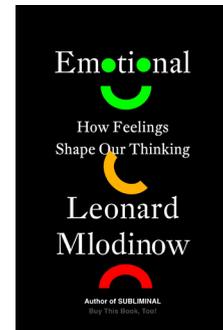
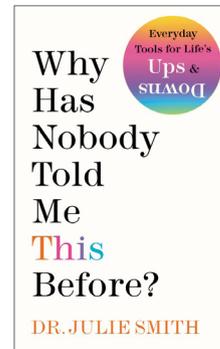
In **Emotional: How Feelings Shape Our Thinking** (Pantheon, \$28.95, 9781524747596), Leonard Mlodinow considers the seemingly diametrical relationship between emotion and logic. A theoretical physicist and mathematician, Mlodinow has previously co-written two books with Stephen Hawking. So what can a physicist tell us about emotional intelligence?

Taking a science-supported approach, Mlodinow demonstrates the usefulness of our everyday feelings. When it comes to important processes such as goal-setting and decision-making, our emotions play as key a role as our ability to think critically.

Over the course of the book, Mlodinow explores the way emotions work by looking at how they arise in the brain and inform our thought processes. He also investigates the history and development of human feelings, including how they've been regarded by different cultures in the past. Mlodinow shares a wealth of practical advice and guidance on how to monitor, and even embrace, emotions in ways that can lead to self-improvement. The book also includes questionnaires that allow readers to determine their own emotional profiles.

Synthesizing hard research, lively personal anecdotes and input from psychologists and neuroscientists, Mlodinow tackles complex topics in a reader-friendly fashion to create a narrative that's wonderfully accessible. Understanding our emotions is a critical step in the journey toward personal growth, and Mlodinow's remarkable book will put readers on the right track.

—Julie Hale



LIFE IS BUT AN AMERICAN DREAM

With her roots in Puerto Rico and heart in Brooklyn, the heroine of Xochitl Gonzalez's vibrant and raw debut novel finds that politics and family are hopelessly intertwined.

In *Olga Dies Dreaming* (Flatiron, \$27.99, 9781250786173), the personal and the political are masterfully intertwined. Its titular heroine, the uber-talented Olga Acevedo, grew up in a working-class Nuyorican family (New Yorkers of Puerto Rican descent) full of strivers and revolutionaries. But as an adult, she makes her living as a wedding planner, catering to New York City's elite and fiercely chasing the American dream. Through Olga's story, first-time novelist Xochitl Gonzalez brilliantly calls into question what that dream really means.

Gonzalez is the Brooklynite daughter of militant activists from the 1970s Chicano Power movement: her mother Nuyorican, her father Mexican American. After many years as an event planner and entrepreneur, Gonzalez's journey to transform her own story into Olga's fictional tale led her to the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where she was honored as an Iowa Arts Fellow and won the Michener-Copernicus Prize in Fiction. She was also the winner of the 2019 Disquiet Literary Prize in Nonfiction. We reached out to Gonzalez to unpack the ideas behind her striking debut.

You sold the manuscript for *Olga Dies Dreaming* to Flatiron in a 10-way auction and made a TV deal with Hulu before its release. First of all, congratulations! That can look like overnight success, but I understand that the real story is more complex. How did you make the shift from event planning to novel writing?

When I turned 40 and the last of my grandparents who had raised me passed away, I suddenly just felt like life was short. Writing was the one constant, nagging thing I felt I'd always needed to try and do. The thing is, owning a small business, especially one that focuses on customer service like my event-planning business, well, it's a hustle. It doesn't leave a lot of creative space.

So the first thing I did was sell my part of the business and get a nine-to-five job. Then I applied and went to the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference—for nonfiction—which really immersed me in community and craft, which was so important. It was so helpful to refine who I could be as a writer that I decided to pursue my MFA. I applied to only NYC programs except for—encouraged by my Bread Loaf friends—Iowa. I never thought I would get in, but I started *Olga Dies Dreaming* almost the same day that I found out that I did.

I was terrified to leave my whole life and my rent-stabilized apartment and pretty great job, to be honest. But I believed in this book and understood the rarity of this opportunity and the blessing, in that moment, that being single was. It was emotionally hard, but not logistically hard. I was able to literally put every waking hour that I wasn't at work into the novel. By the time I arrived at Iowa, I had drafted about half the novel and had an amazing agent who saw the possibility of what this was going to become—but who also stayed out of it until it was done.

From the start, the reader gets to see, in a kind of humorous way, the fighting spirit and rage brewing in Olga. This makes her such a complex and original

character, especially because she's a woman. At one point she even calls herself a "terrible person." Do you think of Olga that way, or is she judging herself too harshly?

First, thank you for saying that about her. I don't think of Olga as a terrible person, but I think there are massive moments when she feels this way—when she feels that she isn't succeeding with her family because her time is so devoted to her economic pursuits, but her ambitions in that arena leave her feeling emotionally empty. She has some peccadilloes, but really, she is not terrible; she is lonely. Her upward mobility has left her, as the saying goes in Spanish, "Ni de aquí, ni de allá." [Neither from here nor from there.] I felt this was an experience I personally had, and one that I think is reflective of many Latinx women, women of color and any person who has tried to "excel."

Something else that sets Olga apart is that she seems to live by her own rules. When she cuts corners in her business, she sees it as equalizing: the little guy scoring one over the exploitative uber-wealthy. But she's also loyal and can be generous. She has high expectations of her congressman brother, Prieto, and she struggles when he is not as compassionate as she'd like. How would you describe Olga's moral compass?

I would say she is very Old Brooklyn. Loyalty, spreading love—that's more than a Biggie lyric. (There's a reason he's our borough representative, even posthumously.) It's really how people who are from here so often are. Do you need money to eat? Is there something that's not that hard for me to do that will

make a huge impact on your day? Tell me, and I'll try and do it. She grew up with that value system.

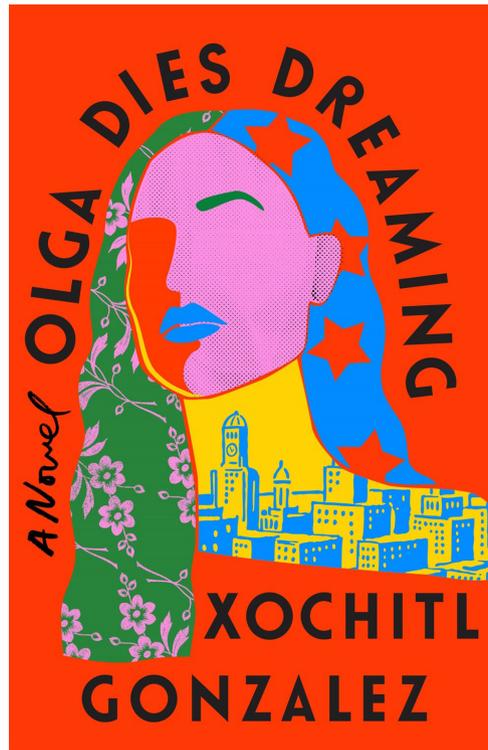
I also think, despite the place that it is now, the Brooklyn she was raised in was a place of underdogs. Taxis wouldn't even come here. So it's ingrained in her to always help the underdog.

Growing up, rules were suggestions, to be honest. The most important thing was not that you live by any black-and-white code but that

you were doing the "right thing," and I think what we see is that "right" for Olga depends on evening out the balance of power.

Olga's mother, Blanca, is a fascinating, destabilizing character. Her absence from her children's lives (in combination with her husband's addiction) was devastating for Olga and Prieto. But Blanca's mission is righteous, and some of the difficult, harsh things she tells her children are important and true. What did you want people to take away from Blanca and the choices she makes?

Sort of, exactly that. None of us are purely bad or purely good, and that is the most starkly true with Blanca. She made choices, and they are the extreme choices of a woman who thinks in absolutes. In many ways this is how truly revolutionary thinkers need to be; we just don't see them in intimate settings too much, such as in letters to their children.



"My approach was to make these characters feel so real so that their pains are your pains."



But the main point I wanted to make with Blanca is that even when she's wrong, she's always also a little bit right. Motherhood is so, so fascinating. That bond, that knowing. Her actions beyond her insights are what's problematic, but her ability to know—that felt very real to me and also important to show.

This is beyond your question, but this is a mirror of how Olga and Prieto feel about Puerto Rico itself: It's a place they only sort of know, and yet it cuts through to something bigger than familiarity.

Puerto Rico's plight, both past and neocolonial present, plays a big role in the story. Tell us about your approach to this element of the story. Did you undertake additional research?

I did. My day job when I started this book was at Hunter College, so I would jet uptown from the main campus to CENTRO, the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, and research [Hurricane] Maria data, the Young Lords, eco-pollution in Latinx communities and waves of activism. Some stuff was ingrained in me; my parents were activists, and I don't remember not knowing about sterilization on the island or the Nuyorican poets, to be honest. Fania and that era of salsa and the cultural history of freestyle are things I dork out on anyway.

But generally speaking, I spent lots of time on colonial history and the history of activism in the diaspora. I spent tons of time watching Maria footage, researching HIV and AIDS in the 1990s—another era I lived through but wanted to refresh. I talked to Puerto Ricans who had been on the island and were displaced because of Maria—that was important. But I tried not to get bogged down in it, writ large. I tried to absorb it, forget it and then go back and write, because it all needed to come from character and story, not messaging. I just wanted to be sure I got it all correct, because I haven't seen this larger history in fiction in a minute and felt it important to my community that it was correct.

Was it hard to find a balance between the personal and the political in telling this story? How did you approach that challenge?

Yes and no. I wanted to write a book for my people. I mean that in a few contexts, but to direct it back to the question, when I saw Donald Trump throw paper towels at people in Puerto Rico after Maria, that was not political. That was personal. When I see the city council vote on an 80-story high-rise of multimillion-dollar apartments that only creates 150 school seats and blocks out a community garden, that doesn't feel like a political story to me. It hurts me in my soul. As an artist, one goal was to try and put that on a page: that for many populations, the political is personal. But technically, my approach was to make these characters feel so real so that their pains are your pains.

—Carole V. Bell



Visit BookPage.com to read an extended version of this Q&A and our review of *Olga Dies Dreaming*.

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★ Small World

By Jonathan Evison

Historical Fiction

In the July 1845 issue of the *Democratic Review*, an editorial urged “the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.” It’s believed to be the first time the expression “manifest destiny,” a staple of high school history papers for over a century, ever appeared in print.

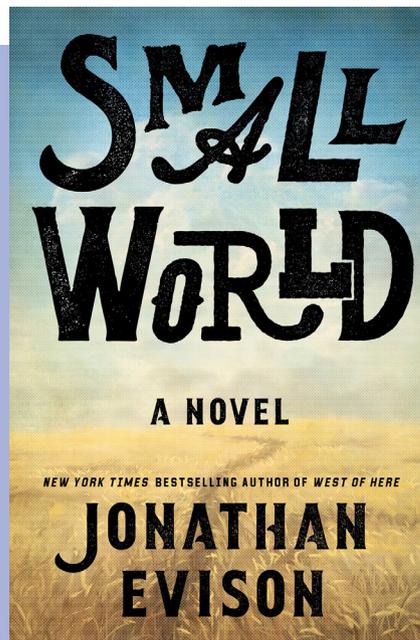
The phrase doesn’t show up as such in Jonathan Evison’s epic seventh novel, **Small World** (Dutton, \$28, 9780593184127), but its presence—and its role within American immigrants’ and Native Americans’ destinies, spread across three centuries—is woven into every page.

There’s Amtrak executive Jenny, whose great-great-great-grandfather was a Chinese immigrant and forty-niner who parlayed his gold into intergenerational wealth; budding basketball player Malik, son of a single mother and descendant of an

enslaved man; abuse survivor Laila, whose Miwok ancestor internalized white people’s cruelty; and retiring train conductor Walter, whose Irish forebear was on the crew that drove the golden spike that connected America’s coasts by rail in 1869.

In fact, it’s Walter’s 2019 train crash that kicks off the odyssey, as the engineer tries to imagine the lives of his passengers and “what circumstances, what decisions, had delivered them all to that moment.”

As Evison tells the tale of America through immigrants’, Native Americans’ and their descendants’ eyes, readers are treated to seemingly unrelated vignettes that jump back and forth across time and space. Piece by piece, Evison successfully corrals this sprawling history into a cohesive whole, coalescing it into a vivid mosaic.



Part of the reason this 480-page book seems like a novel half its girth is Evison’s ability to drop the reader into a scene. You can feel the bone-rattling lurch of a wagon carrying its hidden human cargo to freedom. You can smell the pinewoods as a young couple seeks a place to build their nest in the Sierra foothills. You can taste the congealed oats at a Dickensian orphanage. You can revel in the dreams of a young athlete on the verge of greatness.

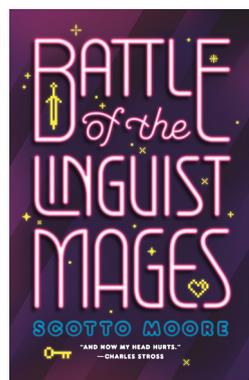
Throughout it all, Evison underscores a sense of a shared America, not so much

in the kumbaya mythology of the melting pot but a feeling—oft-neglected these days—that we are all in this nation-building adventure together. That’s a destiny worth manifesting.

—Thane Tierney

★ Battle of the Linguist Mages

By Scotto Moore



Fantasy

Summarizing Scotto Moore’s debut novel, **Battle of the Linguist Mages** (Tordotcom, \$28.99, 9781250767721), is an exercise in futility. Reducing it to the skeleton of its plot—Isobel Bailie discovers a talent that is considered mag-

ical, goes on a quest to save the world and maybe falls in love—would be ludicrously simplistic. It succeeds as a philosophical treatise and a searing critique of contemporary politics—but treating it as such would discount the fact that it’s also a riveting romp of an adventure.

Isobel, an avid gamer who lives in Los Angeles, contends with villains in the form of cynical advertising executives, disinterested game designers, conniving politicians, idealistic anarchists and arrogant gods. Along the way, she has to figure out how to get the “good” ending, and she must also confront the mother of all trolley problems. To make matters worse, it’s all happening in real life, not in the friendly confines of her favorite virtual reality game, Sparkle Dungeon. Her talents in that game’s vocal spellcasting mechanic make her an ideal fit to learn power morphemes, vocalizations that alter people’s perceptions of reality so thoroughly that they change reality itself. While

becoming the embodiment of a weaponized Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (the idea that the structure of language shapes a person’s perception of reality), Isobel learns that all of existence is under threat and must be saved.

Battle of the Linguist Mages reads like Noam Chomsky and Judith Butler conceived a metaphorical child while high on LSD and blasting Skrillex in a basement. It is hilarious and irreverent, and it relishes the intrinsic ridiculousness of real-life mages and superheroes training in a video game that’s a cross between Kingdom Hearts and Beat Saber. In blindingly inadequate words, **Battle of the Linguist Mages** is, conceptually, very dense.

Flashes of social commentary shoot through this lurid unreality like lasers through a nightclub haze, but the most fascinating element is the deftness with which Moore crafts a fantasy epic about characters who role-play fantasy epics. Lying beneath endless music puns, pointed recreations of Angeleno excess and cynicism about the modern-day celebrity cult is an impressive narrative self-awareness, an acknowledgment of every trope that Moore uses to render the reasonably straightforward core plot (discovery of magical talent, training montage, quest to save the world) as subversive.

The most powerful aspect of **Battle of the Linguist Mages** is not the sly humor, unrepentant geekiness, slow-burn romance or the trenchant sociopolitical commentary. Rather, it is the story’s tacit argument that books (and video games) are power morphemes. They contain the toolsets to construct entire universes but require readers (or

players) for that vision to be fully realized. And, to pursue this analogy to its heavily foreshadowed conclusion, every writer is a linguist mage.

Except writers don’t have to be able to vocalize multiple vowels at once. Thank goodness.

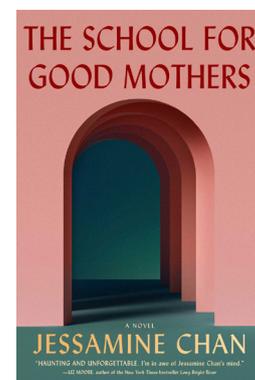
—Noah Fram



Visit BookPage.com to read our Q&A with Scotto Moore.

The School for Good Mothers

By Jessamine Chan



Dystopian Fiction

There is no shortage of parenting books about how to be a good mother. Jessamine Chan’s first novel, **The School for Good Mothers** (Simon & Schuster, \$27, 9781982156121), will make you want to

throw them all out the window.

Chan’s protagonist, 39-year-old Frida Liu, is kind, smart, hardworking and beautiful. She is also divorced from a cheating husband and the mother of 1-year-old Harriet, who is her world. Overworked, overwhelmed and unsupported, Frida has a very bad day that changes the course of her entire life.

This single moment of poor parenting lands Frida in a type of detention center, housed on a

former university campus. Imagine *The Breakfast Club*, only it's 365 days long, cut off from the rest of the world and filled with mothers who have been penalized by the government for making questionable choices. Right away, we wonder if the punishment fits the crime.

The plot thickens when the reform school starts seeming more and more like a prison. The guards, the uniforms, the rigorous daily classes on mothering, the therapy sessions, the robots (yes, robots)—it all seems so preposterous, so over-the-top. Maybe even humorous. That is, until you realize that it's all grounded in our culture's absurd expectations that mothers should be superheroes.

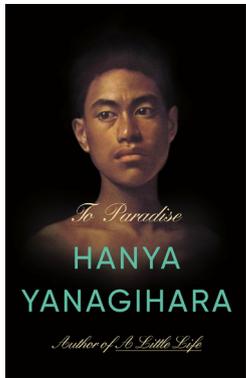
Throughout Frida's story, Chan intertwines supporting characters who are just as interesting, thrilling and desperate as she is. You will catch yourself laughing one minute and shaking your fist the next, demanding that we change the narrative of contemporary motherhood.

If good writing, gripping plot and provocative questions about the world we live in are your priorities, then **The School for Good Mothers** needs to be on your reading list, whether or not you are a parent, or someday want to be.

—Chika Gujarathi

To Paradise

By Hanya Yanagihara



Literary Fiction

With admirable narrative range (and a lavish helping of the epistolary), Hanya Yanagihara returns the concept of the United States to the drawing board. Clocking in at over 700 pages, **To Paradise** (Doubleday, \$32.50, 9780385547932)

is Yanagihara's first novel since the runaway best-seller *A Little Life* (2015), and it's both a dystopian departure from and an extension of her previous themes. The heavily scaffolded narrative is told in three sections, spanning 1893 to 2093, and it's set in historically reimagined New York City and Hawaii—both places the author has called home.

To Paradise begins in Washington Square in an alternate 1893, in which New York is part of the Free States, separate from the rest of the U.S. Here sits the ancestral home of David Bingham, favored grandson of a banking magnate. David is suffocated by the pressures of his station, and also by his desire for the protection that his station affords.

Flash forward 100 years, and disenfranchised Hawaiian prince Kawika is living in this same house with his much older boyfriend during the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Jump ahead another century to 2093, and pandemic survivor Charlie lives in the house, which is now government co-opted,

with her husband by arranged marriage.

Time and again, Yanagihara's characters must decide whether it is preferable to buy into someone else's way of thinking—whether it be a friend's, a lover's or a government's—or face their own reality. The threshold for self-debasement and humiliation is high here, and it is on this subject that Yanagihara writes most compellingly (albeit disturbingly). Her characters engage with battles for civil rights, grapple with disabilities, confront the social freedoms and limitations surrounding homosexuality across centuries, and live on a rapidly warming planet under a totalitarian regime. Typically this is a lot to juggle, and nuance is a casualty of scope in this novel.

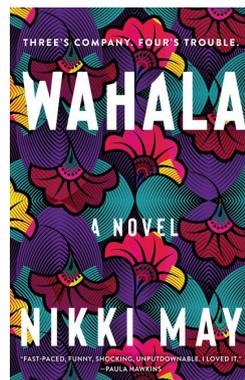
Hanya Yanagihara's latest is a dazzling experiment that returns the very concept of the United States to the drawing board.

Yanagihara's imagined American reality prods readers to consider the one we find ourselves stuck with now. **To Paradise** feasts grimly on the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is not an anomaly, Yanagihara reminds us, but a blip in an increasingly illness-ridden world. If we redrew borders and rewrote laws, the novel asks—if intentions were mostly good—would the U.S. be any better off now?

—Elena Britos

Wahala

By Nikki May



Popular Fiction

Have you ever seen a simulation of what might happen if a rogue planet wandered into our solar system? The animation shows how the planet would be as disruptive as a cue ball, knocking heavenly bodies hither and thither. It might even push them

out of their comfortable orbits. That's essentially what happens to a group of women in Nikki May's first novel, **Wahala** (Custom House, \$27.99, 9780063084247).

The rogue planet is a woman named Isobel, and the orderly, cozy solar system she fumbles into is comprised of three British Nigerian besties. Boo is a frustrated wife and mother with a part-time job that doesn't satisfy her. Her French husband adores her and their bratty, bossy daughter but is one of those "fun dads" who leaves all the heavy lifting

to his wife. Ronke is a dentist who has lousy taste in men and lacks her friends' impeccable sense of style. And Simi's husband is eager to have a baby, but she isn't.

These well-heeled ladies, concerned as they are with clothes and shoes, weaves and gel manicures, brunches and lunches at chichi restaurants and, of course, men, are meant to be a London version of the "Sex and the City" quartet. Maybe, the reader might think, these women need to have their lives shaken up a bit. Maybe a bit of wahala, that word often used by Nigerians to describe chaos or trouble, isn't such a bad thing.

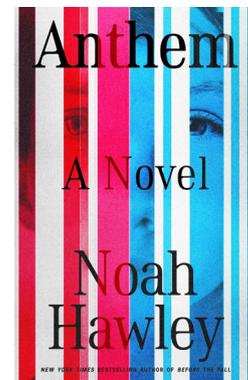
As it turns out, the wild stuff on "Sex and the City" doesn't come close to what happens to Boo, Ronke and Simi. That's because Carrie, Miranda, Charlotte and Samantha didn't have to deal with an Isobel. You've certainly heard of people like Isobel, and if you've run into one and lived to tell the tale, consider yourself lucky. She's the person who wants to be everyone's best friend, who showers you with expensive gifts if she's rich enough to afford them, who beguiles you into confiding your disappointments, your uncertainties, your fears, your secrets.

For all its wittiness, fast-paced writing and recipes for Nigerian chicken stew and Auntie K's moin moin, **Wahala** is a much darker read than you might expect. Many people get hurt—badly. It's a story that reminds us of the ties that bind, and sometimes gag.

—Arlene McKanic

Anthem

By Noah Hawley



Thriller

Whatever one may think of **Anthem** (Grand Central, \$29, 9781538711514), Noah Hawley's latest literary thriller, no one could ever accuse the author and award-winning creator of the television series " Fargo " of skimping on plot. His action-

stuffed follow-up to *Before the Fall* is an exciting cautionary tale that addresses just about every social ill facing Western civilization.

The action begins calmly enough: In 2009, a white judge named Margot Nadir and her second husband, a Black man named Remy, are watching their 9-year-old daughter, Story, sing the national anthem at a recital near their Brooklyn home. In a nice bit of foreboding, the Nadirs (one of the novel's broad touches is their name) say they're proud to "belong to the party of Lincoln" and feel that "the desire to belong, to be something, doesn't make that dream come true." As readers soon discover, the Nadirs' ambition, including Margot's

nomination to the Supreme Court, doesn't shield them from real-world complexities and tragedies they could not have foreseen.

Hawley shifts the narrative a few years into the future, when a plague afflicts the world. As Hawley, one of the more skilled writers of pithy lines, puts it, "The summer our children began to kill themselves was the hottest in history." Soon the crisis spreads worldwide, with more and more 12- to 25-year-olds taking their lives. Markets tank. Thousands die each day. And every victim scrawls "A11" near the site of their death.

Among them is Claire Oliver, the 17-year-old daughter of a pharmaceutical titan. Her death devastates her younger brother, Simon, who is sent to the Float Anxiety Abatement Center, where he hyperventilates into his omnipresent paper bag and contemplates the meaning of existence.

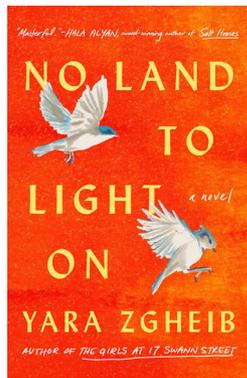
Hawley has further complications in store for Simon, and for the reader. An enigmatic Float resident who calls himself the Prophet tells Simon that God "has a mission for you": to help build a new utopia. "The adults are lost. We, their children, are starting over."

And that's only the start. **Anthem** touches on just about every contentious topic one could name, from gun culture and climate change to race relations, extremist politicians and the "yelling box" that is the internet. The novel would have been stronger if Hawley had blended his themes more seamlessly into the narrative rather than letting his characters give speeches, but many of his painstakingly crafted scenes read like an action movie in book form. "We choose our reality," one character says. Hawley's novel reminds us to choose wisely.

—Michael Magras

★ No Land to Light On

By Yara Zgheib



Literary Fiction

Beirut-born author Yara Zgheib's skills have become even more finely honed in the years since her excellent 2019 debut, *The Girls at 17 Swann Street*. Her devastating second novel, **No Land to Light On** (Atria, \$26, 9781982187422), is an

illuminating, intimate look at the Syrian refugee crisis and the immigrant experience in America during the Trump administration.

On January 27, 2017, Executive Order 13769 banned entry of individuals—including refugees and preexisting visa holders—from seven Middle Eastern countries into the United States. **No Land to Light On** chronicles this directive's cruel impact on one married couple, Sama and Hadi. Hailing from Syria, they separately immigrated to

America—Sama to attend Harvard University, Hadi as a refugee—where they subsequently met and fell madly in love, marrying within months.

Sama is five months pregnant when Hadi is summoned abroad to attend to the sudden death of his father, and he promises to return to her in a few short days. Unfortunately, he returns just one day after the travel ban against majority-Muslim countries, which effectively bars him from entering the U.S. As Hadi is detained for questioning, Sama enters premature labor, giving birth to an American son whose father is in the process of being deported. Within the blink of an eye, their elusive and ever-so-precious American dream is transformed into the stuff of nightmares.

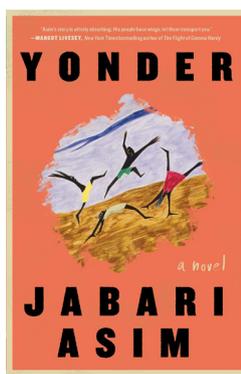
Shuttling between times, perspectives and countries, Zgheib's novel deftly documents Sama's and Hadi's lives in Syria and the circumstances that prompted them to leave, as well as their ensuing experiences as American immigrants. The narrative is purposefully fragmented, an artful reflection of the ways in which the lives of immigrants and refugees are uprooted and disrupted. Within the context of a tense and bittersweet love story—one with a healthy dose of nostalgia for days when hope and possibility seemed likely to prevail—Zgheib offers nuanced insights into the complex psychology of and challenges faced by displaced people, and effectively makes the consequences of anti-immigrant sentiments and policies feel personal to all readers.

Written in soul-searing prose, **No Land to Light On** is an essential, compassionate story that reinstates a sense of humanity for the countless people affected by U.S. travel bans.

—Stephenie Harrison

Yonder

By Jabari Asim



Historical Fiction

Jabari Asim isn't limited by genre or form. He's a poet, essayist, children's book author, cultural critic and novelist who is adept at navigating language and story.

Asim's latest novel, **Yonder** (Simon & Schuster, \$27, 9781982163167), draws readers into the heart of plantation life and the existence of the "Stolen" who live there. Notably, Asim never uses words such as *enslaved* or *slave* in describing their stories, and skin color is rarely mentioned. Instead, Asim emphasizes the individual experiences of his characters, focusing on their humanity.

"As my William has said to me more than once, a story depends on who's telling it, what they choose

to mention, and what they leave out. There's also the way they tell it, and the way they tell it has been shaped by everything that's happened to them," a character says early in the novel. Asim's storytelling approach mirrors this explanation as he unravels the tale from five perspectives.

William is one of the strongest, most respected Stolen men at Placid Hall. Even William's captor, a "Thief" called Cannonball Greene, holds begrudging respect for William after seeing him stare down a loose horse, stopping the runaway animal in its tracks before it plowed into a Thief child.

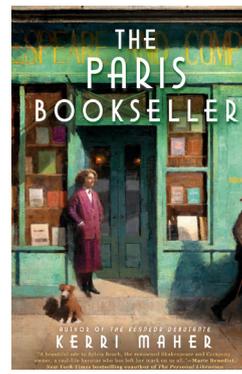
Cato is William's closest friend. He's frustrated by William's spiritual skepticism and bereft after being torn from his love. Margaret is William's lady. She's captured his heart and wants to have his baby, but William has been permanently scarred by things he saw before arriving at Placid Hall. Pandora has also seen quite a lot, observing others at Placid Hall and drawing lessons from their behavior. She believes a better life is possible, despite the odds. Ransom is an itinerant preacher to whom William's companions look for guidance, but William distrusts a man who can move freely through the country without interference from Thieves.

Asim weaves together these five voices in lyrical prose. He is a gifted storyteller, first building the world in which his characters are bound before setting in motion their united mission toward freedom. Throughout, the five main characters wrestle with their doubts, beliefs and hopes for something more. **Yonder** reminds us that even in despair, love and the human spirit can endure.

—Carla Jean Whitley

The Paris Bookseller

By Kerri Maher



Historical Fiction

For Americans who've traveled to Paris, the name Shakespeare and Company will ring a bell; it's the famed English-language bookstore founded by Sylvia Beach in 1919, a bookstore that's intimately linked to Lost

Generation writers such as James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. In **The Paris Bookseller** (Berkley, \$26, 9780593102183), novelist Kerri Maher tells the story of how Shakespeare and Company came to be.

Soon after returning to Paris, where she lived with her family as a teen, American Sylvia meets Parisian Adrienne Monnier, who runs a bookshop on the Left Bank. Sylvia is drawn to the cultured, literary Adrienne, and as their connection deepens,

Sylvia decides to take on the mantle of bookseller, too: She'll open the first English-language bookstore in Paris. And thus Shakespeare and Company is born.

The Paris Bookseller follows Sylvia from her bookshop's first days to the end of the 1930s, as war approaches. Sprinkled throughout are Sylvia's and Adrienne's regular encounters, mostly at Shakespeare and Company, but also at dinners, parties and café gatherings with those literary luminaries—Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Joyce, Gertrude Stein and others.

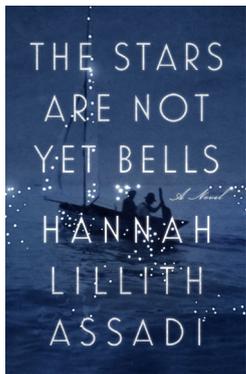
Sylvia's friendship with James Joyce is at the heart of the novel. James, lauded but struggling, can't find a publisher for his latest work, *Ulysses*, as American and British publishers are too prudish to take on the modernist novel and its graphic passages. Out of friendship, Sylvia volunteers to publish *Ulysses*, a quest that turns epic as James misses deadlines, rewrites already typeset pages and demands much, sometimes too much, of Sylvia and other literary friends.

Amid Shakespeare and Company's ups and downs—thriving in the 1920s, when American tourists begin to visit the shop in the hopes of glimpsing famous writers, and then struggling through the Depression—Sylvia and Adrienne create a loving partnership in a time when queer relationships were far less accepted, even in Paris. Background characters are occasionally placed a bit too far into the background, but this is Sylvia's story, and Maher has stayed true to her. With its insider's view of the literary expat world of 1920s Paris, **The Paris Bookseller** will appeal to fans of Paula McClain's *The Paris Wife*.

—Sarah McCraw Crow

The Stars Are Not Yet Bells

By Hannah Lillith Assadi



Literary Fiction

Elegant, melancholic and emotional, **The Stars Are Not Yet Bells** (Riverhead, \$25, 9780593084366) is lyrical from start to finish. The second novel from Hannah Lillith Assadi, a 2018 National Book Foundation "5 Under 35" honoree, draws its

narrative style from the realms of poetry, making for an atypical and dazzling reading experience.

Part of the book's uniqueness lies in its subject: Elle Ranier, an elderly woman with dementia. At the beginning of World War II, Elle and her husband, Simon, left New York City to move to Lyra, a small island off the coast of Georgia, where blue stones are rumored to lurk beneath the ocean. In the novel's present, set in 1997, Elle reminisces about her younger years and grapples with the

Packing a punch

Don't underestimate the short-but-mighty stories in these two collections.

Gwen E. Kirby and Jean Chen Ho make their debuts with short tales of female friendship, power and survival.

★ Shit Cassandra Saw

You know you're in for a wild ride with the shockingly inventive collection **Shit Cassandra Saw** (Penguin, \$17, 9780143136620) when one of the first stories is a piercing tale of women in New York acquiring supernatural powers that allow them to move through the city without fear of sexual assault. This is followed by a story that's a one-star Yelp review written by Gary F, ostensibly about a Maryland restaurant called Jerry's Crab Shack, but really about the man's deeply dysfunctional relationship with his wife.

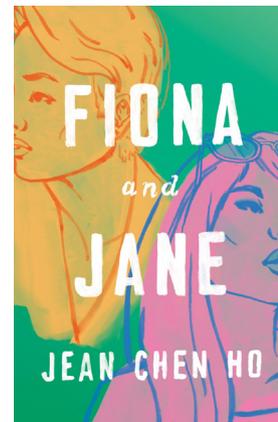
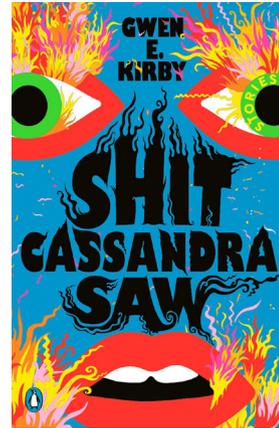
Other standout entries include a poignant look at a high school softball team that is reeling from a recent school shooting, and the tale of a woman who is having an affair and being judged by the priggish Colonial ghost who lives in her neighborhood.

So it goes, in dazzling story after story in this debut book from Gwen E. Kirby, a creative writing instructor and associate director at the Sewanee Writers' Conference at the University of the South. Through humor, ferocity and sometimes a healthy dash of surrealism, Kirby meditates on the fears, joys and pains of being a woman throughout the centuries. Every story feels unique, yet they're tied together by Kirby's mind-bendingly confident writing and her clear fascination with strong yet vulnerable women.

And boy, does she know how to create a sense of place so strong you can feel and smell it. In "We Handle It," for example, we meet teenage girls who are "at a summer music camp, our fingertips sore from strings, our backs sticky with sweat, and when we reach the lake we shed our summer dresses and leap from a boulder into the water, which is deep and clean. Around the lake are tall pines and the heavy hum of Southern bug life."

Shit Cassandra Saw is pure pleasure with something for everyone, especially readers interested in thinking deeply about womanhood from every possible angle. Kirby's characters are sometimes sinners and never saints, as complex as the real-life women we know and love.

—Amy Scribner



★ Fiona and Jane

Spanning the globe from a night market in Taiwan to New York City, Los Angeles and many places in between, Jean Chen Ho's novel-in-stories weaves together the experiences of two young women, **Fiona and Jane** (Viking, \$26, 9780593296042). We see their lives unfold together and apart, amid challenges with their parents, flirtations, relationships and financial concerns. Through it all, Fiona and Jane navigate the complexities of their friendship, allowing it to grow, change and reemerge with time.

Fiona and Jane is comprised of chapters that alternate between Jane's first-person narration and Fiona's third person. Jane describes growing up and navigating her sense of self, and she ruminates on the ways that her friendship with Fiona grounds and challenges her. Meanwhile, Fiona's chapters feel more distant for their external narration. The decision to differentiate the two Taiwanese American women's

sections in this way becomes increasingly interesting and important as the story progresses. In fact, it becomes evident that this structure is essential to how the story must be told.

Time is a fascinating factor in the novel as well. The narrative unfurls in the present while moving the reader into snippets of backstory, filling in gaps at just the right moments. Ho also moves us through and across physical and cultural landscapes, revealing how a person can feel both resonance with and distance from one's community and self.

Ultimately, though, Ho's characters do the most compelling work. Fiona and Jane—both earnest, curious and heart-full—epitomize the realities of growing up in America as young women, as immigrants, as Asian Americans. Their arcs show how families complicate one's life while also enriching it, how friends can become a found family, and how every choice can echo in and reflect a person's whole life.

By the novel's end, readers will feel as though they carry some part of these women with them, as if Fiona and Jane are our friends, as if their stories might yet overlap with our own.

—Freyja Sachs

secrets and betrayals of a life lived and nearly forgotten.

Elle's tenuous consciousness leads to a blurring of the lines between the current narrative and her flashbacks and dreams, and Assadi follows this lead by emphasizing Elle's hallucinations and memories. Underneath Elle's imaginative thoughts, however, lie clues to the novel's plot, ingeniously scattered so that the book feels like a mystery, the reader's mission being to take Elle's ramblings and form them into a cohesive, linear storyline. Assadi's willingness to trust her reader is evident, and the book consequently becomes more immersive and self-reflective.

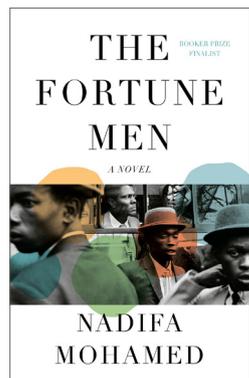
Assadi takes great care in crafting each sentence, incorporating poignant and thoughtful language into the heart of the story. This focus allows Assadi's themes to shine, taking readers along on a journey into what it means to remember and forget, to be young and old, to be satisfied and to long for something or someone. It's rare for a novelist to so seamlessly bring their themes into the spotlight without relying primarily on narrative events, but Assadi is willing and able to take the risk. As a result, her themes are even more relatable and decipherable, and impart longer-lasting messages.

Eerie and spellbinding, **The Stars Are Not Yet Bells** is not for everyone; its plot is incredibly subtle, leading to some moments of confusion, and readers must be willing to work through these moments of doubt and be flexible as they continue. But for the right reader, Assadi's work is the epitome of ingenuity. She has mastered the art of entering a character's mind and bringing it to life.

—Sydney Hankin

★ The Fortune Men

By Nadifa Mohamed



Historical Fiction

In 1952, a young Somali sailor named Mahmood Mattan was arrested for the murder of a Jewish shopkeeper in Cardiff, Wales, a crime he did not commit but nonetheless was convicted of and hanged for. This true

story is the inspiration behind Nadifa Mohamed's masterful Booker Prize short-listed novel, **The Fortune Men** (Knopf, \$27, 9780593534366), a powerful evocation of one man's life and a harrowing tale of racial injustice.

In the 1950s, the Tiger Bay area of Cardiff is a multiracial, multilingual community of Somalis, Arabs, Jews, West Indians and West Africans. It's also the home of Mattan, his Welsh wife and their three sons. When Violet Volacki is stabbed in her

shop, her sister, Diana, thinks she sees a Somali at the door. A gambler and petty thief, Mattan tries to ignore the tidal wave of suspicion flowing from the police, his landlord, even the men at his mosque. But he grossly underestimates the racism of the local community, which wants to punish not only him but also his wife for marrying an African immigrant. Mattan's protestations of innocence and his belief in the British justice system are no match for the prosecution's fabricated testimonies and false witness statements.

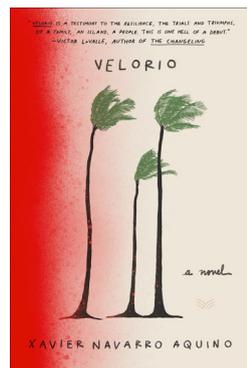
Mohamed brilliantly re-creates Tiger Bay's bustling world of racetracks, milk bars and rooming houses, filled with diverse characters who range from the bigoted detectives to the sheikh from the local mosque. Part of the novel is told by Diana, whose family immigrated to England to escape antisemitic violence in Russia and who never names Mattan as the man she saw, despite pressure from police. **The Fortune Men** is a reminder of a particularly egregious example of injustice and prejudice, but by including Diana's point of view, Mohamed suggests that Mattan's experience is not an isolated incident but one that was and is repeated wherever systemic racism exists.

In the real-world case, after decades of campaigning by his family and the wider Somali community, Mattan was exonerated. His name was cleared almost 50 years after his death, and the wrongful conviction and execution was the first miscarriage of justice ever rectified by the British courts. But these events happened decades after the action in Mohamed's novel. She instead focuses on Mattan's childhood in Hargeisa, his globe-trotting years with the merchant navy and his final weeks in a Welsh jail, where a renewal of faith leads to a new assessment of life. Mohamed's command of both Mattan's place in the historical record and the intimate details of his life makes for a remarkable novel.

—Lauren Bufferd

Velorio

By Xavier Navarro Aquino



Literary Fiction

In his experimentally structured debut novel, **Velorio** (HarperVia, \$26.99, 9780063071377), Xavier Navarro Aquino makes important points about Puerto Rico, its history as a commonwealth of the United States and the catastrophic aftereffects of

Hurricane Maria, which decimated the island in September 2017.

The Spanish word *velorio* signifies a wake or funeral, a moment of mourning but also recognition of what has been lost. There's a pun in this

translation to English, with *wake* also meaning the aftermath of a storm, or the turbulent waters behind a fast-moving ship. The wake of Hurricane Maria—a storm so powerful and its effects so catastrophic that *Maria* has been retired from the circulation of names used by the National Weather Service—provides the energy for this remarkable, mythic novel, populated by a memorable cast.

Maria was one of the most intense storms ever recorded on American territory and the deadliest since 1998. In some areas, floodwaters rose up to 6 feet in 30 minutes, eventually exceeding 15 feet in total, destroying 80% of the crops on the island and an estimated 18 million coffee trees. Months later, half of the population still did not have electricity or potable water. Billions of dollars in aid remained undistributed off-island. In this traumatic aftermath, the Puerto Rican people were rendered largely immobile.

Velorio is far from immobile, taking readers on a painful journey across the devastated island. Aquino addresses the situation using a wide range of voices and narrative styles. Drama is high as survivors fight to rebuild what they can salvage from the fury of nature and the incompetence of the powers that be.

The novel, dedicated to “the thousands lost and the unaccounted,” introduces the survivors individually, including Camila, who digs her sister Marisol's drowned body out from the mud and clings to it as it decays, a symbol for the island itself. Carrying Marisol's body, Camila gravitates toward a haven called Memoria, where gangs of young people are trying to reconstitute a society based on authoritarian symbols and gestures. Their leader, Urayoan, dresses homeless boys in red castoffs pulled from the dead, builds a hellish tower to concentrate his power and oversees the looting of what little is left.

Animals are skinned and butchered, all manner of outrages are performed, and “ghosts of people, ghosts of men, ghosts of women” are everywhere. The foundations of Memoria inevitably collapse like a fever dream, set afire by those who desperately escape it. Maria, “the monstrea,” has gutted the island, and demagogue Urayoan's dream of a new Utopia will be shaken in turn.

Amid scenes of carnage and dialogue that incorporates Spanish idioms and Puerto Rican slang, the novel includes large swaths of poetry written by a visionary secondary character named Cheo. Some of the poems are only drafts, unfinished and abandoned. “It's my poetry and that's what keeps us alive,” he tells the younger gang members. In this way, **Velorio** pays homage to Nobel Prize-winning Caribbean author Derek Walcott, whose Homeric epic, *Omeros*, brought recognition to poets of the region. Extensive passages of Cheo's work give the sense of a life raft bobbing along, battered by the monstrous storm: “Are we culprits to our fate / And live by our names? / And that is empire. / And that is violence.”

—Mark Bernheim

★ Lost & Found

By Kathryn Schulz

Memoir

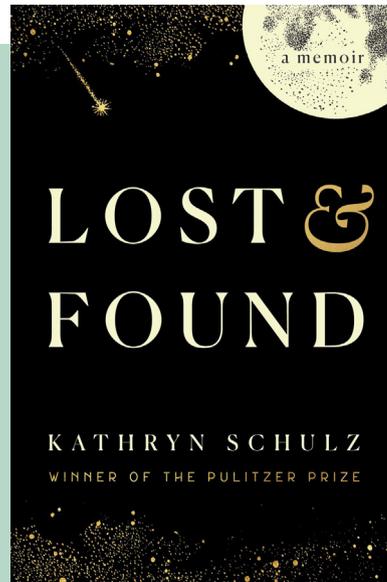
Pulitzer Prize winner and *New Yorker* staff writer Kathryn Schulz's first memoir, **Lost & Found** (Random House, \$27, 9780525512462), is an eloquent meditation inspired by the end of her father's life and the beginning of the romance that led to her marriage. This probing, multifaceted exploration of two universal phenomena—grief and love—is both a revealing account of defining moments in Schulz's life and an eloquent map of the pathways connecting them to our shared human experience.

In the first section of the book, Schulz's reflections on the profound grief provoked by the peaceful passing of the man she describes as "part Socrates, part Tevye," at the end of a decade of slowly failing health, illuminate the "essential, avaricious nature of loss." She examines the complexity and uniqueness of each person's bereavement, giving the lie to clichés like "moving on" and "closure" that are offered to comfort those in mourning. "Everything felt fragile, everything felt

vulnerable," she observes; "the idea of loss pressed in all around me, like a hidden order to existence that emerged only in the presence of grief."

The poignancy of these reminiscences is more than balanced by the exuberant account of Schulz's love affair with C. in the second section of the book. Though C. is a fellow writer, she is also a woman whose cultural roots—as a devout Lutheran from Maryland's Eastern Shore—are so different from Schulz's—a non-practicing Jew from Cleveland—that Mars and Venus can barely encompass them. The affectionately candid story of their instantaneous attachment and deepening relationship allows Schulz to probe some of the ineffable mysteries of human attraction and ponder the wild improbability that two people ever find each other and fall in love.

Concluding her memoir with a section entitled "And," Schulz skillfully melds the two profound subjects that animate her story, attempting to



reconcile herself to an undeniable reality at the heart of life's beauty and pain: our limitless capacity to love, undiminished by the inescapable knowledge that one day every one of us will inevitably lose all we cherish. "Of every kind of 'and' that we experience," she writes, "I find this one the most acute—the awareness that our love, in all its many forms, is bound inseparably to our grief."

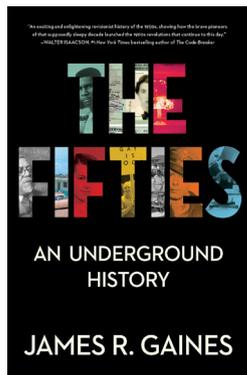
Discussing knowledgeably and often with good humor on subjects that

include etymology, poetry, natural history, psychology and more, Schulz displays a capacious intelligence matched only by her boundless curiosity and insight. **Lost & Found** is a beautiful, life-affirming book that passionately embraces some of the deepest questions of human existence in the fullness of their sorrow and joy.

—Harvey Freedenberg

The Fifties

By James R. Gaines



American History

We remember the 1960s as a time of social protest in the United States, with diverse groups demanding change. But some of those calls for change actually had their roots in the 1950s, led by a few lonely, gifted, stubborn

"accidental activists" who would not or could not tolerate the injustices they suffered and witnessed. Journalist and historian James R. Gaines introduces us to some of these courageous individuals in his enlightening, powerful and intimate **The Fifties: An Underground History** (Simon & Schuster, \$28, 9781439101636).

One is struck by the differences in these activists' personal histories, whether their cause was gay rights, racial justice, feminism or environmental justice. Pauli Murray's experiences as a multi-racial Black woman, for example, led to her long legal career making advances for women's and civil rights, including the argument that finally persuaded the Supreme Court to outlaw discrimination on the basis of sex. She was also the first African American woman to be ordained as a priest in the Episcopal Church. By contrast, Fannie Lou

Hamer spent most of her life as a sharecropper in the Mississippi Delta. Her civil rights activism didn't begin until she was 45 years old, but her strong leadership skills and charismatic personality were natural assets to the movement for voting rights. Gilda Lerner had an entirely different origin story. As a young woman, she barely escaped Nazi-occupied Vienna, but she went on to teach the first college-level courses in women's history in the United States.

Rachel Carson and Norbert Wiener had nothing in common and probably never met. But in their defining works—"she in the living world, he in the electrical, mechanical, and metaphysical one—they converged on the heretical, even subversive idea that the assertion of mastery over the natural world was based on an arrogant fantasy that carried the potential for disaster," as Gaines writes.

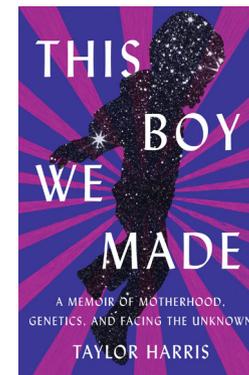
The '50s were, among other things, a time of fear for many—when raising questions could lead to losing friends or jobs at best, or to jail time, beatings and even death at worst, just for doing what one knew to be right. The activists profiled here didn't wholly achieve their goals during the "long Fifties"—the social, cultural and political uprising between 1946 and 1963—but they made significant progress that others built on in the future.

Gaines concludes that the people he writes about were authentic rebels, although they didn't regard themselves as such. This excellent, well-researched and well-written book shows how far America has come and yet how very far we have to go to become the country we often think we are.

—Roger Bishop

This Boy We Made

By Taylor Harris



Memoir

Motherhood is a joyful gift, from a cooing baby's first smile to a tottering toddler's first steps, through the school-age years and into adulthood. Yet accompanying this amazing gift is perhaps the worst fear imaginable: that something

could happen to your child. This worry resides in the back of every mother's mind, simmering like a bubbling stew, punching through the joy when a child is sick, injured or suffering.

In her debut memoir, **This Boy We Made: A Memoir of Motherhood, Genetics, and Facing the Unknown** (Catapult, \$26, 9781948226844), Taylor Harris beautifully and heartbreakingly describes how this fear struck like a lightning bolt when her son Tophs began to experience a string of health issues that baffled medical experts. She struggled through the highs and lows of one diagnosis after another, all while coping with her own anxiety disorder and the systemic racism that, as a Black woman living in Charlottesville, Virginia, obstructed her path to accessing the best medical care for herself and her son. Tophs underwent test after test, including genetic testing that revealed the

presence of a dreaded gene in their family.

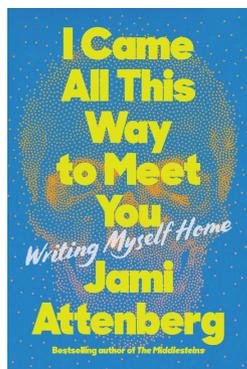
Harris lays all these cards on the table, telling her story with raw candor and wit. She delves into her childhood experiences with anxiety and the subsequent assistance that helped her cope, including both counseling and medicine. These honest revelations provide a touchstone to her experiences as an adult, especially the unbelievable stress she faced while dealing with the unknown.

As a result, **This Boy We Made** is many books in one, combining elements of science and medicine, mental health and wellness, parenting principles and institutional racism. Fusing all these themes together in an entertaining and thoughtful way would seem an exhausting task, yet Harris does it with honesty and grace. With descriptive, poetic prose, her authentic message commands the reader's full attention.

—Becky Libourel Diamond

★ I Came All This Way to Meet You

By Jami Attenberg



Memoir

Reading Jami Attenberg is like hanging out with a friend who encourages you—through their own example—to be your messy, vibrant, glorious self. Attenberg's voice is equal parts wise auntie and wise-ass, whether on social media or in

any of her seven increasingly well-received novels (most recently, *All This Could Be Yours* in 2019). With **I Came All This Way to Meet You: Writing Myself Home** (Ecco, \$27.99, 9780063039797), Attenberg turns to memoir to explore the hustle and chutzpah with which she has built a successful career as a working writer.

Writing isn't magic, but it can do magical things. The preface to **I Came All This Way to Meet You** reminds us of this in an inspiring manifesto about the power of committing to the work of writing. Creating a life of travel and work, rather than a life more domestic and rooted, requires creativity and grit, especially as we age, and especially for women. For Attenberg, in lieu of traditional stability, writing became the portable home she always returned to.

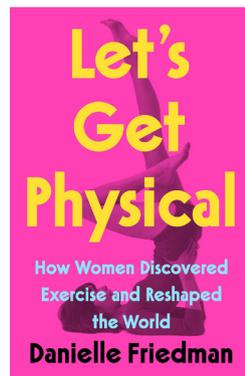
Attenberg's travels around the country to promote her books form the backbone of this book, which is written as a series of short, interlinked essays that touch on themes of work, solitude, friendship, heartbreak, risk and itinerancy. A stunning scene in a chapel constructed out of bones in Portugal exemplifies the beauty and peril of the writer's life. Communing with the dead offers the writer stories and companionship; connecting with the living can be far more difficult.

Attenberg's memoir ends in New Orleans, that magical city of eccentricity and art, where she has only recently created a home for herself and her dog, Sid. The "ultimate privilege," Attenberg finds, is to have a house she can open up to visiting friends, returning the favor from her own periods of wandering. Attenberg extends this hospitality to her readers, too, as she invites us into this funny, perceptive portrait of a life well-lived.

—Catherine Hollis

Let's Get Physical

By Danielle Friedman



Social History

Did you know the sports bra wasn't invented until 1977? Yeah, neither did I. I'm an active person who exercises multiple times a week and sometimes teaches yoga, and this essential part of my fitness wardrobe predates me by only four years.

When I read that fact, I expressed my shock aloud—and author Danielle Friedman was just getting started. **Let's Get Physical: How Women Discovered Exercise and Reshaped the World** (Putnam, \$27, 9780593188422) bulges with tidbits like this, drawing readers into this history of exercise and modern women. The factoids boggle the mind, but Friedman goes further, providing a rich story for each fitness trend she examines, from jogging to Jazzercise, bodybuilding to yoga and beyond.

Friedman uses her award-winning reporting skills to profile the fads of the past century, the women who instigated them and the challenges they faced. Whether through clothing that offered freedom of movement or movement that offered freedom of expression, Friedman demonstrates that women's growing interest in and access to fitness has often granted them a sense of liberation and strength.

But the fitness industry has also created obstacles for women, of course, by pressuring them to conform to whatever physical ideal is currently in vogue. Even in activities that sought to break those norms, such as bodybuilding, participants have couched their efforts in the belief that women's muscles shouldn't be *too* big.

America has historically idolized white bodies, as well, which is a truth Black bodybuilder Carla Dunlap faced head-on. Even when she won contests, lower-ranking white contestants would snag magazine covers. Friedman also examines the classism inherent to these often-expensive activities and the privilege—whether related to time, money or access—that gives some women a chance to move but restricts other women from doing the same.

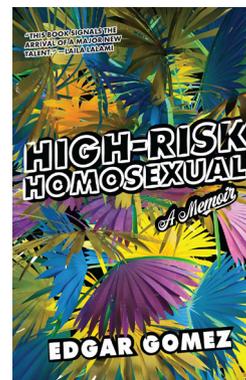
Let's Get Physical incorporates the stories of dozens of women, including the author herself.

Friedman shares just enough of her own experience to grant the book a defined point of view: that of a woman approaching middle age, seeking strength and release in movement. Her research is thorough, and her storytelling is as energetic as the exercises she describes. **Let's Get Physical** is full of stories that humanize an industry that sometimes seems to prioritize perfection over people.

—Carla Jean Whitley

High-Risk Homosexual

By Edgar Gomez



Memoir

Growing up in Florida, with roots in Puerto Rico and Nicaragua, Edgar Gomez was confronted very early in his life by a culture of machismo. Within such a culture, "men must marry, spawn children, and head their households." If it weren't for his queer-

ness, Gomez writes, "which made many of the benefits awarded to men who uphold machismo unappealing, I would have likely accepted them without question." With alternating notes of gut-wrenching emotion and humor, **High-Risk Homosexual** (Soft Skull, \$16.95, 9781593767051) chronicles not only Gomez's coming-of-age and coming out, but also his choppy navigation of a culture and family that refused to accept him.

Much of Gomez's memoir recounts his struggles to find guides to help him growing up, gay and Latinx in a world that often violently rejected gay men. His mother and stepfather couldn't live with the thought that Gomez was gay. His uncles tried to "reform" him by setting him up with a woman one night after a cockfight. Along the way, Gomez found solace in conversations with trans women in Nicaragua and with drag queens at gay clubs in Miami and Orlando—including at Pulse, before the shootings that killed 49 people and wounded 53.

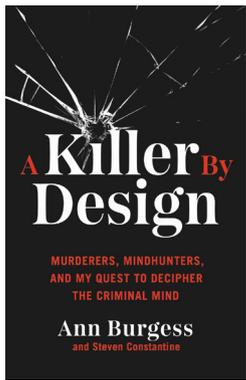
It was when he visited his college health clinic that he was dubbed a "high-risk homosexual" for sleeping with more than two sexual partners a week—a label he knew would not be applied to people who had a similar number of opposite-sex partners per week—and given pills to mitigate HIV. When he learned that taking the pills might be more dangerous than the disease, he dumped them down the toilet and vowed to "live a life that acknowledges [AIDS] as a possible outcome." Gomez concludes that "what you do when you're not afraid anymore is the same thing you do when you are: keep going."

In **High-Risk Homosexual**, Gomez's incandescent prose flickers with an intensity that illuminates his insecurities, his disappointments and his courage.

—Henry L. Carrigan Jr.

A Killer by Design

By Ann Burgess



True Crime

Nowadays, encountering news stories about sexual crimes is a daily occurrence. But in the late 1970s, when the FBI noticed a marked uptick in reported sexual violence, such crimes were considered a strange new trend, which the agency decided they

should address by educating all their agents.

However, as Ann Wolbert Burgess explains in her captivating and chilling **A Killer by Design: Murderers, Mindhunters, and My Quest to Decipher the Criminal Mind** (Hachette, \$28, 9780306924866), there was a major roadblock to the FBI's mission. "None of the agents had the background or expertise to speak about issues of sexual assault, rape, sexual homicide, or victimology," Burgess writes.

That's where she came in. For several years, Burgess—a forensic and psychiatric nurse with a doctorate in nursing science, et al.—had worked on a major study of what was called "rape trauma syndrome." When Roy Hazelwood, a new agent in the FBI's nascent serial killer-focused Behavioral Science Unit, caught wind of her work, he asked her to share her methods for analyzing and finding predictive patterns among sexually violent crimes.

Burgess sees her ability to "ground an infinitely complex human trauma into quantifiable data and research" as a hallmark of her work, and she taught FBI agents how to apply her methods in order to establish a reliable foundation for their investigations. For starters, standardized questions for all suspects are key, as well as analyses of perpetrators' childhood experiences and similarities across crime scenes.

Although the BSU toiled in underground offices without a dedicated staff or budget at first, as the unit employed Burgess' methods, their successes grew. Delving into the minds of everyone from Son of Sam to the BTK strangler, they solved dozens of cases, eventually garnering press coverage—and subsequent respect via above-ground digs. Their work also sparked the popular fascination with profiling borne out in a seemingly never-ending stream of books, movies, TV shows and podcasts. In fact, Burgess inspired a character in the popular "Mindhunter" Netflix show, which is based on a book by her FBI colleague John Douglas.

With **A Killer by Design**, Burgess takes center stage at last, offering important, fascinating new context and details about the history of crime-solving in America. It's an inspiring and meaningful story, too, with its up-close look at people who have dedicated their careers to catching murderers

and pushing for justice. As Burgess writes, "My decades studying serial killers weren't for the game of cat and mouse, nor because I found these killers entertaining. . . . For me, it's always been about the victims."

—Linda M. Castellitto

Reclamation

By Gayle Jessup White



Memoir

Gayle Jessup White's multilayered autobiography, **Reclamation: Sally Hemings, Thomas Jefferson, and a Descendant's Search for Her Family's Lasting Legacy** (Amistad, \$27.99, 9780063028654), is divided into three parts. The first, most

directly autobiographical part of **Reclamation** offers a fascinating look at Black life in a prosperous neighborhood in Washington, D.C., during the 1960s and '70s—a neighborhood that has since been washed away in a wave of gentrification. White describes growing up in this neighborhood as the baby of her family. Her reserved father and acquisitive mother did not get along, but they protected and pampered White so that she did not experience "what racism felt like" until she was 13.

Part two is the heart of the book, documenting White's scrupulous search to prove her family's claim that they are Black descendants of Thomas Jefferson. White, who is now in her mid-60s, first heard that claim as a young teenager, from her much older sister. Her sister had heard it from Aunt Peachie, an elderly relative who died before White was born. Although she was fascinated almost to the point of obsession, White didn't begin her genealogical search until much later.

The long process White went through to establish her lineage will be especially interesting to amateur genealogists. But it is also of great interest in general because of the subtle and not-so-subtle obstacles she faced as a Black person claiming to be a descendant of the author of the Declaration of Independence. In one chapter, White describes developing a relationship with a white Jefferson descendant, a poet and writer, only to end up feeling like her personal narrative had been appropriated and diminished by her would-be collaborator.

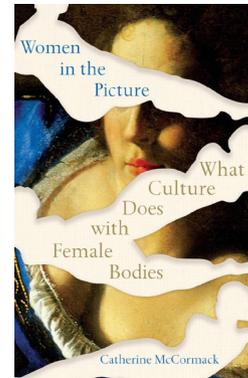
During her research, White developed a relationship with historians at Monticello, Jefferson's home, which is the focus of the third part of the book. For a number of powerful reasons, White, who trained as a journalist and has worked as a TV reporter throughout the South, decided Monticello was where she wanted to work at the end of her career. Getting hired there required superhuman persistence, and after becoming Monticello's first

Community Engagement Officer, she was one of only a few Black employees and frequently faced criticism from her white co-workers. Overcoming the institution's doubts about her, her work eventually transformed Monticello into a place committed to updating the ways it portrays the lives of people who were enslaved there.

—Alden Mudge

Women in the Picture

By Catherine McCormack



Art

As art historian Catherine McCormack points out in **Women in the Picture: What Culture Does With Female Bodies** (Norton, \$22.95, 9780393542080), galleries and museums are full of paintings and statues of women in various guises and genres.

Indeed, there are so many that we rarely take time to consider the implications of how they are depicted. We see a Madonna, and we think, "That's a Madonna." Few question how the Madonna is depicted, or even *why* the Madonna is depicted.

McCormack wants us to ask these questions, but she also wants us to consider *by whom* and *for whom* an artwork was created. She examines four archetypes of women in Western European art—Venus, the Madonna, the damsel in distress and the monstrous woman—to examine their impact on not only how we look at art but also how we view women in general.

Because so much of this art was created by male artists for male clients, McCormack argues, we have become accustomed to viewing these images through male eyes. As a result, when we see Titian's "Rape of Europa," we see a technically brilliant, erotically charged depiction of a myth, not the terror and brutality of the rape that is about to take place. When we see a Madonna, we see an idealized vision of motherhood, not how that mother is trapped by her hearth and home. Sphinxes, witches and gorgons, McCormack believes, are not existential threats to male heroes but the projection of misogynistic fears of powerful women.

McCormack's purpose is twofold. First, rather than ditching Western European art, she wants us to engage with it critically, deliberately and honestly so that we can begin to recognize the impact of the male artist's perspective and reinterpret his art with fresh eyes. Second, she wants to encourage women artists to take these subjects and represent them in ways that expose their realities to future generations. As a result, **Women in the Picture** is a thought-provoking call to action for artists and viewers alike.

—Deborah Mason

A lifeline in the dark

Preston Norton offers a no-holds-barred tale of religion, rock 'n' roll and good ol' teen rebellion.

Preston Norton's third YA novel is a profound and often profane exploration of family and forgiveness. **Hopepunk** (Little, Brown, \$17.99, 9781368057851) is the story of Hope Cassidy, whose beloved sister, Faith, runs away after their mom tries to send her to a camp that practices so-called conversion therapy. While trying to track Faith down, Hope also discovers a love for forbidden rock music, forms a band, Hope Cassidy and the Sundance Kids, and enters her school's Battle of the Bands. We chatted with Norton about his book's nuanced depiction of religion and how they balance heavy themes with humor.

When did you begin to write *Hopepunk*?

In order to answer that, I feel like I need to address the elephant in the room, which is that the word *hopepunk* existed long before it became the title of my novel. I first heard it on Twitter, where a reader had compiled a list of their favorite "hopepunk" stories, and one of my previous novels, *Neanderthal Opens the Door to the Universe*, made the list.

The entire hopepunk genre is a reaction to the dystopia we were all living in—and in many ways, continue to live in to this day—and our desperate need to find hope and happiness in our speculative fiction. **Hopepunk** isn't speculative fiction per se, but it is 100% a love letter to speculative fiction and the lifeline it provides us in super dark times.

Hope wears her heart on her sleeve. Where did her character originate?

Whenever I write in first person, I have a very difficult time not injecting a bit of myself into the main character. When you take a step back and look at my past three protagonists, you will find that they all wear their hearts on their sleeves, they cry a lot, and they have a bit of unchecked anger that could easily be resolved with counseling. These characters all have someone they care about so much that it hurts—it almost becomes their entire identity—and when the people they love are hurt, they sort of lose their minds. It's by learning to care in the right way

that they eventually find themselves. This is how you write a protagonist for a Preston Norton novel. Thank you for coming to my TED Talk.

Initially it may seem like you're pretty harsh on the subject of religion, but so much of the book is actually about forgiveness and faith. Why was exploring this duality important to you?

I have a complex relationship with religion. On the one hand, I grew up in a religious community that I feel like represented the very worst when it came to homophobia and gaslighting and shame culture in Christianity. I am not religious anymore and have not been for a very long time.

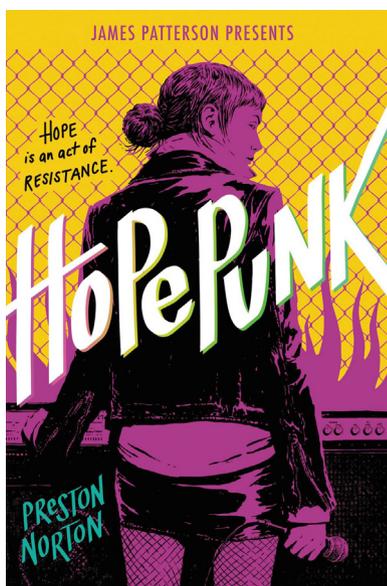
I do see immense value in spirituality. I think we all need something to believe in that is bigger than ourselves sometimes. Not for any moral reason. I think we need it for our own happiness. To help us find equilibrium.

In that same sense, I feel like forgiveness—a concept that we often think of as "Christian" in nature—might be the most important ingredient to any one human being's personal happiness. Even if it's just yourself you need to forgive.

Many characters in *Hopepunk* undergo transformations, but Hope's mom's journey is one of the most meaningful. How did you avoid extremes when creating her character?

If Hope was the easiest character to write (because she is very similar to me), Hope's mom was maybe the most difficult, perhaps because I have never personally met a person who has undergone a transformation quite like hers. But I am very proud of where she ended up because, at the end of the day, she is 100% someone I would want to have on my team.

Christianity 101 is all about powerful transformations, villains becoming heroes (case in point, Saul becoming Paul), so it seems oddly appropriate that she undergoes such a metamorphosis. I realize that not everyone in the world is an ally, but I like to believe it's possible that everyone in the world could become one.



"I realize that not everyone in the world is an ally, but I like to believe it's possible that everyone in the world could become one."



© ERIN WILLMORE



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

Hopepunk is set in Wyoming. Why did you choose to tell this story in a conservative setting? Can you talk a little bit about the broader significance of telling queer stories in spaces like that?

I'll be 100% honest. This story was almost set in Alabama, but then a conversation with my agent and editor drop-kicked it out of Appalachia and into the Rockies. We landed in Wyoming purely because of Sundance. (Yes, the band was called Hope Cassidy and the Sundance Kids before the setting had anything to do with Sundance.) When we finally pushed that puzzle piece into place, it just clicked.

Regardless of where the story could have been set, queer stories are needed everywhere because queer people are everywhere. I'm drawn to conservative settings because those are the places I've always lived. My hope is always to connect with just one reader in such a way that they feel seen, heard and understood. Maybe, if I'm lucky, I will have given them something that wasn't there before.

How did you balance the weighty themes and emotions in *Hopepunk* with the fact that it's also often extremely funny?

This is very easy for me, because life is simultaneously so very funny but also so very sad. I think humor is my way of dealing and coping with sad and difficult topics. Humor allows me a safe distance to be vulnerable, but not so vulnerable that it makes me depressed and anxious.

Hope quite literally finds her voice while singing karaoke at a local haunt. Are you a karaoke person? If so, what's your go-to song?

I will sing anything and everything. I am a karaoke monster. I am not good by any means, but what I lack in talent, I make up for in loudness and staggering enthusiasm. There is nothing I won't sing.

—Luis G. Rendon

★ African Town

By Irene Latham and Charles Waters

Historical Fiction

The true story of the final group of people who were forcibly brought to the United States and enslaved is rendered powerfully and poetically in **African Town** (Putnam, \$18.99, 9780593322888), a novel in verse by Irene Latham and Charles Waters.

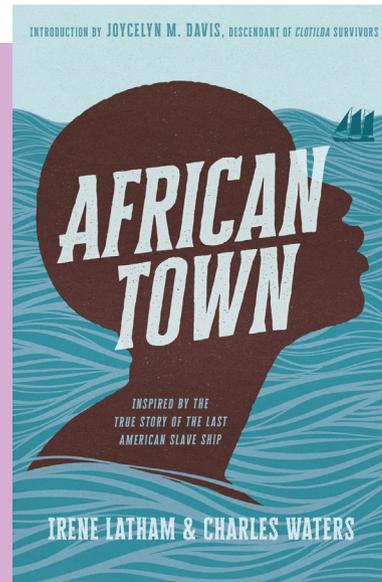
The poets (co-authors of two previous books, *Can I Touch Your Hair?* and *Dictionary for a Better World*) offer a tangible and memorable way for readers to bear witness to the lives of the 110 Africans brought to the U.S. in 1860 by Captain William Foster aboard a ship called the *Clotilda*. They were pawns in a cruelly casual bet made by a wealthy Mobile, Alabama, landowner named Timothy Meaher. Meaher bet \$1,000 that, despite a decadeslong ban on the importation of enslaved people, he could pay Foster to smuggle people into the U.S. without getting caught.

Throughout the book, the poets move between voices and poetic forms as they imagine the

long and terrible journey. They embody the despair of a religious man named Kupollee down below (“We are inside a / terrible story. When will it end?”); the denial of Foster, above (“I can’t think of them as humans. I won’t.”); and the anguish of the *Clotilda* herself (“If I’d been built with a heart, it would be broken”).

Among the 14 voices that narrate this history is Kossola, a young man eager to learn from his Yoruba elders at home and who, once in America, encourages fellow survivors to find home within each other. Teens Abilè and Kèhounco forge a sisterhood that unites them in grief and love. And Meaher, well, he holds fast to his beliefs, repugnant as they are.

Readers will feel heartened to learn that, after the Civil War ended and the *Clotilda* survivors were freed, they worked together to create a community that was theirs alone, and that the African



Town (now Africatown) of the book’s title still exists today in Alabama. In fact, Joycelyn M. Davis, an Africatown resident descended from Oluale, one of the survivors, wrote the book’s introduction.

Plentiful back matter includes a glossary, timeline and bibliography, news about Africatown’s present and future plans and more. A section called “Poetry Forms/Styles” offers fascinating insight into the authors’ creative process; their descriptions of the poetic forms employed in the book are little

poems in and of themselves.

African Town is a book that should be both taught and treasured.

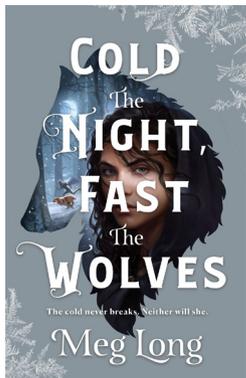
—Linda M. Castellitto



Visit BookPage.com to read our Q&A with Irene Latham and Charles Waters.

Cold the Night, Fast the Wolves

By Meg Long



Science Fiction

On the frozen planet Tundar, survival is a daily struggle. Greedy corporations and crime syndicates rule through fear, and everything from the weather to the wildlife can kill you in an instant. The only resource Tundar offers the interstellar

economy is a rare metal mined during an annual sled race in which would-be miners drive teams of vonenwolves across hundreds of miles to reach the dig site first. With fame and fortune on the line, racers are just as likely to be killed by another team as they are by Tundar’s osak bears and blizzards.

Sena Korhosen knows this all too well: Five years ago, her mothers died in the race. Since then, Sena has sworn off all things race-related. When circumstances force her to rescue Iska, a wounded wolf, and enter the competition she despises, Sena must use everything her mothers taught her and more in order to survive to the finish line.

Cold the Night, Fast the Wolves (Wednesday, \$18.99, 9781250785060) makes full use of its perilous setting. Debut author Meg Long spends a significant amount of time familiarizing readers with Tundar, as well as exploring Sena’s reluctance to race, which builds a sense of danger and dread

for the competition. While some readers might find such methodical world building a little slow, particularly for a story about racing, the novel’s third act will reward patient readers with all the brutal, fast-paced survival action they could want.

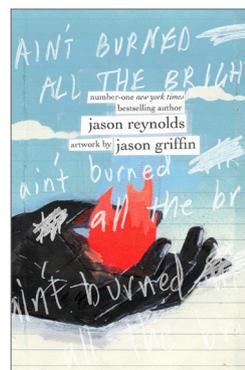
Sena’s grief and her connection with Iska form a quiet counterpoint to the novel’s setting. Sena’s memories of her mothers are a source of pain, love, protection and strength, all of which she finds mirrored in the wolf she’s tasked with healing. Whether Iska is helping Sena cross a wasteland or thawing her heart, the bond between girl and wolf is lovely and touching. Readers will root for them as they’re swept along on their wild ride.

—RJ Witherow

★ Ain’t Burned All the Bright

By Jason Reynolds

Illustrated by Jason Griffin



Fiction

In the summer of 2020, amid an unending news cycle of fear and death, millions of people took to the streets to protest the murders of not only George Floyd but also many more Black people by police officers. In **Ain’t**

Burned All the Bright (Caitlyn Dlouhy, \$19.99, 9781534439467), author Jason Reynolds and artist

Jason Griffin portray this claustrophobic spiral from the perspective of a young boy.

“And I’m sitting here wondering why / my mother won’t change the channel,” the narrator begins, “and why the news won’t / change the story.” In sections titled “Breath One,” “Breath Two” and “Breath Three,” his desire to change the channel transforms into fearful imaginings of his family being consumed by smoke, water or illness.

Griffin’s art is the linchpin of the book. Dynamic and visceral, it is composed with paint, pencil and lined paper, as well as with Reynolds’ text itself, which Griffin has cut out in strips of short phrases and placed into each spread. He skillfully juxtaposes vast spaces of black and white with color and texture; canvas tape and speckled paint make images feel urgently dimensional, while the blank spaces feel expansive. Many of the illustrations recall the densely saturated colors and silhouette figures of artist Kerry James Marshall.

In the book’s final pages, Griffin depicts a large leaf growing out of a pot, its delicate green reaching the top of the page. The image calls to mind a poem written by Ross Gay in the year after Eric Garner’s death. In “A Small Needful Fact,” Gay writes that Garner, whose final words were “I can’t breathe,” worked in horticulture, where he might have planted seedlings that “continue / to do what such plants do . . . like making it easier / for us to breathe.” As it ends, **Ain’t Burned All the Bright** doesn’t offer any platitudes, and the narrator still wants to change the channel. But he does, despite everything, remember to breathe.

—Mariel Fechik

A Caldecott Medalist takes on a new challenge

Matthew Cordell offers a mouse's tale that's perfect for the youngest of readers.

Matthew Cordell is best known for his Caldecott Medal-winning *Wolf in the Snow*, a book that contains almost no words. His new book, **Cornbread & Poppy**, contains a lot of words—80 pages of them, in fact! It's Cordell's first foray into early readers, those books nestled snugly between picture books and chapter books and designed for children who are just beginning to read independently.

Featuring oodles of Cordell's signature sketchlike illustrations, **Cornbread & Poppy** is an endearing tale of two mice who embark on an expedition up Holler Mountain in search of enough food to see them through the winter.

Why did you want to create an early reader?

I love the picture book format for its challenge and need to distill and consolidate lots of thoughts and ideas into a short amount of text and space. But I've often wondered what it would be like to open things up and put more words on the page for readers to chew on. Not quite ready to jump into a full-length novel, I thought an early reader would give me a chance to play with a longer text and still hold on to lots of illustrations.

What are some early readers you admire, and what did you want to accomplish in your own?

There's quite a range of offerings, past and present, in early readers! I wanted to write a longer text, broken up into chapters. I really wanted the character development, world building and rich plot that one can create with a fuller text.

Arnold Lobel's *Frog and Toad* is the gold standard for its charm, humor and exquisite, pitch-perfect writing. In terms of contemporaries, I love Cece Bell's *Rabbit and Robot* books for all of the same reasons.

What were the pleasures and challenges of telling and illustrating a story in more than 32 pages?

After years and years of keeping only essential words and working with the picture book mindset of "showing not telling," it was liberating to just write and write and not worry too much about how much pruning would need to be done in the end.

But it was challenging too, not to go in and start slicing and dicing. I'm so used to working that way that I had to remind myself that I wanted

to keep the storytelling language nice and beefy for those new little reading eyes that would be reading it.

Early readers are designed for children who are still gaining literary fluency. How conscious of these developmental needs were you as you wrote the text, and how did you balance them with the creative demands of the story?

I'm a dad of two kids who are on either side of the world of early readers. My daughter is 13 and devours books, but it wasn't all that long ago that she was just learning to read. My son, who's 8, is just now picking up early readers. So, having seen it firsthand, I was very conscious of wanting to not write over the heads of these littlest readers. I did, however, want to make the book a little challenging. Something longer and a little complicated, so that they might take a little more time with it—maybe even not finish it in one sitting.

How did Cornbread's and Poppy's names come to you?

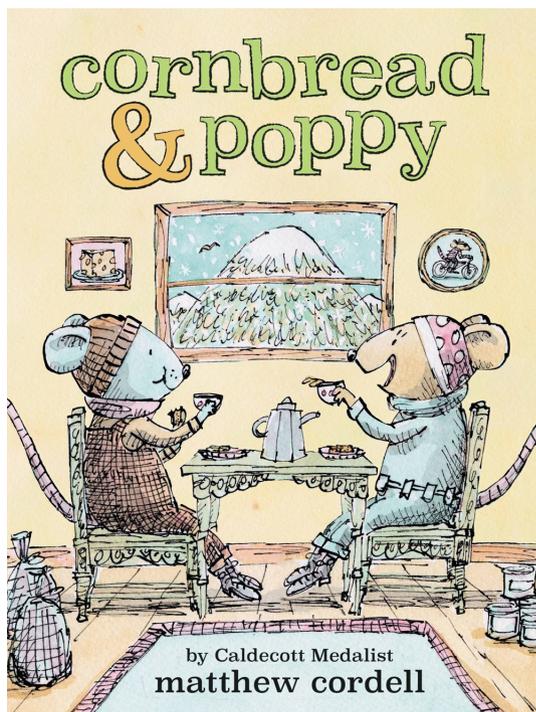
They are such great names! I can say that with actual modesty, because I didn't come up with them. My cleverer-than-me wife, author Julie Halpern, gifted me these character names one day, and I used them as a springboard for everything that followed. To me, *Cornbread and Poppy* conjured a world of fun and adventure with animals in a rural setting. And *Poppy* is a great name, but *Cornbread* . . . I was in love with that character name from the get-go!

Were *Cornbread and Poppy* always mice?

More or less, yes, they were always mice. In the very beginning, before I even had any stories, I jotted down a list of animal possibilities. Those notes are forever lost, but I remember thinking, maybe pigs or dogs could work. But my very first sketch was of these two mice, and I looked no further!

What was their character development like? Did you land on their personalities right away or did they evolve as you wrote?

I think it was a gradual development, overall. I knew I wanted one to be uptight and the other to be a free spirit, but it wasn't until I started writing more from that basic premise that I felt like each personality should have positives and negatives. When you put the two characters together,



Cornbread & Poppy
Little, Brown, \$6.99, 9780759554863
Ages 5 to 8

Early Reader



they fill each other out nicely. One's positive traits fill in for the other's flaws and vice versa. They don't always see eye to eye, but they really like each other, they're willing to listen and learn from each other, and in the end, they make a great team.

What's your favorite illustration in the book? Do you have a favorite line?

My favorite spread is where Cornbread and Poppy first encounter an owl on Holler Mountain. It's their worst fear to be descended upon by a mouse-eating owl, and when they find themselves under the giant shadow of a flying owl, the look on their gaping faces is horrific and priceless. There's lots of drama in that picture, and I just like how it looks.

My favorite line (or lines) in the book are probably the very first two. "It was winter. The first snowflake had fallen." Very simple idea, but I love the idea and visual of the first single snowflake falling signifying the beginning of winter itself.

The book's dedication hints that you may be more of a Cornbread than a Poppy. What Cornbread-ish qualities are handy for a writer and illustrator to have?

Cornbread is very on top of things and has things planned out perfectly. He's ready for anything! This mindset would be very helpful to someone writing or illustrating a book. Or to any person doing any job, really. Be prepared! I should follow my own advice.

Are there Poppy-ish qualities that are also helpful for a creative person?

Poppy loves to try new things, explore and seek thrills. Going on adventures in life is a great way to find new things to write about and draw. We're never too old to learn and experience new things. As long as we keep looking, we'll always have something to be inspired by and something new to create.

—Julie Danielson



Visit [BookPage.com](https://www.bookpage.com) to read our starred review of *Cornbread & Poppy*.



WINTER TREASURES

Three picture books capture the magic of snow—and friendship.

Trying to make new friends can feel like being lost in a blizzard! These picture books show how snowstorms can bring friends together in lots of wondrous ways.

Words to Make a Friend

Excitement permeates every page of Donna Jo Napoli and Naoko Stoop's **Words to Make a Friend: A Story in Japanese and English** (Random House Studio, \$17.99, 9780593122273, ages 4 to 8), a joyful ode to friendship between new neighbors.

As a Japanese girl and her family move into their home on a wintry day, the newcomer looks out her bedroom window and spots another girl who is outside playing. She quickly unpacks her snow gear and heads out to join her. The pair don't let a language barrier get in their way, greeting each other with a "hello" and a "konnichiwa." As they frolic in the flurries and build a snow monster together, they toss phrases back and forth like snowballs, trading "Let's play!" for "Asobou!" and "shiver shiver" for "buru buru." Napoli limits the text to carefully chosen words of dialogue like these, allowing the beauty of the snowstorm and the girls' delight to speak for themselves as the story unfolds with natural momentum.

Stoop's illustrations capture falling snow so exceptionally well that readers will practically feel the frosty flakes falling onto their cold cheeks. Against this backdrop, the newcomer's bright yellow boots and red coat and her new friend's lilac parka and pink earmuffs pop wonderfully. The girls eventually go inside to warm up, enjoy a snack and try some origami. Their fun continues with such ease that a firm friendship seems bound to form.

Words to Make a Friend captures the energy of a budding bond and a swirling snow day, extolling the fun of exploring cultural differences while highlighting the curiosity that brings two strangers together and turns them into friends.

★ Friends Are Friends, Forever

In a story inspired by her own childhood move from China to North Carolina, author Dane Liu offers a lovely tribute to friendships old and new. Her writing is lyrical and detailed. "In our town, the winter howls," the book opens. "Heavy flakes swarm and glaze the earth." Indeed, a storm is brewing. Just before the Lunar New Year, Dandan informs her best friend, Yueyue, that she and her family are moving far away to America.

Dandan savors every moment of their annual traditions, knowing it'll be the last time they'll share them. There's a festive meal featuring her grandmother Nainai's dumplings, a fireworks display and the fun of a special art project. Dandan and Yueyue cut snowflakes out of red paper, dip them in water and freeze them overnight, then hang their ornaments from a tree the next morning. "Our best snowflakes yet," Yueyue proclaims. "And my last," Dandan says quietly.

Lynn Scurfield's art begins with enchanting, vibrantly colored scenes of Dandan's life in China: The best friends stroll down a snowy sidewalk, their expectant faces peer up at a stovetop where "vegetables skid around the wok," and later, their farewell hug fills an entire spread with bittersweet emotion as Yueyue whispers, "Friends are friends, forever." A wonderfully conveyed transition spread depicts a plane flying over a big globe, from China to the United States; in the background, daytime and nighttime skies represent the

change in time zones. In America, Dandan's days are besieged by loneliness and shades of gray. One especially evocative illustration shows her asleep in bed as jagged, scrawled English words cover the page, the strange new language haunting Dandan's dreams.

After a low point, when Dandan's classmates snicker at the satin dress she wears on her birthday, a freckle-faced friend named Christina emerges, and Dandan's world slowly becomes lively and filled with color again. Liu brings the story full circle to the next Lunar New Year as the new friends celebrate with an old tradition and a parting gift from Yueyue. Scurfield cleverly unites old and new in a spread that depicts Dandan's nightstand and her framed photo of her final embrace with Yueyue as, out her bedroom window, Dandan and Christina hang paper snowflakes from the branches of a tree.

While there are many children's books about the difficulties of moving, **Friends Are Friends, Forever** (Holt, \$18.99, 9781250778185, ages 4 to 8) is an especially well-crafted tale that explores the depth of old friendships, the loneliness of being a newcomer in a strange place and the beauty of new friends finding each other.

Birds on Wishbone Street

A girl named Moe wants to make the new boy feel welcome on Wishbone Street, a friendly neighborhood filled with families of many nationalities that's based on a real street in Toronto. Sami, the new kid, has just arrived from Syria, while Moe's father emigrated from Ireland when he was young. Initially, Moe feels shy about introducing herself. "Do I wave? Go say 'hi'?" she wonders. "My head is a jumble of words, all shmushed-up together."

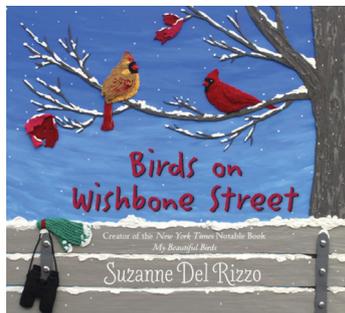
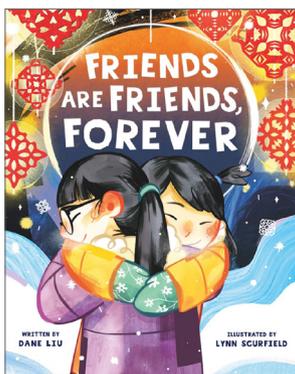
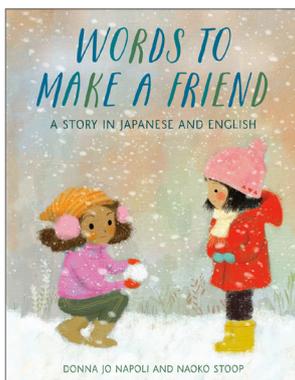
A snowstorm and a shared love of birds soon bring Moe and Sami together. Moe's dad brought his pet bird to America in a hollowed-out radio—based on a true story of author-illustrator Suzanne Del Rizzo's father—while Sami's family raised pigeons in Syria. When Moe and Sami discover a cardinal that has been stunned by the cold during the first blizzard of the season, they cement their friendship by trying to rescue the creature, taking it to a vet with help from a neighbor. Their actions spark a collective effort to help the neighborhood birds. Everyone pitches in to make suet treats and weave winter roosting pockets; Del Rizzo includes instructions for both at the end of the story.

Del Rizzo's unique art adds dimension to the book's warm, welcoming neighborhood scenes. She creates illustrations with polymer clay, acrylic glaze and other mixed media, giving depth and texture to each page. Snowflakes truly seem to float in the winter sky, and the blanket used to swaddle the cardinal has realistic folds and wrinkles.

Del Rizzo also excels at presenting a community full of many intertwined familial and social connections while capturing the smaller details of the developing friendship between Moe and Sami. She expertly balances the hustle and bustle of lively outdoor scenes with more intimate indoor moments, such as when the pair share their treasures—drawings of birds, special feathers and other trinkets—with each other. In a lovely touch, Del Rizzo depicts Moe's and Sami's collections of keepsakes on the book's opening and closing endpapers.

Birds on Wishbone Street (Pajama Press, \$18.95, 9781772782196, ages 5 to 8) is a bighearted book that will leave readers eager to discover the many treasures that new friendships hold.

—Alice Cary



Honest June

By Tina Wells

Illustrated by Brittney Bond

Middle Grade

June Jackson is only 11 years old, but her dad already has her life mapped out. She'll excel on Featherstone Creek Middle School's field hockey and debate teams, get A's in her classes and then attend Howard University, just like he did. Then she'll become a lawyer and work at the firm he co-founded.

In **Honest June** (Random House, \$13.99, 9780593378298, ages 8 to 12), Tina Wells empathetically shows how these expectations burden eager-to-please June. Her parents work so hard to give her such a nice life, June muses, so what right does she have to ever tell them no?

June has become a pro at strategically nodding along and even lying. "Making people happy is what I'm good at," she reasons. "Sometimes that

means not telling people the whole truth." Consequently, no one is aware of June's true feelings—or how she catastrophizes about what might happen if she dares to express a contradictory opinion. But all the dissembling is wearing her down, and she's begun having trouble focusing in class. It's not a sustainable way to live, and June knows it.

Someone else knows it, too: Victoria, her fairy godmother (and Tracee Ellis Ross look-alike), who appears in the town carnival's fun house and bestows a superpower upon the astonished June that renders her unable to lie. Of course, June sees the gift as a curse, and all of her many amusing attempts to circumvent the spell fail. Her only source of relief is her blog, *Honest June*. If June types out her feelings, she'll



never have to say them out loud, and nobody will be upset with her... right?

Brittney Bond's cheerful illustrations offer a sweet counterpoint to the book's growing psychological tensions, and their cartoonlike style keeps the tone light even as June walks an increasingly perilous tight-rope. Will Victoria show up at an inopportune time? Will June's strategies work, or will she be under the spell forever? How will June's parents react if they find out the truth?

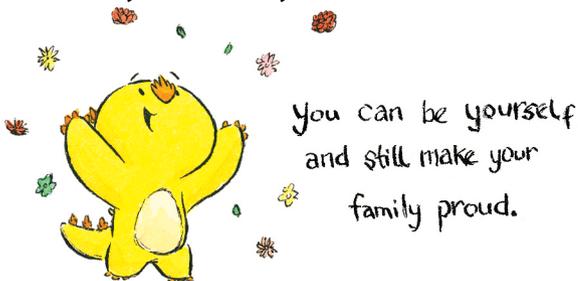
Readers will cheer June along on her journey and benefit from

the valuable themes in **Honest June**. It's a charming and resonant cautionary tale about the importance of being honest with others and—most of all—with ourselves.

—Linda M. Castellitto

meet BENSON SHUM

How would you describe your book?



What books did you enjoy as a child?

Any books with pictures!
Comics, picture books, chapter books.



Who has been the biggest influence on your work?



What one thing would you like to learn to do?



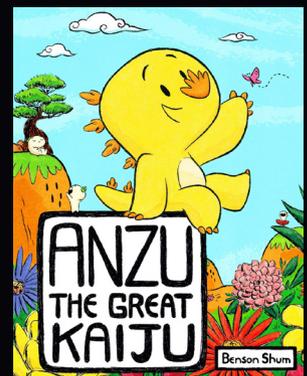
Who was your childhood hero?



What message would you like to send to young readers?



In Benson Shum's playful and tenderhearted *Anzu the Great Kaiju* (Roaring Brook, \$18.99, 9781250776129, ages 4 to 8), Anzu longs to strike fear into the heart of his city, but his kaiju superpower is... making flowers grow. In addition to writing and illustrating picture books, Shum is an animator and has worked on such films as *Frozen*, *Moana* and *Big Hero 6*.

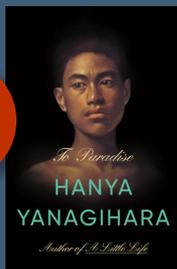




Your Next Great Read

JANUARY 2022

#1 PICK



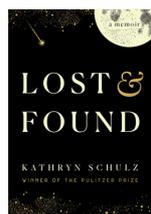
To Paradise: A Novel

By Hanya Yanagihara

(Doubleday, 9780385547932, \$32.50, Jan. 11, Fiction)

"Expansive, wholly original, and utterly engrossing, *To Paradise* is a masterpiece. Fans of Yanagihara's *A Little Life* will find themselves making a little more room in their hearts for this marvelous, emotional, and brilliant story."

—Christine Bollow, Loyalty Bookstore, Washington, DC



Lost & Found: A Memoir

By Kathryn Schulz

(Random House, 9780525512462, \$27, Jan. 11, Memoir)

"Schulz explores love, loss, and everything in between with empathy and nuance. A feat of pure brilliance that speaks directly to our humanity in these challenging times. It found me at a necessary moment, and I will always be grateful."

—Lesley Rains, City of Asylum Bookstore, Pittsburgh, PA



Olga Dies Dreaming: A Novel

By Xochitl Gonzalez

(Flatiron Books, 9781250786173, \$27.99, Jan. 4, Fiction)

"Get ready to root for Olga! I absolutely loved this book. It beautifully captures the Puerto Rican experience with humor and bravery. It felt like home and when a book feels like home, I can't help but invite everyone over."

—Rosa Hernandez, Third Place Books, Lake Forest Park, WA



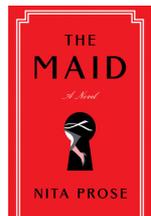
Mouth to Mouth: A Novel

By Antoine Wilson

(Avid Reader Press/Simon & Schuster, 9781982181802, \$26, Jan. 11, Fiction)

"I loved this suspenseful novel, these mysterious characters. Antoine Wilson has created a situation worthy of Hitchcock, or of Highsmith. Mouth to Mouth asks if we can ever know the truth about those we love, or indeed ourselves."

—Adam Possehl, Powell's Books, Portland, OR



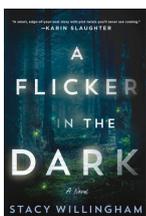
The Maid: A Novel

By Nita Prose

(Ballantine Books, 9780593356159, \$27, Jan. 4, Mystery)

"Very entertaining! Miss Marple meets *The Rosie Project* in this charming book about a hotel maid who sees the world a bit differently than many of us. Molly the maid and her cast of friends will bring a smile to your face!"

—Jenny Stroyeck, The Homer Bookstore, Homer, AK



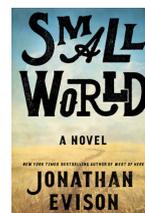
A Flicker in the Dark: A Novel

By Stacey Willingham

(Minotaur Books, 9781250803825, \$27.99, Jan. 11, Thriller)

"This twisty thriller kept me reading late into the night! It keeps you guessing up until the very end of this cat-and-mouse game, where monsters and unsettling memories lurk in every corner — who can be trusted? Utterly captivating!"

—Maxwell Gregory, Madison Street Books, Chicago, IL



Small World: A Novel

By Jonathan Evison

(Dutton, 9780593184127, \$28, Jan. 11, Fiction)

"From the Gold Rush with Chinese, Irish, and Native Americans among the protagonists, Evison alternates time—work on the rails to Amtrak; gold panning to modern West Coast life—tying generations together in a splendid sleight of hand."

—Pat Rutledge, A Book For All Seasons, Leavenworth, WA



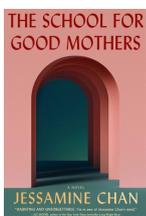
Fiona and Jane: Stories

By Jean Chen Ho

(Viking, 9780593296042, \$26, Jan. 4, Short Stories)

"Beautiful, intimate look at the evolving relationship of two complex women navigating their lives from youth into adulthood. Fierce and unsentimental, this one will stay with you!"

—Tova Beiser, Brown University Bookstore, Providence, RI



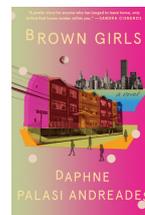
The School for Good Mothers: A Novel

By Jessamine Chan

(Simon & Schuster, 9781982156121, \$27, Jan. 4, Fiction)

"A mother leaves her toddler alone for hours and pays the price for the rest of her life. Chan took me from being a judgmental spectator to understanding how the system is stacked against mothers. A Handmaid's Tale and 1984 for Generation Z."

—Cathy Fiebach, Main Point Books, Wayne, PA



Brown Girls: A Novel

By Daphne Palasi Andreades

(Random House, 9780593243428, \$24, Jan. 4, Fiction)

"What an achievement this book is. Andreades gives the reader a glimpse into the lives of a tight-knit group of girls who are first-generation Americans growing up in Queens. Their stories announce the arrival of a major new talent."

—Cody Morrison, Square Books, Oxford, MS

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