

The Bookworm presents Shelf Awareness for Readers for Friday, May 15, 2020

From: The Bookworm Omaha (bookwormomaha@shelf-awareness.com)

To: [REDACTED]

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**THE SECRET PLOT THAT
ALMOST CHANGED
HISTORY...**

BRAD MELTZER
— JOSH MENSCH

THE LINCOLN CONSPIRACY
The Secret Plan to Kill America's 16th President—And Why It Failed

“A must-read!”
—DOUGLAS BRINKLEY,
author of *American Moonshot*

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Presents
Shelf
AWARENESS

Friday, May 15, 2020

From the Shelf

Hotel Reads in a Time of Vacancy

Last week, Stephen King told Stephen Colbert that *The Shining's* Jack Torrance was a character he wouldn't want to be quarantined with right now. Seems reasonable.

In olden (pre-Covid-19) times, I spent about 30 days per year in hotel rooms, but I'm unlikely to do so again for a while. Hotels have never been so vacant, which is scary on many levels and has prompted thoughts of great hotel reads and empty rooms (except, of course, for the ghosts).

I recently booked a few days in Eimear McBride's brilliant novel *Strange Hotel* (FSG), offering amenities like this: "Which

OH MY GOUDA!
Geronimo Stilton
IS NOW A GRAPHIC NOVEL

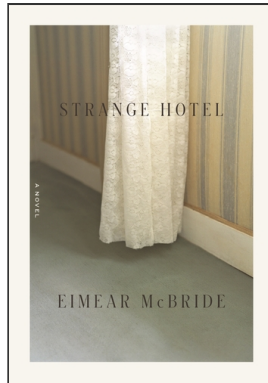


Reimagined by bestselling author
Tom Angelberger
Story by Elisabetta Dami

**START READING**

© 2019 Atlantyca S.p.A. From an original idea of Elisabetta Dami. Art by Tom Angelberger.

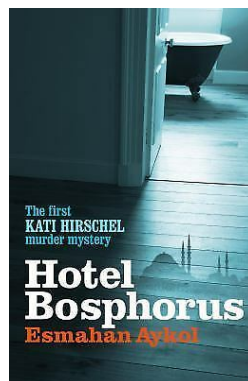
begs the question then, does she think of her life in these hotel rooms as laboratorially contained? Clearly the answer is yes, she has thought of it in this way. Each experience and experiment brought to culmination, data stripped, then labelled a failure or success. Is that really true? The answer is really yes: anthill--hotel rooms, ants as men. On reflection she can't deny the similarities between these games and their, oh so conscientiously maintained, absences of conquest."



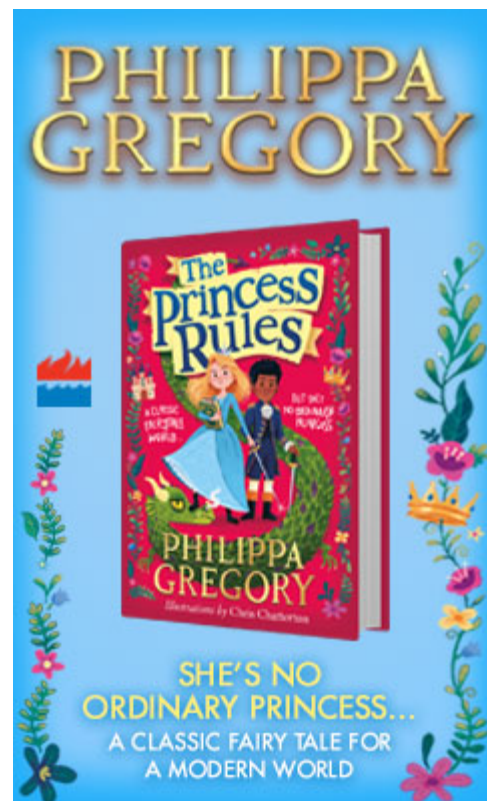
I've also stayed in the beautifully surreal *Hotel Silence* by Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir, translated by Brian FitzGibbon (Grove Press/Black Cat), where Jónas observes: "Sleeping pills also feature as a way of enabling

people to sleep longer than usual in hotel rooms, for eternity you might say."

And a great time was had in *Hotel Bosphorus* by Esmahan Aykol, translated by Ruth Whitehouse (Bitter Lemon Press), where the intrepid Istanbul bookseller Katie Hirschel investigates a murder in "a suite with a magnificent view. It was almost larger than my apartment.... Can a hotel room make a person happy? Well, this one could."



Ultimately, however, I suspect I'm more like Count Rostov in Amor Towles's wonderful *A Gentleman in Moscow*. Exiled





A NEW (AND ANCIENT) LENS TO REIMAGINE OUR WORLD

READ ON

HarperOne



chair for guests, and a ten-foot passage just wide enough for a gentleman to circumambulate in reflection." --[Robert Gray](#), contributing editor
Book Candy



What Bestselling Authors Are Reading at Home

Great Reads

Rediscover: Per Olov Enquist

The Writer's Life

Reading with... Phuc Tran

Reviews



The Compton Cowboys: The New Generation of Cowboys in America's Urban Heartland
by **Walter Thompson-Hernández**

Black cowboys merge tradition and current culture to save at-risk youth in a city with one of the highest death-by-gun rates in the country.

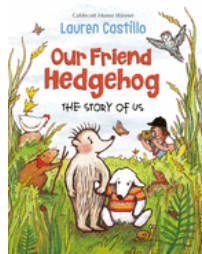
[Read this review >>](#)



Six Square Metres: Reflections from a Small Garden
by **Margaret Simons**

An Australian journalist shares anecdotes from her urban garden in a memoir full of wry humor and stubborn optimism.

[Read this review >>](#)



Our Friend Hedgehog: The Story of Us
by **Lauren Castillo**

This hugely appealing book delivers adventure, lovable characters and sweet messages about helpfulness and tolerance.

[Read this review >>](#)

Reviews by subject:

[Fiction](#) · [Mystery & Thriller](#) · [Biography & Memoir](#) · [Gardening](#) · [Reference & Writing](#) · [Humor](#) ·

Children's & Young Adult

Read Each Mayfield Standalone



ENTER TO WIN

Rakes AND Roses

JOSI S. KILPACK

"This magnetic tale will appeal to fans of emotional romance."

-Publishers Weekly

PROPER ROMANCE

Book Candy

What Bestselling Authors Are Reading at Home

Check out "[what bestselling authors are reading at home.](#)" Participants include John Grisham, Elizabeth Gilbert, Jay Manuel, Scott Turow and James Patterson.

"[Meryl Streep reciting poetry to Yo-Yo Ma's cello](#) is the lockdown tonic we all need," Classic FM noted.

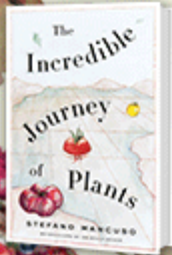
"The [most complex word in the English](#) is only three letters long," *considerable* noted.

Author C Pam Zhang picked her "[top 10 novels about moving](#)" for the *Guardian*.

Atlas Obscura checked out "[7 spectacular libraries](#) you can explore from your living room."

"Eco-responsible furniture: this [bookshelf can be reassembled into a coffin](#) after the owner's death." (via *Bored Panda*)





Explore this “quirky little global history, which argues that plants ‘are more sensitive than animals.’”
—*Nature*

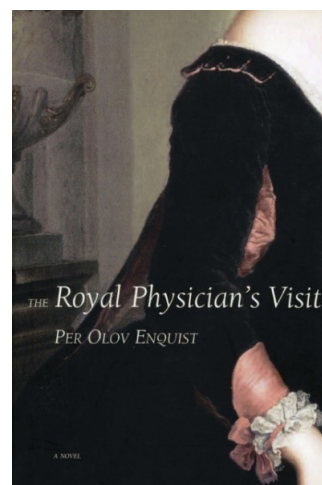
The Incredible Journey of Plants
BY STEFANO MANCUSO

BUY FROM YOUR LOCAL INDIE

Great Reads

Rediscover: Per Olov Enquist

Per Olov Enquist, the Swedish novelist, playwright, poet and screenwriter, died April 27 at age 85. Enquist was winner of the Nordic Council's literary prize and the Swedish Academy's Nordic prize. His historical novel *The Visit of the Royal Physician* won him the August Prize, Sweden's most prestigious literary award after the Nobel. He won a second August award for his 2008 autobiography *A Different Life*. His books, including *The Crystal Eye* (1961), *The Parable Book* (2013), *The Magnetist's Fifth Winter* (1964) and *The March of the Musicians* (1978), have been translated into a dozen languages. He also helped write the screenplay for the film *Pelle the Conqueror*, which won an Oscar for best foreign language film.



"Few have, like him, inspired other writers, renewed the documentary novel, revitalized Swedish drama and touched readers for more than half a century," said Håkan Bravinger, literary director at Enquist's Swedish publisher, Norstedts.

Enquist was cited by fellow Swedish writer Henning Mankell in Mankell's final diary entry before he died. "Eventually, of course, the day comes when we all have to go," wrote Mankell. "Then we need to remember the words of the author Per Olov Enquist: 'One day we shall die. But all the other days we shall be alive.' "



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The Writer's Life

Reading with... Phuc Tran

Phuc Tran has been a high school Latin teacher for more than 20 years; at the same time, he has become a highly sought-after tattooer. He taught Latin, Greek and Sanskrit in New York City at the Collegiate School and was an instructor at Brooklyn College's Summer Latin Institute. Most recently, he taught Latin, Greek and German at the Waynflete School in Portland, Maine. His 2012 TEDx talk "[Grammar, Identity, and the Dark Side of the Subjunctive](#)" was featured on NPR's Ted Radio Hour. Tran's memoir [Sigh, Gone](#) was just published by Flatiron Books.



photo: Jeff Roberts Imaging

On your nightstand now:

Like, metaphorically or literally? Because I don't actually have a nightstand, I'll assume metaphorically since my books just lie in a pile on the floor. The next books on the docket are *The Family Fang* by Kevin Wilson (because holy smokes, I was blown away by *Nothing to See Here*); *Writers and Lovers* by Lily King; *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens (this is my book club's book); and *Minor Feelings* by Cathy Hong Park. I read *Minor Feelings* in two days, but I feel like I'm going to have to read it again because it's so intense and there's a lot to unpack.

Favorite book when you were a child:

Lloyd Alexander's Chronicles of Prydain series because I was such a fantasy nerd as a kid. I think I read the whole series three times--and if you say that's a Tolkien rip-off, we're gonna have to arm wrestle.


Your top five authors:

Oof! Are we talking dead? Alive? Of all time? Okay, I guess in no particular order: Charles Dickens, Nicholson Baker, Oscar Wilde, Michael Chabon, Ann Patchett. I know, it's a weird list, and I'm sure it would change weekly, if not hourly. Stay with me, though. I'm thinking about being on a deserted island and being able to read only five writers for the rest of my hot, gritty life on that island as I went coconuts. Dickens because his sentences and characters are so wild and not tropical; Baker because he's so modern and astute (and two novels are just rocks-off smutty); Wilde because, well, because he's Wilde; Chabon because of *Kavalier and Clay*; and Patchett because her writing is so heady and hearty at the same time but without the head-scratching syntax of Dickens.


Book you've faked reading:

Ulysses by James Joyce. Ugh. I've tried reading *Ulysses* so many times, and I keep losing steam (of consciousness)....

[Read more >>](#)

Just like Sally Rooney, Nicolas Mathieu has “received domestic acclaim and international attention for writing about working-class youth.”
(*New York Times*)

And Their Children After Them **BUY FROM YOUR LOCAL INDIE** 

Book Reviews

Fiction

The Book of Longings
by Sue Monk Kidd



[MORE INFO](#)

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Sue Monk Kidd imagines that Jesus Christ had a wife, Ana, and *The Book of Longings* is her story. Ana doesn't appear in history, but provides illuminating context for the historical life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. Ana's chronicle is striking and woman-centered, as she declares, "I am Ana.... I am a voice."

Before she marries Jesus, Ana lives with her Jewish family in Sepphoris. Their wealth and literacy are rare; joining a poor family introduces the harsh realities of life under Roman rule. Jesus, who "put compassion above holiness," pictures God as a forgiving father rather than as a vengeful deity. Ana realizes that "God could be love, as Jesus believed." Jesus' preaching takes him away for months at a time. His absences allow Ana to maintain an independence that other women don't have. Her writing and meditation lead her to wonder, "What if my words could, like men's, prophesy or preach?" Ana's longing for agency is as passionate as Jesus' desire for a relationship with God, and as he faces crucifixion, she vows to be with him, saying, "I would go with him to the end of his longings."

Monk Kidd (*The Invention of Wings*) mixes historical and fictional characters, giving an engrossing portrayal of life

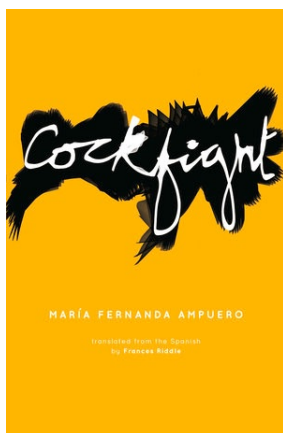
during the Christian New Testament era. Christians and non-Christians alike will appreciate the well-developed characters and carefully researched settings. For fans of Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent* and Geraldine Brooks's *The Secret Chord*, here is an audacious and original historical fiction. --[Cindy Pauldine](#), bookseller, the river's end bookstore, Oswego, N.Y.

Discover: Ana, fictional wife of Jesus Christ, longs to chronicle women's stories even as she bears witness to her husband's desire for radical change.

Viking, \$28 hardcover, 432p., 9780525429760

Cockfight

by María Fernanda Ampuero, trans. by Frances Riddle



MORE INFO

BUY NOW



In her scarifying fiction debut, translated by Frances Riddle, Ecuadorian writer and journalist María Fernanda Ampuero offers a baker's dozen stories that stab at the heart of the very idea of domestic tranquility. Fierce and tender, pained and vicious, Ampuero's miniatures focus on women facing violence and exploitation, as her (mostly) young protagonists survive abusive fathers, brothers and neighbors, well-organized sex traffickers, armies of cockroaches and other pervasive threats of violence that might gut their lives open at any time.

"I say yes because I've always said yes to men," one narrator says, after performing for an abuser's pleasure in the most squalid of settings. That declaration suggests this lean collection's prevailing tone of dazed resignation in the face of everyday terrors, but Ampuero's most memorable stories edge toward a bravura horror reminiscent of the most brutal work of Joyce Carol Oates. The opener, "Auction," in which a girl discovers men stop touching her when she's covered in the guts of gamecocks, stands as a sort of mission statement about the feminist uses of gore, and several other stories are pointedly splashed in menstrual blood. (Plus: creepy twins and copious incest!) Most of *Cockfight's* voices come from Ecuador's poor, but Ampuero sets two stories--one told by an international tourist watching workers bleach a resort swimming pool, the other by a wealthy woman whose friends get drunk and try on the maid's clothes--on the other side of the class divide. They're caught in sick cycles, too. --[Alan Scherstuhl](#), freelance writer and editor

Discover: These blood-soaked stories from Ecuador are a cry of feminist rage.

Feminist Press, \$15.95 paperback, 128p., 9781936932825

“Often informative, sometimes moving, and ambitious in its frank talk about what is oddly taboo: an inevitable experience for half of humanity.” —*Publishers Weekly*

GRAPHIC
MEDICINE

The Big Finish
by Brooke Fossey



[MORE INFO](#)

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Brooke Fossey's cleverly conceived, charming first novel, *The Big Finish*, centers on gruff and feisty 88-year-old Duffy Sinclair--a never-married Vietnam vet and recovering alcoholic. He believes his days are numbered while in residence at Centennial, an assisted living community in Everton, Tex. Duffy is fun and spirited. He jokes with the nurses, complains to the dining hall cook, riles the facility manager and flirts endlessly with an attractive female resident. Duffy and his staid best friend and roommate, Carl Upton, are still able-bodied and intellectually sound. But Duffy worries, if he doesn't toe the line or if he loses mobility, he'll be moved to Simmons, a dreadful nursing home for the aged, to live out his last days. Duffy's fears soon fall by the wayside, however, replaced by bigger ones, when Carl's granddaughter, Josie--a reckless 20-something whom Duffy never knew existed--breaks into their room through a window, seeking refuge. Her mother, the daughter of Carl's former mistress, has died, and Josie, in trouble, has fled an abusive boyfriend.

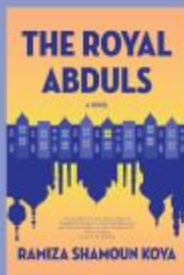
What ensues is an often madcap yet deeply poignant story. Josie's predicament and presence (Duffy and Carl secretly harbor her at the assisted living community) rallies Duffy's empathy and affections, forcing him to re-examine his life and take stock of--and perhaps even alter--his destiny.

Fossey delivers a funny, adventurous novel about second chances, redemption and how, just when it might seem as

though life is winding down, it's actually just getting started. --[Kathleen Gerard](#), blogger at [Reading Between the Lines](#)

Discover: In this adventurous, poignant novel, a feisty 88-year-old comes to the rescue of his roommate's troubled granddaughter.

Berkley, \$26 hardcover, 336p., 9781984804938



"Thoughtfully, pointedly confronts race, white privilege, cultural appropriation and erasure in a volatile new world."

—Terry Hong, *Shelf Awareness*

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Mystery & Thriller

The Split

by Sharon Bolton



MORE INFO

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Sharon Bolton (*The Craftsman*; *Dead Woman Walking*) often opens her thrillers with a scene that makes it hard to stop reading, and *The Split* is no different. Glaciologist Felicity Lloyd is stationed on the remote Antarctic island of South Georgia to study the decline of ice, but she's also hiding from a violent man, Freddie, who will literally go to the ends of the earth to find her. The island's tourist season is wrapping up but there's one more boat due to arrive--and Freddie's name is on the passenger list. Felicity packs emergency supplies and goes on the run, in a brutal environment that could kill her before Freddie gets to her.

Back in Cambridge, England, where Felicity is from, her former therapist, Joe, discovers shocking information about Freddie and races to South Georgia also to search for Felicity, before someone ends up dead.

One of Bolton's signatures is setting her story in a distinctive environment, and South Georgia's glaciers, subzero winds and frigid waters become menacing characters, ones without logic or compassion, always

threatening to kill at a moment's notice. Bolton's descriptions of setting and people are equally vivid: "A tear zigzags down the elderly woman's cheek. Her face is so wrinkled it can't flow in a vertical line." Felicity is another of Bolton's resourceful heroines, even while suffering from blackouts and memory loss. Some plot twists are predictable--the title is a giveaway--but Bolton's tight pacing and complex characters will take readers on a riveting adventure across a landscape as breathtaking as it is deadly. --[Elyse Dinh-McCrillis](#), blogger at [Pop Culture Nerd](#)

Discover: A glaciologist is hunted by a killer on a remote Antarctic island in this chilling psychological thriller.

Minotaur , \$27.99 hardcover, 400p., 9781250300058

Biography & Memoir



The Compton Cowboys: The New Generation of Cowboys in America's Urban Heartland
by **Walter Thompson-Hernández**

MORE INFO

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"Streets raised us. Horses saved us." Growing up in Southeast Los Angeles, Walter Thompson-Hernández wondered why there were no black cowboys. Then one day in Compton, he saw a show-stopping group of black horsemen riding down the street. "The cowboys had an allure to them that went beyond words. They seemed ethereal--like superheroes on the backs of mystic creatures who, I imagined, communicated in a language unknown to me."

Now a reporter for the *New York Times*, Thompson-Hernández reached out to the present-day Compton Cowboys. Many have ridden together since the 1990s and all started in the Compton Jr. Posse. Founded in the 1980s, the nonprofit was formed to provide at-risk youth an alternative to drugs and gangs, teaching them to care for themselves through caring for horses.

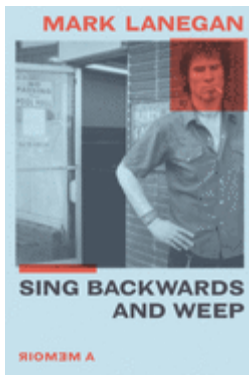
In *The Compton Cowboys*, Thompson-Hernández traces the roots of Compton, the organization and its members, providing heartrending insight into their varying paths to the Posse. They continue to challenge stereotypes and ride with "a free and rebellious spirit." While carrying the legacy of Compton's black cowboys, there is an effort to make the Cowboy culture accessible and cool--designer clothes, Air Jordans--and allow the armor that keeps them safe within their present realities. "Being black cowboys was as much about having a community where you could be your unapologetic self as it

was about riding." Compelling and transforming, *The Compton Cowboys* is a story of history, race, tradition and pride, given life by Thompson-Hernández's insight and care. --[Lauren O'Brien](#) of [Malcolm Avenue Review](#)

Discover: Black cowboys merge tradition and current culture to save at-risk youth in a city with one of the highest death-by-gun rates in the country.

Morrow, \$28.99 hardcover, 272p., 9780062910608

Sing Backwards and Weep: A Memoir by Mark Lanegan



[MORE INFO](#)

[BUY NOW](#)



Sing Backwards and Weep, Mark Lanegan's no-holds-barred, untidy but unforgettable recollection of his years in the burgeoning Seattle grunge scene, opens as he is about to be arrested. In Lanegan's pocket are bags of dope and coke. On the curb beside him, two acquaintances are already in handcuffs.

Suddenly: "The cop narrowed his eyes, took a hard look at me, then said, 'Didn't you used to be a singer?' " Indeed--and one autograph later, the motley crew gets off without penalty.

Such breaks have long "blessed" Lanegan, whose life in music has been punctuated by battles with addiction that he has managed to survive. A longtime songwriter, he achieved renown both on his own and with Screaming Trees and Queens of the Stone Age. His debut memoir covers the mid-1980s to early 2000s, while he was making music with Screaming Trees and beginning his solo career alongside bands like Alice in Chains, Pearl Jam and Soundgarden.

On tour and at home, Lanegan's tempestuous relationships and battles with addiction form consistent barriers to his success. His recounting is warts (plus fiberglass slivers embedded in intimate places) and all, and what could read as name-dropping actually doesn't, given his longtime proximity to rock stars: Kurt Cobain, for instance, was a fan of Lanegan and eventually a close friend.

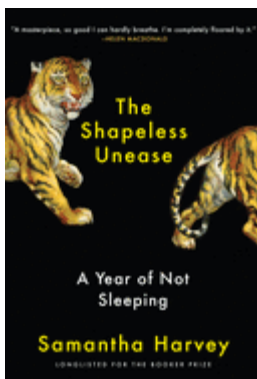
While some stories can feel braggadocious or score-settling, they're almost always still engrossing. Lanegan is a consummate lead singer: talented, engaging, brash and

center stage in every moment. Fans will eat it up. --[Katie Weed](#), freelance writer and reviewer

Discover: Relive the Seattle grunge rock heyday that frontman-cum-junkie Mark Lanegan barely survived in this sometimes haphazard, but always gripping, memoir.

Hachette, \$28 hardcover, 352p., 9780306922800

The Shapeless Unease: A Year of Not Sleeping by Samantha Harvey



[MORE INFO](#)

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Sleep won't be much of an option when pondering the questions and images novelist Samantha Harvey raises in her profound, earthshaking memoir, *The Shapeless Unease: A Year of Not Sleeping*.

Harvey (*The Western Wind*) is a writer of both sparkling effusions and dark, twisted inquiry. *The Shapeless Unease* defies linear genre and offers a varied look at the somber affliction of insomnia. In 2016, Harvey couldn't sleep. She talked to her doctor, tried various remedies, but all to no avail. She captures her experience of that year in stream-of-consciousness interior monologues and more essay-like probing into the heart of her distress. She's a shapeshifter, in that the point-of-view changes constantly. She writes in first-person then shifts to third-person. Some of her passages are short stories she wrote during that time. Some are dialogues with people trying to help. What's constant is the restless energy propelling the prose: fervent, searching, luminous at times.

The best part of *The Shapeless Unease*, though, is the author's exploration of writing. The act of writing saves her in the night, and she delves into what constitutes the miraculous phenomenon known as the written word. "Writing is dreaming," she explains. "It is lucid dreaming--the work of the subconscious that has a toe in the conscious, just enough to harness the dream's waywardness." This memoir churns in the soul. Here is a talented writer plumbing her personal experience as deeply as she can. The results are staggeringly beautiful. *The Shapeless Unease* belongs on the nightstand of every literary-minded insomniac. --[Scott Neuffer](#), writer, poet, editor of *trampset*

Discover: An accomplished novelist grapples with her insomnia and life's biggest questions in this brilliant, genre-bending memoir.

Grove Press, \$24 hardcover, 192p., 9780802148827

Gardening

★ *Six Square Metres: Reflections from a Small Garden* by Margaret Simons



MORE INFO

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Gardeners, the saying goes, reap what they sow. But Australian journalist Margaret Simons isn't so sure. "What about," she argues, "all the things you sow that don't germinate?" What about "opportunistic weeds" and the occasional glorious, unlooked-for surprise? In her memoir *Six Square Metres*, Simons (*Penny Wong*) shares wry, often contrarian reflections on her years of tending a tiny urban plot in Melbourne, battling slugs, shade and burger wrappers from the McDonald's next door.

Simons is candid about her gardening frustrations: plants are vulnerable not only to wind, drought and wildfire, but sometimes refuse to grow no matter how much she coaxes them. On the other hand, summer zucchini will double in size (and become barely edible) if left unwatched for a day. Nevertheless, Simons persists, growing eggplants on the roof, a "Happy Wanderer" vine on her back fence and hardy daffodils in red pots on her tiny sundeck. She experiments with strawberries (a bust), various herbs (with various results) and a lavender hedge (which becomes so abundant that she leaves a bucket of clippings for her neighbors). The successes never quite happen when she expects them to, but neither do the failures, and the elusive elements of luck and serendipity can never quite be discounted. In this way, as Simons notes, gardening is both addictive and exasperating, like life itself.

A mix of sunny optimism and beady-eyed realism, Simons's memoir celebrates the small joys and "sheer stubborn hope" of both gardening and family life. --[Katie Noah Gibson](#), blogger at [Cakes, Tea and Dreams](#)

Discover: An Australian journalist shares anecdotes from her urban garden in a memoir full of wry humor and stubborn optimism.

Scribe US, \$15 hardcover, 128p., 9781950354221

Reference & Writing

Death by Shakespeare: Snakebites, Stabbings and Broken Hearts

by Kathryn Harkup



MORE INFO

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William Shakespeare took simple ideas and wove them, with rich detail, into poetry and prose that astoundingly still resonates centuries later. Throughout much of his work, he layered in empathy and understanding about life and death. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the grim reality of death was pervasive. Commonplace in the era were widespread illness, contagious disease and plagues; starvation and violent excesses; murder and suicide; venereal diseases and deaths from childbirth; witchcraft; war and public executions. These facts drew chemist and author Kathryn Harkup (*A Is for Arsenic*) to explore facets of death in the Bard's dramatic works and to examine death through the prism of analytical science.

Did Shakespeare capture the essence of death with accuracy? Harkup leaves no stone unturned in her immensely thorough and compelling distillation of the Bard's work, *Death by Shakespeare*. She starts with his humble beginnings in the 1500s and his rise to prominence, setting his ascendancy amid the challenges of the time and the context of other playwrights of his era. From there, she cites specific works, examining the role of doctors, quacks and apothecaries in many of his plays, from Dr. Caius in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to the female practitioner Helena who successfully treats the king of France after male physicians have failed in *All's Well that Ends Well*.

Harkup's expertise leans toward the scientific. Her riveting storytelling, however, is refreshingly accessible. Her narrative will attract and intrigue readers who appreciate the macabre, eager for the enriching wisdom offered by two masters in their fields. --[Kathleen Gerard](#), blogger at [Reading Between the Lines](#)

Discover: A fascinating, thorough examination and scientific analysis of notable deaths that pervade the stage works of William Shakespeare.

Bloomsbury Sigma, \$28 hardcover, 368p., 9781472958228

Humor

So You're a Little Sad, So What?: Nice Things to Say to Yourself on Bad Days and Other Essays

by Alicia Tobin

MORE INFO

BUY NOW



With a combination of humility and feel-good humor, Canadian comedian Alicia Tobin's literary debut, *So You're a Little Sad, So What?*, examines memorable moments from her life in a series of charmingly awkward essays. Ever had a disastrous romance? Owned a high-needs pet? Suffered strained relationships with parents? Tobin has been through it all and survived, if not with grace, with a fully intact sense of humor. In "Velcro," Tobin describes the innocence of her fourth-grade self, joyfully performing a ribbon dance to Madonna's "Like a Virgin" in front of a shocked auditorium of parents. In "How to Talk to City Animals," she offers tongue-in-cheek suggestions for communing with nature: "Even more than cats, crows love to be told they are beautiful."

In a more serious piece, Tobin shares her diagnosis of Hashimoto's disease, an autoimmune illness that often leaves her with significant pain and no energy. In another essay, she laments the often toxic and hostile atmosphere for women and minorities in stand-up comedy, which forced her to carve out her own more positive place in the industry. But even in the most difficult of times, Tobin's charm, hard-won optimism and wit shine: "all of this beauty kept seeping into my hardest and saddest places... like a fancy thong on a sunburnt butt." Comedy, as Tobin says, is "an excuse to open our lives to each other," something she has successfully achieved in her own writing, with humorous insights and overwhelming empathy. --[Jennifer Oleinik](#), freelance writer and editor

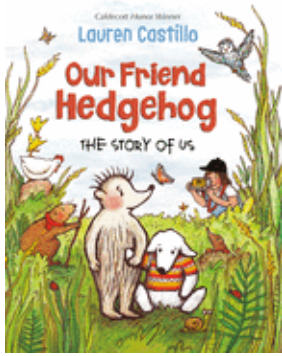
Discover: A comedian's debut essay collection tackles her own life stories--the good, the bad and the awkward--with humor and heart.

Arsenal Pulp Press, \$14.95 paperback, 160p., 9781551527871

Children's & Young Adult

★ *Our Friend Hedgehog: The Story of Us*
by Lauren Castillo

Like William Steig's *Abel's Island* and Arnold Lobel's Frog and Toad series, *Our Friend Hedgehog: The Story*


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of Us balances small but thrilling escapades with an earnest, whimsical, often droll friendship story.

In this first title of a proposed series, Caldecott Honoree Lauren Castillo (*Nana in the City*; *It Is Not Time for Sleeping*) introduces readers to a ragtag band of meadow and woodland characters--and one human girl--who are poised for adventure. First, we meet Hedgehog and her beloved friend, a sweater-wearing stuffed dog named Mutty, who live "between the great forests, in the center of the river, on a teeny tiny island." When a terrible storm blows in one day and carries Mutty away, Hedgehog is bereft. But she knows that tears won't bring anyone home, so she sets out to find Mutty. Crossing the river is her first step not only to being reunited with her companion, but also to making new friends. Soon she encounters a wiggly Mole, an erudite Owl, a peevish Beaver and a distracted mother hen and her chicks, all of whom burrow in tunnels and raft down the river in their efforts to help find Mutty.

Castillo uses pen, pencil, watercolor and Photoshop in an earthy palette to illustrate her winsome characters and fetching settings. Small details, like Mole greeting every friend with one of her multilingual salutations, bring out personalities as much as the lively illustrations, which wend their way through the pages like the serpentine river the characters all live in and around. Young readers ready to move on from picture books will find the short, generously illustrated chapters a satisfying way to break into the exhilarating world of chapter books. --[Emilie Coulter](#), freelance writer and editor

Discover: This hugely appealing book delivers adventure, lovable characters and sweet messages about helpfulness and tolerance.

Knopf, \$16.99 hardcover, 128p., ages 5-9, 9781524766719

Unstoppable

by Adam Rex, illus. by Laura Park

In *Unstoppable*, Adam Rex's message goes down nice and easy as he keeps the banter fast and furious and the laughs front and center.

As *Unstoppable* begins, a lakefront crab scares off a predatory cat by snapping its claws. The cat sneaks up



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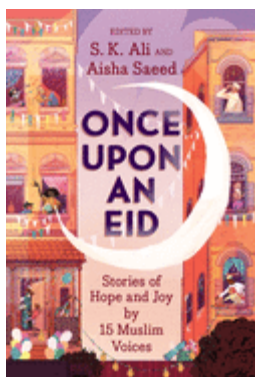
on a bird that flies to safety. Seeing this, the crab laments its inability to fly: "To soar, happy and carefree..." The bird isn't having it--"Do I look carefree? I almost got eaten by a cat"--and expresses envy for the crab's pincers. Suddenly the bird grabs the crab, takes to the air and a hybrid is born--"Crabbird!" or maybe "Birdrab!" After they trounce the cat, they pick up a turtle ("Craburtlebird!") and then a bear ("Craburbearbird!"). When the animals spy some trucks demolishing the lakefront in order to build a shopping mall, they use their combined strength to get the U.S. president involved, and then Congress. With friends like this, who needs superpowers?

A special illustrator's prize should be awarded to Laura Park for her images of the flying-wrecking-ball-like mass of animals and politicians ("Congresibirdraburtlebear") hell-bent on averting environmental destruction. Armed with a suitably megaphone-loud palette, Park (*Abner and Ian Get Right-Side Up*) likes to interrupt bucolic outdoor scenes with sudden blasts of droll chaos. She's a good match for Rex--among his greatest hits are *School's First Day of School* and *Are You Scared, Darth Vader?*--who proves with *Unstoppable* that his gift for crafting sense-making absurdity is undiminished. Let's hear it for Lauradrexpark! --[Nell Beram](#), freelance writer and YA author

Discover: This extravagantly absurd picture book centers on some lakefront animals who unite (in more than one sense) to stop ecological disaster.

Chronicle, \$16.99 hardcover, 56p., ages 5-8, 9781452165042

Once Upon an Eid: Stories of Hope and Joy by 15 Muslim Voices
by S.K. Ali and Aisha Saeed, editors, illus. by Sara Alfageeh



In a welcoming collection of fictional tales about celebrations of Eid, 15 notable Muslim voices share the excitement of this special day with middle-grade readers.

Regardless of country of origin, culture or language, followers of Islam around the world unite in joyful celebrations two days of each lunar year: the Eid celebrations at the end of Ramadan (Eid-ul-Fitr) and on "the tenth day of the month of Hajj, during which... Muslims undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca" (Eid-ul-Adha). The moving and often funny stories found in this anthology--comprising prose, poetry, prose poetry and one

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comic strip--capture the many ways families and friends observe the holiday. The compilation includes a boy overly impatient to find the Eid gifts his parents have hidden; a girl navigating both her first Eid and fashion issues after converting to Islam; and a Turkish refugee on a Greek island grieving the loss of his home and family while finding a way to transform this strange Eid into a miraculous feast.

Skilled writers/editors S.K. Ali ([Saints and Misfits](#); [Love from A to Z](#)) and Aisha Saeed ([Yes No Maybe So](#)) have gathered a stirring and lively selection of writing from prominent Muslim authors in *Once Upon an Eid*. Each story encapsulates the universal sense of joy Eid brings. Culturally rich descriptions of feasts, outfits, gifts, prayer and family paint a bright picture of a holiday non-Muslim readers may have known nothing about... yet which might sound familiar to followers of any religion. --[Emilie Coulter](#), freelance writer and editor

Discover: A delightful and varied collection of stories for middle-grade readers showcases a cross-section of Muslim experiences of the joyous Eid holidays.

Amulet Books, \$17.99 hardcover, 272p., ages 8-12, 9781419740831

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