

The Bookworm presents Shelf Awareness for Readers for Friday, May 22, 2020

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

To:

Date: Friday, May 22, 2020, 09:28 AM CDT

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**THE WIFE STALKER**  
LIV CONSTANTINE



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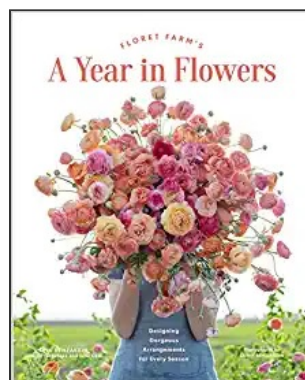
Friday, May 22, 2020

## From the Shelf

### Tending Our (Bookish) Gardens

In this extended work-from-home period, I've been craving time outside: fresh air, a break from screens and the chance to enjoy spring flowers. More recently--though I don't have much outdoor space--I've been delving into gardening books, dreaming of growing my own blooms.

Erin Benzakein, founder-owner of Floret Farm in Washington State's Skagit Valley, offers practical gardening advice and hundreds of gorgeous photos in her first book, *Floret Farm's Cut Flower Garden* (Chronicle, \$29.95). She takes readers



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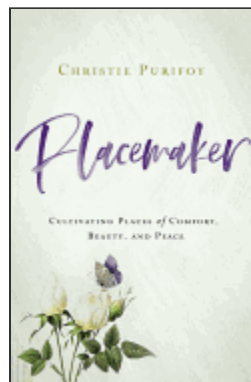
through the classics--daffodils, tulips, sweet peas, dahlias--and offers "vase life tricks" to make cut flowers last longer. (Her new book, *Floret Farm's A Year in Flowers*, was released this February--it's on my list.)



Australian journalist Margaret Simons chronicles a year of scrappy urban gardening in her brief, wry memoir *Six Square Metres* (Scribe US, \$15).

Through the Antipodean seasons, Simons recounts her struggles with growing plants in a small, shady Melbourne back garden located next to a McDonald's. Simons's memoir is less handbook than journal--though she does share some clever tricks, like putting a few pots on the (flat) roof, and her unexpected successes, including stubbornly cheery daffodils and a runaway lavender hedge.

Christie Purifoy grew up going to the garden store with her father in central Texas. Her journey from there to Maplehurst, the farmhouse in eastern Pennsylvania she shares with her husband and four children, has been a winding one. In *Placemaker* (Zondervan, \$18.99), her second memoir, Purifoy recounts the homes she has lived in over the last four decades, anchoring each one to an image of a different tree: honey locust, silver maple, saucer magnolia. She eloquently celebrates the gifts and honors the losses of each place. As many of us stay at home this spring, *Placemaker* may



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## In this issue...

### Book Candy

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[Lockdown Poetry Parties](#)

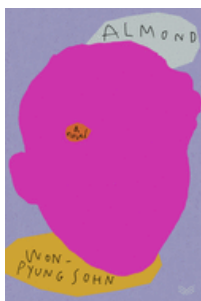
### The Writer's Life

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[Suzanne Collins: A Return to Panem](#)

## Reviews

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★ *Almond*  
by Won-Pyung Sohn

This self-proclaimed monster's story will draw readers in with its insight and empathy.

[Read this review >>](#)



★ *On Lighthouses*  
by Jazmina Barrera

This book of essays is the best kind of tranquilizer, taking readers out of their own skin and on a journey of quiet adventure.

[Read this review >>](#)



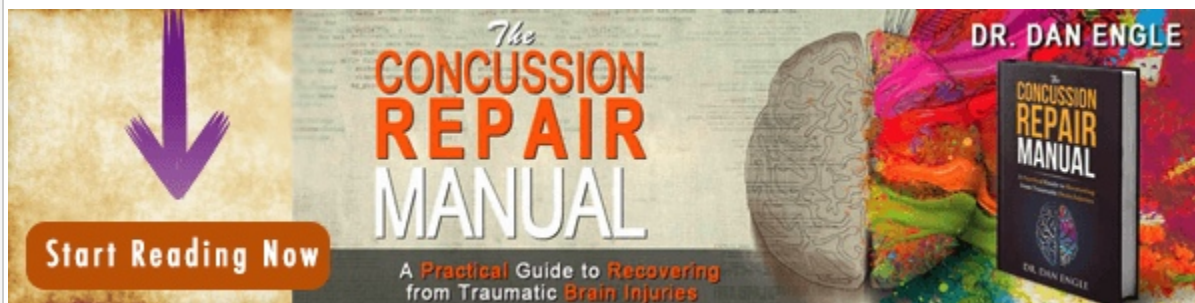
★ *Clap When You Land*  
by Elizabeth Acevedo

Two young women must each come to terms with their father after losing him in a plane crash in this piercing novel-in-verse.

[Read this review >>](#)

*Reviews by subject:*

[Fiction](#) · [Mystery & Thriller](#) · [Biography & Memoir](#) ·  
[History](#) · [Psychology & Self-Help](#) · [Children's & Young Adult](#)



## Book Candy

### Lockdown Poetry Parties

[Lockdown poetry parties](#) "bring families closer," BBC News contended.

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"[Best practices at Little Free Libraries](#) during the coronavirus outbreak."

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[Bill Gates](#) recommended "five summer books" and other things to do at home."

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" '[Social Distance](#)': a graphic short story for the coronavirus age by Mark Haddon." (via the *Guardian*)

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Take a [virtual tour of Harry Potter's London](#) through TripAdvisor's travel activity company Viator, *Mental Floss* suggested.

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Cédric Loth's sculpture "[La Leçon](#)" at Montreal's McGill University in Montreal "is a heavy-handed lampoon of student life," *Atlas Obscura* wrote.

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Valuing Black Lives and Property in America's Black Cities

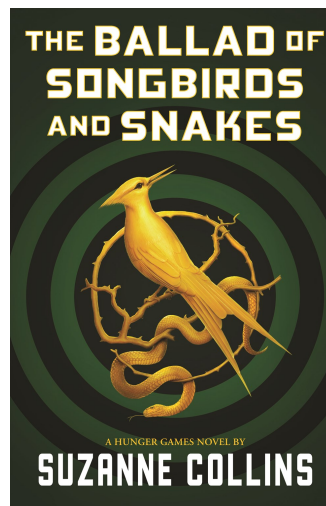
A new book by Andre M. Perry

## The Writer's Life

### Suzanne Collins: A Return to Panem

*Suzanne Collins's* *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (Scholastic, \$27.99), a prequel to the *Hunger Games* series, was published with a 2.5 million-copy first printing on May 19. Collins, who does not usually do interviews, sat down with her editor, [David Levithan](#), to discuss her process and her return to the world of Panem, 64 years before the events of the first book in the series, *The Hunger Games*, took place.

**David Levithan:** I'll start with the two questions I'm sure most readers will want to ask: Did you always plan to return to Panem after the trilogy with a book set 64 years earlier? And if not, what made you return to the story in this way?



**Suzanne Collins:** Here's how it works now. I have two worlds, the Underland (the world of The Underland Chronicles series) and Panem (the world of The Hunger Games). I use both of them to explore elements of just war theory. When I find a related topic that I want to examine, then I look for the place it best fits. The state of nature debate of the Enlightenment period naturally lent itself to a story centered on Coriolanus Snow.



Suzanne Collins

Focusing on the 10th Hunger Games also gave me the opportunity to tell Lucy Gray's story. In the first chapter of *The Hunger Games*, I make reference to a fourth District 12 victor. Katniss doesn't seem to know anything about the person worth mentioning. While her story isn't well-known, Lucy Gray lives on in a significant way through her music, helping to bring down Snow in the trilogy. Imagine his reaction when Katniss starts singing "Deep in the Meadow" to Rue in the arena. Beyond that, Lucy Gray's legacy is that she introduced entertainment to the Hunger Games.



David Levithan

**Levithan:** I have to ask--when you wrote that reference in the first book, did you have any sense of who that fourth victor might be?

**Collins:** Yes, but she's evolved a lot since then.

**Levithan:** What was it like to rewind the world you'd built by 64 years? What were some of the touchstones you used to understand what this version of Panem would be?

**Collins:** I really enjoyed going back in time to an earlier version of Panem and visiting the reconstruction period that followed the Dark Days. I thought a lot about the period after the Civil War here in the United States and also the post-World War II era in Europe. People trying to rebuild, to live their daily lives in the midst of the rubble. The challenges of food shortages, damaged infrastructure, confusion over how to proceed in peacetime. The relief that the war has ended coupled with the bitterness toward the wartime enemy. The need to place blame....

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"[The] haunting and eloquent...narrative of a Guatemalan woman's desperate search for a better life."

**-KIRKUS, STARRED REVIEW**

HarperCollins Español

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Book Reviews

# Fiction



## *Almond*

by Won-Pyung Sohn, trans. by Sandy Joosun Lee



MORE INFO

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The engrossing voice and outsider's perspective from a young narrator with a brain condition will reward readers of *Almond*, the debut novel from Won-Pyung Sohn. Yunjae's underdeveloped amygdalae--two almond-shaped clusters of nuclei in the brain--mean that he doesn't experience emotions the same way most people do. His mother and his grandmother raise him with great care, writing down instructions for him to memorize, such as to move away if a car comes close to him and to smile back when people smile at him. Then, at age 16, he is suddenly and violently rendered alone.

Yunjae describes his story as "about a monster meeting another monster. One of the monsters is me." A new student, Gon, arrives at school and sees Yunjae's lack of fear as a challenge to his bullying skills. Yunjae has the idea that learning about the angry Gon may be the key to understanding emotions, and the two develop a surprising friendship.

The narration by a young protagonist with a disorder that affects his ability to identify and express feelings will rightly draw comparisons to *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon, but Sohn's insightful depiction of an outsider's perspective on society around him will also please fans of other narrators who sharply consider the world at a remove, such as in *The Sympathizer* by Viet Thanh Nguyen. Readers will treasure the opportunity to see the world through Yunjae's eyes and watch him as he grows. --[Kristen Allen-Vogel](#), information services librarian at Dayton Metro Library

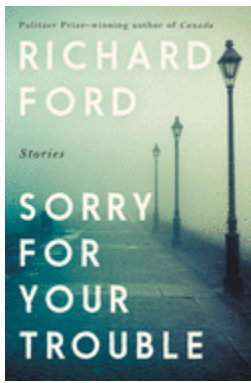
**Discover:** This self-proclaimed monster's story will draw readers in with its insight and empathy.

HarperVia, \$25.99 hardcover, 272p., 9780062961372

## *Sorry for Your Trouble*

by Richard Ford

Richard Ford's short story collection *Sorry for Your Trouble* offers nine emotionally resonant tales of aging, loss and existential displacement. In "Nothing to Declare," a pair of ex-lovers, estranged for decades, take a walk together through the New Orleans French Quarter. "Second



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Language" tells the story of an ex-husband and wife who manage to maintain a relationship after their divorce. Finally, in the longest tale, "The Run of Yourself," a man traverses the unsettled and lonely terrain of his life two years after his wife's suicide. Each story examines the life of a character--often an economically well-off white man--as he faces the realities of age and the disappointment of realizing that, even after all this time, he still has not found his place.

Ford's meditative insights and careful emotional tenor made him famous in his earlier novels, *The Sportswriter* (1986) and *Independence Day* (1995). *Sorry for Your Trouble* portrays this same precision of character and tone, but colored by a chillier aesthetic that vividly captures the sobering moment his characters all find themselves in. All past what could be considered the peaks of their lives, this collection's characters attempt to settle into the unsettling reality of old age and frustrated expectations. While they have lived relatively successful lives, a feeling of dissatisfaction connects them all. Thus, the collection makes space to acknowledge and value these unnamable, existential crises that question the meaningfulness of a life and its seemingly catastrophic events. Ford's quiet faithfulness to a character's interior life remains unsurpassed. --[Alice Martin](#), freelance writer and editor

**Discover:** Nine stories examine displaced desire and candid disappointments with life in evocative yet sensitive and soothing prose.

Ecco, \$27.99 hardcover, 272p., 9780062969804

## *We Had No Rules* by Corinne Manning



[MORE INFO](#)

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"My family had no rules."  
"There are certain rules you learn early."

Corinne Manning's nuanced debut short story collection is bookended by these two statements, both straightforward in concept but complex in execution. The first entry in *We Had No Rules* is a story of the same name; it follows a queer teen girl as she runs away from home to live with her older sister in 1990s New York City. She recalls a childhood in which rules seemingly didn't exist--that is, until her sister broke them and was kicked out of their home for being queer. Then the rules are glaringly obvious, intrusive and oppressive. Only through leaving everything she's known does she find out what it truly means to live without rules--and how confusing that can be.



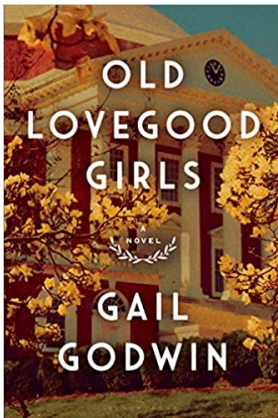
Each story is told in first person and approaches rules, identity and relationships in a different way. At first glance, these characters and their stories seem unconnected, but as the collection progresses, minor figures from earlier stories reappear in their own narratives or in those of their daughters, friends or ex-lovers. Rather than embracing the modern idea of the gay nuclear family, the characters in Manning's stories are messy and far from perfect.

These stories do not subscribe to the idea that to be properly queer one must live out loud, with a partner and within the framework built for them by modern codes of respectability--but they do not deny it, either. At times funny, sad and frustrating, *We Had No Rules* is a collection of modern queer stories that embraces ambiguity over order. --[Suzanne Krohn](#), editor, *Love in Panels*

**Discover:** Nuanced and interconnected short stories explore queerness through the lens of rules, and rules through the lens of queerness.

Arsenal Pulp Press, \$15.95 paperback, 192p., 9781551527994

## *Old Lovegood Girls* by Gail Godwin



MORE INFO

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The lifelong impact of a brief friendship is the theme of *Old Lovegood Girls*, Gail Godwin's 16th novel. Spanning decades and moving from a traditional women's junior college in 1958 North Carolina to New York City, yet always returning to the South, the emotional interdependence of Feron Hood and Merry Jellicoe is a quiet force propelling this engaging novel.

For ill-matched roommates, their bond is surprising. Feron had been "subjected to a wider range of life's misadventures than the typical Lovegood girl," the dean noted, instilling a wary reserve. Merry, of the Jellicoe Tobacco family, puzzles Feron: "Was a person like Merry born with her openheartedness, or was it seeded and grown, year after year, by people who had raised her to choose the generous and the true?" Their intriguing differences, plus their mutual love of Literature and Composition class, encouraged the friendship, but a family tragedy abruptly ended Merry's studies.

Godwin (*Grief Cottage*) divides her evocative novel into sections roughly by decades and details the women's stories between their rare encounters. Both continue to write, Feron in New York and Merry while managing the tobacco business. Their connection survives; Feron

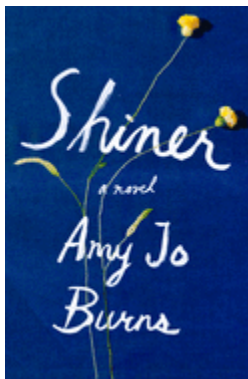


often has "the Merry dream" and thinks of her as a "moral compass." Merry reflects, "Her flashes of insight have influenced my life." Both endure heartache, and readers often learn their stories through the other's reactions to them. While Feron enjoys the greater literary success, Merry's North Carolina life eclipses Feron's in depth. The culture and characters of the small-town South enrich *Old Lovegood Girls*, as do the updates on the college as decades alter the place where the women met. --Cheryl McKeon, bookseller, Market Block Books, Troy, N.Y.

**Discover:** This engaging novel explores the power of a brief friendship to resonate through decades, between two women who meet as roommates at a Southern college in 1958.

Bloomsbury, \$27 hardcover, 352p., 9781632868220

*Shiner*  
by Amy Jo Burns



MORE INFO

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Set on a mountain in West Virginia and populated by snake-handling preachers, moonshiners and the women who survive them, Amy Jo Burns's first novel, *Shiner*, is a powerful story about finding moments of light in the dark--even if that means burning everything down. *Shiner* is a story about stories: those we tell ourselves, those we tell others and the stories that live on after we can no longer tell them.

Teenage Wren and her mother, Ruby, are cut off from the world. Their only regular contact outside their cabin door is with Ivy, Ruby's lifelong best friend, and Ivy's family. Wren narrates the first part of the book, describing her possessive preacher father and the intensely close relationship between the two adult women in her life. Wren and Ruby's existence is characterized by poverty, loneliness and a constant sense of dread. When tragedy is followed by a miracle, their world is upended, leading Wren to seek the truth behind the faith that has shaped the lives of everyone around her.

Though they inhabit a world of controlling men, Ivy and Ruby persevere, sharing their stories and struggles--except when they don't. Everyone in *Shiner* is keeping secrets, sharp and dizzying like moonshine, revealed to the reader and, eventually, to Wren through changes of narrator.

Burns (author of the memoir *Cinderland*) illustrates how cruel and ceaseless life for these three women is, and how changing who tells the story can free both the listener and the teller. --Suzanne Krohn, editor, Love in Panels

**Discover:** Toxic faith, long-kept secrets and survival through sisterhood create a coming-of-age story that asks, if the story is different depending on the narrator, what is truth?

Riverhead Books, \$27 hardcover, 272p., 9780525533641

## Mystery & Thriller

### *Summer of Reckoning*

by Marion Brunet, trans. by Katherine Gregor



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*Summer of Reckoning* is a thriller set in the hothouse of the Luberon region in the south of France, as poverty, racism and boredom boil over into terrible violence. Marion Brunet's first book to be translated into English from the French is almost cruelly efficient, hurtling the reader toward inevitable tragedy in little more than 200 pages. Brunet's novel is overheated and psychologically complex, filled with the kinds of intense, conflicting personalities that wouldn't be out of place in a Tennessee Williams play.

A complicated sequence of events is set into motion when 16-year-old Céline becomes pregnant and refuses to name the father. Céline's father, Manuel, retreats into alcoholism and a festering rage born of his own insecurities.

Meanwhile, Céline's younger sister, Jo, carries on a risky, intermittent relationship with Saïd, a childhood friend of the sisters from an Arab family, and experiments with entering the world of the upper-crust through a wealthy friend. Brunet delights in lighting multiple fuses, leaving readers to anticipate an explosion at any moment, from any direction. When it comes, it is exceptionally grim, a hateful act brutally reinforcing the book's themes of wealth inequality, bigotry and pointless aggression.

*Summer of Reckoning* is a remarkably sensual novel: when Jo comes up for air after pretending to drown, she feels "her blood pulsating violently in her body as though it's about to split her veins." The novel features people on the edge--Brunet's style is suitably, wonderfully lurid. --[Hank Stephenson](#), manuscript reader, the *Sun* magazine

**Discover:** In a thriller set in a claustrophobic town in the south of France, an unexplained pregnancy sparks a tragic chain of events fueled by racism and poverty.

Bitter Lemon Press, \$12.95 paperback, 276p., 9781912242269

## *The Secrets of Bones*

by Kylie Logan



MORE INFO

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As contrary as it seems to reference charm and murder in the same sentence, Kylie Logan's *The Secrets of Bones* blends them wonderfully. The second in Logan's Jazz Ramsey series (*The Scent of Murder*) finds Jazz recovering from large life losses. She finds solace in her Airedale puppy, Wally, who she's training to be her next Human Remains Detection partner, and her job as administrative assistant to Sister Eileen Flannery, principal of St. Catherine's Prep Academy for Girls.

Assembly Day at St. Catherine's is a yearly highlight, with prominent women professionals giving talks to the girls. When one presenter doesn't show, Jazz is pushed into service, borrowing a trained HRD dog, Gus, and putting on a performance on the allegedly haunted and always locked fourth floor. During the demo, Gus finds more than Jazz bargained for, signaling at the access door to an old heating system. Behind the door are human remains, desiccated and partially plastic-wrapped, wearing the cross of Bernadette Quinn. Bernadette, a staunchly religious and difficult teacher, sent a resignation letter to St. Catherine's three years ago and never returned.

With Sister Eileen in the crosshairs, Jazz tries to find the truth of Bernadette's disappearance and death, bringing her back in contact with homicide detective Nick Koselov, her former lover. The lack of much on the dog front is offset by winning characters, an intriguing mystery in the traditional style, fun dialogue and a pace that makes this small town in Ohio, even with a murder, a charmingly entertaining place. --[Lauren O'Brien](#) of [Malcolm Avenue Review](#)

**Discover:** Bones of a former teacher found in a closet spark a murder investigation at an all-girls' school in this engaging mystery.

Minotaur Books, \$26.99 hardcover, 336p., 9781250180599

## Biography & Memoir



### *On Lighthouses*

by Jazmina Barrera, trans. by Christina Macsweeney

"Even before I ever saw a lighthouse, I dreamed of one," writes Mexico City writer Jazmina Barrera in her luminous, wistful book of essays, *On Lighthouses*. "Obsession," she explains, "is a form of mental collecting," and Barrera's



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obsession leads her "to research the history of lighthouses, the stories surrounding them... it was like falling in love."

She's not alone. James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Jeanette Winterson and Robert Louis Stevenson are only a few of the writers who share her passion; Herman Melville launches her journey, noting how "human beings 'share a natural attraction to water.'" Mariners lured by the sea were guided home by "fire indicating the sea's end," telling them, "human beings are here."

"I live on an island," Barrera says, in a dark apartment where she hungers for glimpses of the sky. "Humans absorb light through their skin, they eat light." Lighthouses become sources of nourishment that are almost maternal, offering protection and guidance. "The lighthouse looks and searches, as a human being looks." Barrera gives an enticing view of life within a lighthouse and then tempers it by saying there are 300 lighthouse keepers in Mexico--and they "often go mad." There's a price to pay for that romantic solitude with its view of sea and sky.

Still, Barrera's obsession is contagious. Her graceful sentences ensnare tidbits of history and tantalizing glimpses of her own life, accompanied by delicate sketches of lighthouses she's visited, making this book a refuge from everyday life, a place of enchantment and safety. --[Janet Brown](#), author and former bookseller

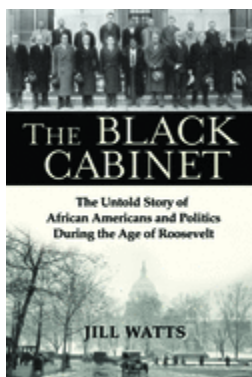
**Discover:** This book of essays is the best kind of tranquilizer, taking readers out of their own skin and on a journey of quiet adventure.

Two Lines Press, \$19.95 hardcover, 174p., 9781949641011

## History

### *The Black Cabinet: The Untold Story of African Americans and Politics During the Age of Roosevelt*

by Jill Watts



In 1933, as FDR's first New Deal programs sprung up across a United States in crisis, NAACP official William Pickens found the Roosevelt administration's relief efforts lacking: he saw Roosevelt's NRA--the National Recovery Act--as more akin to a "Negro Removal Act," thanks to the early New Deal's targeting of aid toward white communities and its enshrinement of discriminatory hiring practices.

This vivid, penetrating study by historian Jill Watts (*Hattie McDaniel: Black Ambition, White Hollywood; Mae West: An*

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*Icon in Black and White*) captures how determined black intellectuals and activists accumulated the power to document the inequalities of the New Deal, often from within its own agencies, and to nudge a reluctant federal government toward seeking relief for *all* Americans. Chief among this unofficial cabinet's accomplishments: pressuring Roosevelt into signing an executive order that barred racist hiring practices in the defense industry, a pioneering antidiscrimination regulation that, decades later, would stand as the foundation of affirmative action law.

Despite such triumphs, the Black Cabinet faced much frustration, disappointment and intractable racism. Roosevelt himself never officially acknowledged its existence, even as its members were touted in black newspapers and integrated government lunchrooms. Watts's attention to personalities and the nuts-and-bolts practicality of D.C. decision-making builds the story's tension. She's adept at capturing complex lives in a page or two, and her treatment brings vigorous life to figures like Mary McLeod Bethune, the activist turned official, and Lucia Mae Pitts, a secretary skeptical at first of her white boss's dedication to black America. --[Alan Scherstuhl](#), freelance writer and editor

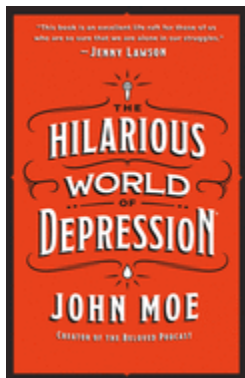
**Discover:** A historian illuminates how a Black Cabinet moved FDR and the New Deal toward the invention of anti-discrimination law.

Grove Press, \$30 hardcover, 560p., 9780802129109

## Psychology & Self-Help

### *The Hilarious World of Depression*

by John Moe



MORE INFO

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Comedic and sobering, *The Hilarious World of Depression* by John Moe, host of the podcast of the same name, imparts what living with depression looks like.

Depression has tried to kill Moe (*Dear Luke, We Need to Talk, Darth*) since he was 12. Tricked by an "If I Could Just mentality," he believed achieving goals would bring happiness. It didn't. Dream jobs--writing for NPR, hosting *Weekend America*, launching American Public Media's *Wits*--fueled stress, strengthening the disorder's grip on his psyche. Soon, suicide seemed a logical answer. However, after his brother who struggled with addiction died by suicide, Moe knew he could never damage his family that way: "I would have to walk the earth... no secret ticket out."



Moe's journey exemplifies the trying path to help for those with depression. It "isn't a mood," he demonstrates; it erases self-worth and emotions, it makes connecting with people seem impossible, it "builds a protective carapace out of [the] worst habits." Convinced their problem is unsolvable, "saddies" avoid therapy. Depression becomes part of their identity, sometimes with deadly consequences. If more people talked about mental illness, Moe argues, more people would improve.

Podcast quotes about battling depression from celebrities like NPR's Peter Sagal, Wilco's Jeff Tweedy, John Green, Mara Wilson and Wil Wheaton augment Moe's message that no one must face depression alone. His jokes ("You get all the pizza in the world but pizza will taste like lettuce") land with an accuracy that validates his promise: "getting help... feels like floating." Phenomenally reassuring, *The Hilarious World of Depression* is a rallying cry for mental health advocacy. --[Samantha Zabolski](#), freelance editor and reviewer

**Discover:** A podcast host illuminates depression in all its eccentricities--and the importance of talking about it.

St. Martin's Press, \$27.99 hardcover, 304p., 9781250209283

## Children's & Young Adult

★ *Clap When You Land*  
by Elizabeth Acevedo



[MORE INFO](#)

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NBA, Printz and Carnegie Medal-winner Elizabeth Acevedo's second novel-in-verse, *Clap When You Land*, is inspired by and pays tribute to "the lives lost on American Airlines flight 587," which crashed in Queens, N.Y., in 2001 on its way to the Dominican Republic. Diving deep into the lives of two teens who have lost their father in a plane crash, Acevedo (*The Poet X*) uses her immense skill to describe their lush, complicated inner worlds.

Through an apprenticeship with her tía, 16-year-old Camino discovers that "curing is in [her] blood." Though she doesn't tell anyone, Camino knows she will join the father she adores in the U.S., to attend medical school. But the day he is supposed to come home for the summer to the Dominican Republic, his plane crashes: the word "accident" is "a gnashing jaw,/ a bottomless belly," a "shark-toothed truth." Yahaira, who lives in Upper Manhattan, learned a year ago that her father broke her trust. Before, he had been her everything. Now, they don't speak. But Yahaira's father was on that flight to the

Dominican Republic: "Papi/ is/ dead." The finality of this phrase is driven home by an extended blank space between each word.

Acevedo's poetry at one moment envelops readers through vibrant description, and the next pierces them with all-too-effective phrases: "The thought of speaking/ makes me want to/ uncarve myself from this skin." Her quick, penetrating verse is lean and decisive, her blank spaces expertly planned moments of held breath. Finishing the book is not unlike touching ground again after a flight. And, "when you touch down on this soil, you must clap when you land./ Gracias a Dios. Entiendes?" --Siân Gaetano, children's and YA editor, *Shelf Awareness*

**Discover:** Two young women must each come to terms with their father after losing him in a plane crash in this piercing novel-in-verse.

Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins, \$18.99 hardcover, 432p., ages 14-up, 9780062882769

### *Felix Ever After* by Kacen Callender



MORE INFO

BUY NOW



After coming out as transgender, changing his name and physically transitioning, 17-year-old Felix Love got exactly what he wished for. So why does he still feel like something isn't right? Kacen Callender's second work for young adults is an enigmatic story of self-discovery featuring a dynamic cast of queer characters who are divided by their insecurities but secretly united by their desire to be loved.

Felix is a Black, trans, queer art student desperate for his own Cinderella story. Despite his surname, Felix admits, "It's like every identity I have... the more different I am than everyone else... the less... lovable I feel." As his friends pair off and fall in love, Felix watches from afar, feeling undeserving. Then his former identity is revealed in a very public way and he is harassed on social media. Felix decides anonymously to track down his bully and "destroy" him. But Felix's plan goes awry when, through his anonymous persona, he develops feelings for the target of his revenge. Now embroiled in a complicated love triangle, Felix fears he'll lose his chance at love once he reveals his true identity.

In *Felix Ever After*, Callender (a Stonewall and Lambda Award winner for *Hurricane Child*; *This Is Kind of an Epic Love Story*; *King and the Dragonflies*) adeptly weaves a poignant bildungsroman that builds suspense as, layer by layer, new dimensions of Felix's identity are unmasked with each failed attempt to identify his tormentor. In a society

where the lines between in-person and social media interactions blur, Callender believably captures this interconnectivity with teenagers whose identities are shaped, dismantled and reconfigured by their social media use. Inevitably, Felix and his peers peel away their carefully constructed virtual facades to face their own painful truths and flawed selves. --[Kieran Slattery](#), freelance reviewer, teacher, co-creator of Gender Inclusive Classrooms

**Discover:** In a remarkable exploration of self-discovery, a Black, transgender, queer art student embarks on a quest to find true love while simultaneously tracking down an anonymous transphobic bully.

Balzer + Bray, \$18.99 hardcover, 368p., ages 14-up, 9780062820259

### *Dear Beast*

by Dori Hillestad Butler, illus. by Kevan Atteberry



MORE INFO

BUY NOW



This comical and surprisingly touching collection of letters between a snooty cat and an exuberant and oblivious dog introduces young readers to the richness awaiting them in early chapter books.

Simon is a pompous--though perhaps a bit insecure--black cat. He lives with his human, Andy, and Andy's mom. Ever since Andy's parents split up, Simon has managed just fine as his boy's singular pet (if you don't count the goldfish, which he doesn't). Learning that Andy's dad has adopted a dog is a serious blow. Simon is moved to pass along his concerns to the dog via "proper" letters with salutation, closing and signature on engraved stationery, delivered via snail (a nod to Arnold Lobel's *Frog and Toad*, perhaps?). Unfortunately, the guileless dog (aka Beast, Baxter, Master Baxter Man) refuses to be intimidated. He continues the correspondence with warmth and enthusiasm, signing his misspelled missives "Luv and Liver Treetts" and trying to convince uptight Simon that "there's more to life than book reports."

Geisel Honoree and Edgar Award-winner Dori Hillestad Butler (*King & Kayla and the Case of the Missing Dog Treats*; *Buddy Files: Case of the Lost Boy*) and Kevan Atteberry (*Ghost Cat*; *Puddles!!!*) join forces for this first in a series featuring a most delightful odd couple. Atteberry's full-color comics-style illustrations capture in only a few deft strokes the personalities of each character: Baxter's joy is colossal while Simon's scheming nature comes across in the tilt of an eyebrow. *Dear Beast* is a beauty! --[Emilie Coulter](#), freelance writer and editor



**Discover:** This inaugural title in a series about a mismatched pair of pets is a terrific introduction to early chapter books, packed with funny correspondence and enormously appealing illustrations.

Holiday House, \$15.99 hardcover, 80p., ages 6-9, 9780823444922



## the big THRILL

an exclusive interview with  
bestselling author Sara Paretsky

*Dead Land*  
(A V.I. Warshawski Novel)  
by Sara Paretsky  
isbn: 9780062435927  
William Morrow  
April 21, 2020



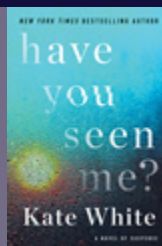
**DEAD LAND** is your 20<sup>th</sup> thriller featuring Chicago's beloved private investigator, V.I. Warshawski's--an impressive accomplishment! What are some of the challenges of writing a series character?

"When I started writing, I just wanted to prove I could write a novel from beginning to end. And then, I had this mission to turn the stereotypes around female characters on their heads. Now V.I. feels fully realized in my mind, and one of the challenges in being so familiar with the characters is making sure how *I* think and act, and how *she* thinks and acts gets broken down enough so that she doesn't become a reflection of my psyche. I always get there, but--and I think this is true for all writers--starting each new book feels like an act of terror."

[Read the rest of the interview here.](#)

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**HAVE YOU SEEN ME?** by KATE WHITE: *HAVE YOU SEEN ME?*--the sixth standalone thriller by *New York Times* bestselling author Kate White--introduces readers to Ally Linden, a finance journalist who, in

the book's opening scenes, is clearly having a bad day. Things get worse from there. [Read more at The Big Thrill.](#)

**THE LAST TRIAL by SCOTT TUROW:** In bestselling author Scott Turow's newest legal thriller, *THE LAST TRIAL* (the 11th book of his Kindle County series), Sandy Stern will try his last case. Stern knows that everything ends, of course. But even so, letting go is never easy. [Find out more here.](#)

**NO GOING BACK by SHEENA KAMAL:** In *NO GOING BACK*, author Sheena Kamal spins a riveting tale of a lost soul who will risk everything to protect the daughter she never thought she wanted. [Visit The Big Thrill for more.](#)

**EAGLE STATION by DALE BOWN:** If you've been eagerly anticipating the next Brad McLanahan novel, your wait is over--Brad is back, protecting America to the moon and back, in Dale Brown's latest soon-to-be blockbuster, *EAGLE STATION*. [Read more here.](#)

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