

# Midmonth BookNotes

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## Welcome to BookNotes

*Our Romance, Women's Fiction, & Historical Fiction newsletter*



If the romantic suspense genre were to have a literary fairy godmother, it would have to be Mary Stewart. Between 1954 and 1967, Stewart wrote 10 novels that managed to strike the perfect balance between suspense and romance. With each of these books, Stewart blurred the line between the mystery and romance genres so skillfully that these novels received acclaim – including the Silver Dagger from the Crime Writers Association and the Romance Writers of America's Lifetime Achievement Award – from critics in both genres. Stewart's carefully crafted romantic suspense novels are characterized by her realistically flawed yet ultimately courageous heroines and heroes, vividly realized settings, and a love of history and literature that is deftly woven into her fast-paced plots.

Over the last decade, Chicago Review Press has been reprinting Stewart's romantic suspense books and this July the publisher brings out Stewart's first novel *Madame, Will You Talk?* with a new introduction by mystery writer Katherine Hall Page. Set in the south of France, the book features war widow Charity Selborne, who is enjoying a vacation with her friend Louise Cray when they meet a young man named David, who is having some trouble with his dog. From that moment on, Charity's "quiet" sojourn in France turns into something very different once she discovers David's father, Richard Bryon, has been accused of murder and is in France trying to find his son.

If you have never read Mary Stewart (or if you already have and just want to luxuriate in a re-read of this classic or any of her novels), now is your chance. In addition to *Madame, Will You Talk?* The Poisoned Pen stocks (or can easily order) copies of other of her titles including *This Rough Magic* (with its evocative Corfu setting and Shakespearean influenced plot), *The Ivy Tree* (whose plot may remind some readers of Josephine Tey's classic *Brat Farrar*), and *My Brother Michael* (one of my own favorites in which the endearing heroine finds herself caught up in a dangerous plot with ties to ancient Greece as well as World War II).

*Ashley, Kristen. [Ride Steady](#)* (Grand Central \$8)

Ever since high school, Carson Steel (a.k.a “The Joker”) had a thing for Carissa Teodoro, but Carissa ended up marrying someone else. Now seven years later when Carson comes across Carissa and her infant son stranded by the side of the highway, he discovers Carissa still holds the key to his heart. But bringing Carissa into his club and his life could be very dangerous for them both. Ashley’s latest is a perfect example of how the romance genre handles the concept of “series” a bit different from mystery fiction. Each book in a romance series can stand by itself since it focuses on an individual couple, but often the author will tie a series of novels together by some common element such as a geographic setting, a group of people who work together, or members of an extended family. In this case of the “Chaos Motorcycle Club,” the action centers on the members of a motorcycle club (think Sons of Anarchy), and the 3rd book in the series delivers plenty of high testosterone action and danger as well as a generous helping of smoking hot sex.

*Binchy, Maeve. [Maeve’s Times: In Her Own Words](#)* (Knopf \$15.95)

This trade paperback edition of last year’s hardcover collects five decades of the iconic Irish writer’s articles that she wrote for newspapers and magazines. Think of this heartwarming collection as an Irish Erma Bombeck anthology.

*Bush, Nancy. [You Can’t Escape](#)* (Kensington \$7.99)

Reporter Jay Dance and journalist Jordanna Winters team up to investigate a string of unsolved murders, in which each victim’s body has been branded in some way. Bush will definitely keep you way up past your bedtime with this gritty, nail-biting novel of romantic suspense.

*Carr, Robyn. [New Hope](#)* (Mira \$8.99)

The eighth addition to Carr’s best-selling “Thunder Point” series is all about new beginnings and fresh starts. For Ginger Dysart coming to Thunder Point means finally figuring out a way to move forward in life after the devastating loss of her young son to AIDS. For Matt Lacoumette meeting Ginger is just the kick in the pants he

needs to finally let go of the anger and bitterness he holds against his ex-wife Natalie. Unfortunately, Matt’s first meeting with Ginger at a family wedding in which he drunkenly propositions Ginger is not exactly the “meet cute” from which a thousand romances have been launched. Fortunately, when Matt shows up at Ginger’s workplace to apologize, something clicks between the two of them.

*Cocks, Heather and Jessica Morgan. [The Royal We](#)* (Grand Central \$26.00)

You may have missed this when it first was published in April. I know I did. But a very good friend raved about it and said “you have to read this,” and she was absolutely right! The Royal We is co-authored by two friends, who have also written young adult novels (Spoiled and Messy) as well as being the creators of the celebrity fashion blog Go Fug Yourself. It’s the story of American Rebecca “Bex” Porter who is admitted to Oxford only to find she is living down the hall from Nick (otherwise known as Prince Nicholas of Wales). Before you can say “put the kettle on,” the two have fallen for each other. Of course there are more than a few potholes on the royal road to happily ever after for Bex as she finds herself both dazzled by the celebrity spotlight as well as having to deal with all the baggage that comes from dating Great Britain’s future King. Will The Royal We remind you of a certain recent real-life royal romance? Well of course, and that is half the fun in reading it. The other half comes from enjoying the authors’ sly sense of wit and the obvious fun they had in writing this sparkling, sweetly romantic story.

*Dodd, Christina. [Virtue Falls](#)* (Simon Schuster \$7.99)

Twenty-three years ago, Elizabeth Banner left Virtue Falls after her father Charles was convicted of murdering Elizabeth’s mother Misty. Now armed with a geology degree, Elizabeth is back in Virtue Falls hoping she can use her father’s seminal geological studies as the framework for a new way of mapping earthquakes. When a class-8 earthquake and subsequent tsunami strikes the coast, Elizabeth thinks it may provide the data she needs, but she never expected the earthquake would have one more surprise in

store for her when the body of Misty Banner (along with a few others) surfaces. Now based on new evidence the police find, it could turn out that Elizabeth's father may actually be innocent of the murder as he claimed all along. But if Charles Banner didn't kill his wife, someone else in Virtue Falls did. Dodd launched her new series set in a small coastal town in Washington with Virtue Falls and the result is a nail-biter of a suspense novel with a sexy romantic thread expertly woven through the plot. Look for the next in the series, *Obsession Falls*, in September.

*Frampton, Megan. [Put Up Your Duke](#)* (Harper \$7.99)

When Nicholas Smithfield becomes the new Duke of Gage, he discovers he not only has inherited a title but a fiancée as well! In exchange for a rather sizeable monetary gift, Nicholas's predecessor agreed to marry Lady Isabella Sawford, and Isabella's parents insist that Nicholas honor the agreement. What starts out as a strict marriage of convenience, however, quickly turns into something else when Nicholas realizes he is falling for his new wife. If you enjoy sexy historicals by authors like Lisa Kleypas or Julia Quinn, you may want to give Frampton a whirl.

*Gable, Michelle. [The Paris Apartment](#)* (St. Martin's \$15.99)

Gable's debut, which was a surprise hit in hardcover at the Poisoned Pen last year, is now available in trade paperback. The book's heroine, April Vogt, is an expert on furniture. Sent to Paris to appraise the contents of an apartment that has been locked up for decades, April finds a cache of letters and journals by a Belle Époque courtesan, whose own choices in life forces April to reexamine her future.

*Garwood, Julie. [Fast Track](#)* (NAL \$7.99)

Cordelia Kane is shocked when her father informs her that her mother didn't die in a car accident but is actually still alive. When Cordelia tracks her mother down (with a little help from her teenage crush Aiden Madison) to Sydney, she discovers not only isn't mommy thrilled to see her, she might be willing to do anything to keep her past life a secret. Garwood usually does a good job with her romantic suspense novels,

but I thought this one was a bit less thrilling and a bit more Judith Krantz glitzy than some of her earlier titles like *The Ideal Man* and *Hotshot*.

*George, Nina. [The Little Paris Bookshop](#)* (Crown \$25)

"With all due respect, what you read is more important in the long term than the man you marry, ma chere Madame." This sentence reflects the philosophy of M. Jean Albert Victor Perdu, the protagonist of George's remarkable, life-affirming novel. Perdu is the owner of the Literary Apothecary, Paris's famous floating bookshop. Perdu has filled the barge with hundreds of books that contain the literary remedies for countless, undefined afflictions, but what book can heal Perdu's own wounded soul? When Perdu finally opens the letter left to him by his one true love, who left him 21 years ago, the contents of the letter send him, along with a best-selling author and a lovelorn Italian chef, on a mission to the south of France to find their heart's desire. Karen already raved about this book in last month's Booknews, but I wanted to add my own recommendation for this truly remarkable novel. George writes with quiet grace and striking eloquence about heartbreak and hope as well as love and friendship, and her ability to evoke the beauty of Paris as well as the sun-drenched splendor of France's Provence region is nothing less than magical. The Little Paris Bookshop is one of those rare novels that a reader comes across once in a blue moon and shouldn't be missed.

*Green, Jane. [Summer Secrets](#)* (Simon Schuster \$26.99)

Life is a party for London journalist Cat Coombs until she wakes up one morning in a strange bed and realizes she has no idea how she got there. Fortunately for Cat, the stranger happens to be a recovering alcoholic named Jason Halliwell. Partly because of her new found infatuation with Jason, Cat decides to give Alcoholics Anonymous a try, but when some shocking news from her mother sends Cat to Nantucket, she falls off the wagon with devastating results. Years later, Cat returns to Nantucket to make amends as part of her sobriety, but can the people she wronged ever forgive her? British best-selling author



Green writes with great compassion and insight about the courage it takes to battle an addiction to alcohol.

*James, Julie. [Suddenly One Summer](#)* (Berkley \$7.99)

All Chicago divorce attorney Victoria Slade wants is a little peace and quiet, but her sexy new condo neighbor is driving her crazy. If Ford Dixon isn't pounding on the walls with his home repair projects; he is busy entertaining a cavalcade of vivacious beauties. However, Victoria finds she must revise her opinion of Ford when the two team up to help track down the man who abandoned Ford's pregnant younger sister. James has a wonderfully sharp sense of wit, and reading her latest sexy contemporary is something akin to watching one of those wonderful romantic comedies of the 1930s and 1940s in which Carole Lombard or Claudette Colbert trades sharp verbal spars with someone like Clark Gable or Cary Grant while falling in love (albeit with a bit more sex than then movie censors back then would allow).

*Kaye, Laura. [Hard to Let Go](#)* (Harper \$7.99)

Special Forces A Team member Beckett Murda finds his investigation into the ambush that killed half of his fellow teammates complicated by beautiful prosecutor Katherine Rixy in the latest addition to Kaye's "Hard Ink" series.

*Kindl, Patrice. [A School for Brides](#)* (\$17.99)

While the publisher is marketing this book as a YA romance, it really will be a hit with any reader who loves classic Regency romances. The story is set at the Winthrop Hopkins Female Academy, where young ladies are trained in all the feminine arts necessary for finding a suitable husband. The only problem is that the school is located in Yorkshire, where "suitable" men are as scarce as hens' teeth. However, when a young man on a walking tour breaks a leg and is forced to recuperate at the school, it brings more gentlemen as well as the possibilities for romance to Winthrop Hopkins Female Academy. Kindl leavens her writing with a generous dash of dry wit that Jane Austen herself would admire, and

the result is an effervescent novel of love and manners that deserves a place on any romance reader's bookshelves.

*Klassen, Julie. [Lady Maybe](#)* (Berkley, \$16.00)

Hannah Rogers can't remember anything about the carriage accident, but she does know that all of the people calling her Lady Mariana Mayfield are somehow wrong. While she slowly recuperates, Hannah knows she should correct their mistake, but a secret in Hannah's own past keeps her from telling the truth. Hannah knows impersonating Mariana is wrong, but she has a very good reason for doing so. It isn't like Hannah is hurting anyone, especially since the real Lady Mariana Mayfield is presumed to be dead, and Lord John Mayfield lies dead to the world in a coma. The only question is how far will Hannah go to maintain the ruse, especially when it seems as if Lord John may recover? Klassen has been nominated for numerous awards for her previous historical romances (including several Christy awards and a couple RITAs), and when it comes to dishing up a sweet love story spiced with just the right dash of mystery and intrigue, she really can't be beat. Lady Maybe has such a wonderfully retro gothic flavor that it reminded me of those classic romances by Victoria Holt, but fans of Stephanie Barron's Jane Austen mysteries may also want to check it out.

*Macomber, Debbie. [Love Letters](#)* (Ballantine \$7.99)

The proprietor of the Rose Harbor Inn as well as two of her guests find their lives changed by letters they read in this sweet addition to best-selling Macomber's "Rose Harbor" series.

*Margolis, Sue. [Losing Me](#)* (NAL \$15)

Just when it seems almost every protagonist in romance and women's fiction is under the age of 30, Margolis gives us Barbara Stirling, whose 60th birthday is rapidly coming up on the horizon. Barbara thinks she may have figured her life all out, but then budget cuts unexpectedly cost Barbara her job as a special education teacher. Suddenly, not only does Barbara have to try and reinvent herself in the workplace, she must cope with the added stress of taking care of her own

elderly mother, worrying about her own grown-up children, and come to terms with her less than emotionally supportive husband. There is something wonderfully satisfying about watching Barbara realistically tackle all of the obstacles life puts in her way and yet still maintain her sense of compassion and humor. If you enjoy British flavored women's fiction served up with a wicked sense of wit, Margolis latest will definitely be your literary cup of tea.

*Martin, Kat. [Against the Tide](#)* (Kensington \$7.99)

In the latest installment of Martin's "Broodies of Alaska" series, Liv Chandler is running for her life and the only person who can help her is charter boat captain Rafie Brodie.

*Miller, Linda L. [Marriage Season](#)* (Houghton \$7.99)

After her first and only love died in Afghanistan, Becca Stuart gave up on the idea of ever finding love again until former charter pilot and widower Tate Calder shows up in Mustang Creek with plans to start a horse breeding business.

*Morgan, Victoria. [Daughter of an Earl](#)* (Berkley \$7.99)

Lady Emily Chandler is determined to prove her fiancé was murdered, and Emily thinks brash American shipping company owner Brett Curtis is just the man to help her.

*Neggers, Carla. [The Harbor](#)* (Mira \$7.99)

In this reprint, Zoe West isn't sure if she can trust burned-out FBI special Agent Jb. McGrath or not, but with a killer loose in Goose Harbor, Maine it isn't like Zoe has a lot of options.

*Novak, Brenda. [The Secret Sister](#)* (Mira \$14.95)

Maisey Lazarow swore she would ever return to Fairharm Island. But after her own marriage imploded and her brother Keith tried to commit suicide, Maisey found herself back home with her wealthy, controlling mother Josephine. When Rafe Romero, the contractor hired by her mother to restore some family bungalows, discovers a box of photos hidden in the walls of one of the cottages, Maisey gets yet another shock. While

going through the pictures, Maisey and Keith both recognize one little girl, who bears a close resemblance to Maisey at that same age. But who is this girl and why does Maisey's mother refuse to talk about her? Former Valley of the Sun resident Novak's latest emotionally involving novel neatly bridges the gap between contemporary romance and women's fiction making it the perfect choice for readers who enjoy authors like Barbara Delinsky or Kristin Hannah.

*Roberts, Nora. [Blue Smoke](#)* (Berkley \$17)

In this trade paperback reissue of one of Robert's older titles, Baltimore arson investigator Reena Hale finds her past is coming back to haunt her.

*Walker, Julie A. [Hell or High Water](#)* (Sourcebooks \$7.99)

Walker hit the NYT best-seller lists with *Hell on Wheels*, the first book in her "Black Knights" series (yes, yet another romance series centered on motorcycles). Now Walker launches her "Deep Six" books with a thrilling novel of high-stakes danger and hot-as-sin desire, in which CIA agent Olivia Mortier teams up with former Navy SEAL Leo Anderson to locate three missing containers of deadly chemicals lost overboard during a mission involving Islamic terrorists. With its intriguing plot involving shipwrecks, salvage work, and plenty of steamy sex, Walker's latest addictively readable romance is the perfect summer read.

## Signed Books

If you were not able to attend one of the Poisoned Pen's author events earlier this month, we do still have signed copies (while supplies last) of the following titles:

*Laurie, Victoria. [Sense of Deception](#)*

(Obsidian \$24.95 Signed) Tossed in a jail cell for contempt of court, professional psychic and FBI consultant Abby Cooper meets a woman convicted of killing her young son. Abby's intuition tells her the woman is innocent, however, but finding the real killer will take all of Abby's gifts plus a little help from her husband Dutch and her friends. If you enjoy reading about sassy sleuths with plenty of spirit (both in terms of their own

well as their ability to connect with spirits on the other side) and you haven't yet discovered Laurie's books, you are in for a real treat.

*Patel, Shona. [Flame Tree Road](#)* (MIRA \$15 Signed) When Biren Roy sees the suffering his mother must endure as a widow in India in the late 19th century, it pushes him to not only pursue a career in law but to also become an advocate for the rights of all women in his country. Unfortunately, Biren quickly discovers that centuries of tradition can't always be changed overnight. Just when Biren is becoming completely discouraged, he meets the wonderfully unconventional Maya Nandi, and the love he has for her inspires him to continue with his dream. Patel does a marvelous job at weaving the customs and culture of India into the storyline of her latest vibrantly etched, richly satisfying novel.

*Teran, Andi. [Ana of California](#)* (Penguin \$16 Signed) Orphaned fifteen year old Ana Cortez is out of options. If Ana wants to avoid being sent back to a group home, she will have to accept a job working as a summer intern at a family-run farm in Northern California. Emmett Garber and his sister Abigail could certainly use some help with their farm, but Emmett is initially skeptical that Ana will last more than a week. Abigail, however, has more faith in the girl, and it turns out she just may be right when Ana not only begins to thrive in her new home, but begins to develop real relationships with Abigail, Emmett, and some of the other residents of Hardy. Teran's debut takes its inspiration from L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, and readers will have a lot of fun recognizing the literary nods Teran makes to that classic novel. However, with its wonderfully spunky heroine, cast of endearingly quirky secondary characters, and beautifully evoked rural California setting, *Ana of California* is completely charming in its own way as well.

*Williams, Beatriz. [Tiny Little Thing](#)* (Putnam \$26.95 Signed) Christina "Tiny" Hardcastle has the perfect husband, the perfect marriage, and the perfect life until the day the first letter with a photograph arrives at her husband's family estate in Cape Cod. Now if Tiny doesn't pay

up, Tiny's perfect life and her husband Frank's chances at a perfect political career (that eventually could include the White House) will come tumbling down faster than a house of cards. Unfortunately, there is no one else in the family that Tiny thinks she can turn to for help; especially not Frank's cousin Cap, a decorated Vietnam War hero home on leave. But as the election season gets underway and Tiny frantically tries to keep her secret under wraps, she discovers almost everyone close to her is also keeping a secret or two of their own. I loved Williams' latest smart and classy novel of women's fiction with its addictively readable plot about secrets and scandals and its pitch perfect 1960s setting, but what I love most about Williams' books is her ability to create realistically flawed, richly nuanced characters.