

Midmonth BookNotes

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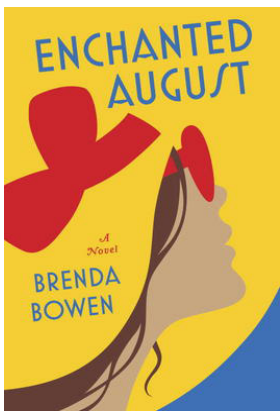
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Enchanted September



As summer turns into fall (despite what the thermometer might say) it isn't too late to recapture some of the escapist joys of that idyllic season by delving into the two following books.

Bowen, Brenda. *Enchanted August* (Pamela Dorman Books, 27.95)
Bowen, a children's book publisher and author, was inspired by Elizabeth von Arnim's classic early 20th century novel *The Enchanted April* to write her own sweetly charming tale about four people, who decide to share the rental of a cottage in Maine for the month of August. Lottie Wilkinson and Rose Arbuthnot are feeling terribly overworked and underappreciated by their husbands and families when they both spot an ad on the bulletin board at their children's preschool.

The notice reads:

Hopewell Cottage
Little Lost Island, Maine
Old, pretty cottage
To rent on a small island.
Springwater, blueberries, sea glass
August

Suddenly, the idea of escaping their lives – even if only for a month – is just too impossible to resist. By joining forces with two other people – movie star Caroline Dester, who just wants to be left alone, and elderly Beverly Fisher, who is mourning the loss of two loved ones – Lottie and Rose are able to afford Hopewell Cottage's rather expensive monthly rent. Once the quartet arrives on Little Lost Island, the transformation process begins aided by copious amounts of salt air, wild flowers, fresh corn, and breathtaking views. I absolutely loved *Enchanted August*, which is a wonderfully old-fashioned story in the best possible way, and I especially appreciated the manner in which Bowen gracefully tips her literary cap to *Enchanted April* while at the same time putting her own individual touches into the story

von Arnim, Elizabeth. *The Enchanted April* (Penguin, 16.00)

von Arnim's book opens with Lottie Wilkins and Rose Arbuthnot meeting on a grey, rainy day at a Ladies Club in London, where they both spot the following advertisement in the Agony column in *The Times*:



To Those who Appreciate Wisteria and Sunshine. Small medieval Italian Castle on the shores of the Mediterranean to be let.

Furnished for the month of April. Necessary servants remain.

It is at that moment, that Lottie and Rose find they want nothing more than to escape dreary London and their dull lives even if it is just for one month. By taking on two additional partners – jaded socialite Lady Caroline and the rather formidable widowed Mrs. Fisher – Lottie and Rose are able to afford San Salvatore. It is a dark and stormy night when Rose and Lottie arrive at their castle, but the next morning when they throw open the shutters on their bedroom windows, everything changes. Under the warmth of the Italian sun, each woman blossoms in her own unique way as lives change and hearts mend in this completely enchanting novel. This new edition by Penguin includes a wonderfully written introduction by Elizabeth Bowen, who deftly sketches in von Arnim's place in the literary firmament.

Albert, Susan Wittig. [The Darling Dahlias and the Eleven O'Clock Lady](#) (Berkley, 25.95)

When telephone switchboard operator Rona Jean Hancock is found strangled with one of her own silk stockings, some folks in Darling say Rona shouldn't have been eavesdropping on private phone conversations. Other folks in town say it may very well been one of the many "gentleman callers" that Rona liked to entertain who killed her. As the newly minted sheriff of Cyprus County, Buddy Norris knows finding Rona Jean's killer is the only way he will earn the trust of the citizens of Darling, but what Buddy didn't count on was the help he would receive from the members of the Darling Dahlia's garden club. *The Darling Dahlias and the Eleven O'Clock Lady* is the sixth installment in this charming series, and it is an absolute delight. The author does an excellent job incorporating a wealth of details about life in the 1930s into the plot, and with this book in particular, the role the Civilian Conservation Corps played in helping communities combat the economic effects of the Great Depression. If you enjoy cozy historicals with a strong sense of place

and time as well as some wonderfully endearing characters, you are in for a real treat with Albert's Darling Dahlia books.

Balogh, Mary. [Only a Kiss](#) (Signet, 7.99)
Widowed Imogen Hayes, the only female member of the war-scarred Survivor's Club, is more than a bit annoyed when the new Earl of Hartford, Percival Hayes, arrives to inspect his estate in Cornwall, especially since Imogen has been quietly living there ever since her husband's death two years earlier. Imogen's fears that she will be asked to find a new home are quickly replaced by her concerns that she just might be falling in love with Percival. Balogh adds a dash of mystery to her latest Regency-set historical in the form of a Cornish smuggling ring, whose dangerous activities bring the hero and heroine together.

Beck, K.K. [Tipping the Valet](#) (Perseverance Press, 15.95)

Parking valet Tyler Benson is thrilled when he is given the chance to work at Ristorante Alba since the tips will definitely be better at the upscale Italian eatery. What Tyler doesn't know is that the valets at Alba have another way of earning money: helping the mob run a chop shop out of the parking lot. However, when a corpse is found in the trunk of an Audi left at Alba's, guess who is at the top of the police's suspect list? I really enjoyed Agatha-nominated Beck's Iris Cooper and Jane da Silva mysteries (both sadly out of print) and am delighted to see her back after an extended absence.

Blackwell, Juliet. [The Paris Key](#) (NAL, 15.00)

With her marriage crumbling and a divorce in the works, Genevieve Martin seizes the chance to return to Paris, where she spent the happiest summer of her life as a teenager learning the locksmithing trade from her late uncle Dave. Once Genevieve arrives in Paris, her first task to sort through her uncle's old files to see if she really wants to stay in France and takeover his shop. What Genevieve doesn't expect is that is that her time in Paris will also provide her with the key to not only unlocking some mysteries in her family's past, but will also turn out to be the key to

her future. Blackwell is the author of the “Witchcraft” and “Haunted Home Renovation” series as well as the “Art Lover’s” series as Hailey Lind, and *The Paris Key* is her first foray into romance/women’s fiction. The book is a charming love letter to Paris and the French way of life as well as offering a fascinating exploration into the art of locksmithing. Blackwell’s *The Paris Key* will also serve as the first choice in the Poisoned Pen’s new Romance/Women’s Fiction Book Discussion Group, which will have its first meeting on Saturday October 11th at 12 PM.

Brockway, Connie. [*Highlander Undone*](#) (Montlake, 12.95)

Captain Jack Cameron knows one of the officers in the Black Dragoons is a traitor, who by aiding and abetting the slavers in the Sudan is now responsible for the deaths of many British soldiers. In order to uncover the identity of this traitorous officer, Jack must infiltrate a circle of artists hosted by Ted Hoodless and his widowed sister Adelaide. Brockway once again works her unique brand of literary magic by conjuring up another elegantly written love story that is graced with superbly nuanced characters, fueled by an abundance of potent sensuality, and generously seasoned with the author’s sly sense of wit.

Christie, Sally. [*The Sisters of Versailles*](#) (Atria, 16.00)

Christie launches a new trilogy that focuses on the women, who shared the heart and bed of France’s most beloved monarch: Louis XV. It’s the early years of the 18th century, and everyone in the French court is whispering about how the King is becoming bored with his Polish wife. As various factions compete to find the King’s new mistress, Louise, the eldest of the Nelse sisters, finds herself maneuvered into Louis’s arms by a few scheming court ministers. Over the next decade, Louise will be replaced in succession by her sisters Pauline, Diane, and Marie Anne as Nesle family struggles to hold onto the power and influence they have gained as favorites of the king. Christie’s debut is rich and sumptuous read that perfectly captures the indulgent, gilded life of the French court, and I think she does an excellent job at capturing the distinctive personalities of each of the sisters. If you saw the movie

A Little Chaos with Kate Winslet or gobbled up Philippa Gregory’s *The Other Boleyn Girl* or loved Karleen Koen’s *Through a Glass Darkly* this will definitely be your literary cup of tea.

Dallas, Sandra. [*The Last Midwife*](#) (St. Martins, 25.99)

The women in the small Colorado mining town of Swandyke trust midwife Gracy Brookens because she has successfully delivered hundreds of their babies into the world. However, everything changes for Gracy when a baby is found dead, and a wealthy mine owner accuses her of murder. As the town’s residents choose sides, Gracy must find a way to defend herself and her practice against charges that she is an untrained quack, who is a danger to the community. In her latest impeccably researched historical novel, Dallas writes eloquently and movingly about the ties that can bind together women as well as the physical and mental strength it took to survive in the old West in the 1880s. If you enjoy historical fiction with a strong sense of place and time, Dallas, who has also written the wonderful novel *The Persian Pickle Club*, is your author.

Dodd, Christina. [*Obsession Falls*](#) (SMP, 26.99)

Interior decorator Taylor Summers has a plan. Taylor came to the Sawtooth Mountains in Idaho, hoping that while she was sketching there, she would rediscover her long dormant artistic muse. Instead Taylor observes two men drive up in a car, get out, and proceed to drag a terrified boy out of the car’s trunk. The men then begin discussing the best way to murder the boy and get rid of the body without realizing Taylor listening in. Before the thugs can follow through on their threat, Taylor hatches a desperate plan that she hopes will save the boy. Flinging her drawings into the air, Taylor screams “run” to the boy and then takes off into the woods with one of the killers hot on her trail. This is just the opening from Dodd’s latest thrill-a-minute novel that will definitely have you on the edge of your seats right up the book’s jaw-dropping conclusion. Dodd got her start writing some terrific romances, and now with last year’s *Virtue Falls* and *Obsession Falls*, Dodd is successfully venturing further and further into the suspense genre

as she takes a walk on the dark side. With its gutsy heroine, unexpected plot twists, and sharp edge of humor, *Obsession Falls* is tailor-made for fans of Lisa Gardner's *The Perfect Husband* or Iris Johansen's *The Ugly Duckling*.

Donati, Sara. [*The Gilded Hour*](#) (Berkley, 26.95)

It's 1883 and Dr. Liliane "Anna" Savard and Dr. Sophie Elodie Savard live with their Aunt Quinlan and her widowed stepdaughter Margaret while they struggle to establish themselves as medical professionals. Things are particularly difficult since Postal Inspector Anthony Comstock is on a rampage about women using any form of birth control. Toss in a killer targeting pregnant women, two missing orphans, and a romance for Anna with detective Jack Mezzanotte and you have a book that should appeal to both historical fiction and historical mystery fans.

Duran, Meredith. [*Luck Be a Lady*](#) (Pocket, 7.99)

All Catherine Everleigh wants is to reclaim the auction house that is her birthright, but in order to do so; Catherine will need a powerful ally. Therefore a marriage of convenience to powerful crime lord Nicholas O'Shea could be just the right move for her. Duran's latest Victorian-set historical romance is rich in sexy banter and adventurous intrigue.

Finch, Kay. [*Black Cat Crossing*](#) (Berkley, 7.99)

Aspiring mystery author Sabrina Tate never thought she would get some first-hand experience with murder. But when Sabrina's Aunt Rowe is accused of killing her dreadful cousin Bobby Joe Flowers, Sabrina realizes it is time to put her theoretical plotting skills into practice and find the real murderer. It is always fun to discover a new series, and this debut's small town Texas setting may remind some readers of the China Bayles' books crossed with a hint of Carolyn Hart.

Harbison, Beth. [*If I Could Turn Back Time*](#) (SMP, 26.99)

The world should be Raimie Philips's oyster. Raimie has a great job and lots of money, but she still feels there is something missing from her life.

While enjoying a holiday with friends on a yacht off the coast of Florida, Raimie, who has had more than one glass of champagne, dives off the boat and hits her head. When she wakes up, Raimie finds herself back in her old childhood home in the body of her 18-year-old self. This time around Raimie is determined to make better choices in life, but will the new choices she makes ultimately change her fate for better or worse? Mix *Back to the Future* with a bit of *Freaky Friday* and you have a good idea of the appeal of Harbison's latest humorous yet also heartfelt novel.

Higgins, Kristan. [*If You Only Knew*](#) (HQN, 14.95)

Wedding dress designer Jenny Tate wants to hate her ex-husband Owen and his new wife Ana-Sofia, but darn it, they are just too nice. However, their idea that the three of them can be best friends is asking a bit much, which is why Jenny decides to leave Manhattan and open her own bridal shop in Cambry-on-Hudson. One of the advantages to moving back to her old hometown is that Jenny's sister Rachel and her husband and three daughters live there too, which will give Jenny the chance to spend even more time with Rachel, who, as far as Jenny can tell, has the perfect life. However, soon after Jenny moves back to Cambry-on-Hudson, Rachel discovers her perfect husband Adam has been sexting a colleague at work. As Jenny works on building her business and explores the possibility of a new relationship with Leo, the sexy superintendent of her apartment building, Rachel must decide whether she wants to try to patch up the holes in her marriage or end things with Adam permanently. Higgins has built a reputation for her sweet and funny contemporary romances. With *If You Only Knew*, she is moving into women's fiction territory with a novel that perfectly blends love, laughter and a few tears into an emotionally compelling story the deftly celebrates the bonds between sisters.

Jenoff, Pam. [*The Last Summer at Chelsea Beach*](#) (MIRA, 14.95)

In 1941 Italy, Adelia Montefort's parents manage to get her safely out of the country to her uncle and aunt's home in Philadelphia. As she settles

into her new life, Adelia makes friends with the Connally clan, especially the oldest son Charlie, who lives next door. However, just as they are about to announce their engagement, the war once again intrudes on their lives. Jenoff's latest sweeping novel has a bit of the feel of Herman Wouk's classic *Winds of War* to it.

Kappes, Tonya. [*A Ghostly Demise*](#) (Witness Impulse, 7.99)

The polite people in Sleepy Hollow say that Emma Lee Raines is suffering from "Funeral Trauma." The less polite people say Emma has lost her marbles. But Emma, the co-owner of Eternal Slumber Funeral Home isn't crazy; she just sees dead people. As a "betweenner," Emma helps those who have been murdered receive the closure they need to move into the light by finding out who killed them. In *A Ghostly Demise*, the third in series, Emma Lee Raines is surprised to discover her best friend Mary Anna Hardy's father Cephus at the local deli since no one in town had seen him since he disappeared five years ago. What is even more surprising is that Cephus is dead and wants Emma Lee's help finding his killer. If you enjoy humorous amateur sleuth mysteries with a smidgeon of romance and lots of wacky characters, checkout this series, which will definitely appeal to readers of Caroline Haines' "Bones" series and Victoria Laurie's M.J. Holliday books.

Karon, Jan. [*Come Rain Or Come Shine*](#) (Putnam, 27.95)

In the 11th installment of Karon's popular "Mittford" series, the long-awaited wedding of Father Tim's adopted son Dooley Russell Kavanaugh and Lacey Harper Harper is about to take place. Since Dooley has just graduated from veterinary school and is opening his own animal clinic, money is a bit tight, which is why he and Lacey have decided to keep their wedding simple. Should be a piece of cake, right? Karon's latest gentle, heart-warming novel emphasizes the importance of family, friends, and faith and is a book that will restore your faith in humanity.

Lancaster, Jen. [*Best of Enemies*](#) (NAL, 25.95)

In college, Jacqueline "Jack" Jordan and Kitty

Carricoe thought they were going to be BFFs until Jack accidentally hooked up with Kitty's boyfriend. Now the two of them have nothing in common except for their bone-deep hatred of each other and their mutual friendship with Sarabeth Chandler. However, when Sarabeth's fabulously wealthy husband Trip dies in a suspicious plane accident, Jack and Kitty try to put aside their past differences in order to help Sarabeth by finding out who really wanted Trip dead. Lancaster has written a number of other fabulously funny nonfiction books including *Bitter Is the New Black*, and she brings the same addictively acerbic sense of wit to her laugh-out-loud novels.

Macomber, Debbie. [*Silver Linings*](#) (Ballantine, 26.00)

Rose Harbor Inn owner Jo Marie's ongoing flirtation with handyman Mark Taylor may be coming to an end when Mark suddenly announces he is moving away. Meanwhile two guests Kellie Crenshaw and Katie Gilroy check in to attend their high school reunion with Kellie determined to confront the old boyfriend who broke her heart while Katie hopes to reconnect with the high school dreamboat. You really can't beat Macomber when it comes to crafting sweet contemporary romances.

Neggers, Carla. [*Keeper's Reach*](#) (MIRA, 24.95)

In the fifth installment of the Sharpe and Donovan series, Emma Sharpe and Colin Donovan are preparing for the upcoming wedding in Maine, when Emma mysteriously disappears. Meanwhile, Colin's brother Mike wonders why some of his former military colleagues have decided to also gather for a meeting in Maine. Are they really planning on forming a private security consulting business or is there some other kind of business on the agenda?

Robb, J.D. [*Devoted in Death*](#) (Putnam, 27.95)

The first time Ella-Loo Parsens and Darryl Ray James kill someone, the couple experience such a sexual rush, they know they must repeat the experience. The two start off in the South and slowly begin heading North with the ultimate

goal of reaching New York City, where the murderous couple plan on taking their own deadly “bite” out of the Big Apple. What Ella-Loo and Darryl didn’t plan on was the fact that New York City is Lieutenant Eve Dallas’ territory, and Eve isn’t going to rest until she finds a way to make Ella-Loo and Darryl pay for their crimes. Robb, pseudonym for best-selling romance writer Nora Roberts, began her Eve Dallas series twenty years ago and *Devoted in Death*, the 41st book in the series, has everything long-time fans have come to expect including a pulse-pounding plot and plenty of sizzling passion between Eve and her sexy Irish billionaire husband Roarke. However, readers with delicate constitutions may find the scenes in which Ella-Loo and Darryl torture and kill their victims to be way too graphically detailed thus greatly diminishing their enjoyment of the rest of the book.

Staub, Wendy Corsi. [Blood Red](#) (William Morrow, \$7.99)

The package contained thirteen burned cookies and a newspaper from fourteen years ago with the date November 13th. When it shows up in Rowan Mundy’s mailbox, it scares the living daylights out of her because it means someone else knows her secret, and as far as they are concerned, the past cannot be forgotten or forgiven. *Blood Red* is the first in a new trilogy by Staub set in the small Hudson River town of Mundy’s Landing, a place that has seen its own share of past murders. Staub does an excellent job developing the cozy, small town setting of the book, which provides a nice contrast to the growing sense of dread as the killer comes closer and closer to their ultimate target: Rowan. If you enjoy domestic suspense novels that aren’t too gory but provide plenty of chilling thrills and few nice plot twists, you will want to give this, as well as Staub’s earlier novels, a try.

You’ve Got Mail

Walters, Louise. [Mrs Sinclairs Suitcase](#) (Putnam, 26.95)

One of the things Roberta likes best about her job at the Old and New Bookshop is all the personal flotsam and jetsam she finds tucked inside old books. So when Roberta finds a letter to

Dorothea from her husband Jan Pietrykowski in one of her grandmother Dorothea’s old suitcases, she is thrilled to be given this little bit of her own family history. The strange thing, however, is that the letter from her grandfather Jan is dated one year after he supposedly died in battle during World War II. Through its dual storylines, Walter’s remarkable debut thoughtfully explores the topics of love, war, motherhood, sacrifice, and secrets. I also really enjoyed the snippets of information about different books Roberta finds that open each chapter.

Grey, Iona. [Letters to the Lost](#) (Thomas Dunne, 25.99)

While on the run from her abusive boyfriend, Jess Moran decides to temporarily hide out in what she thinks is a long-abandoned London house. When the postman drops a letter addressed to a Mrs. S. Thorne through the slot the next morning, Jess can’t resist opening it to find out more about the home’s owner. The letter is from an American Air Force pilot, who is trying to find Stella: the woman he fell in love with during World War II. Grey’s poignant and moving debut is another book that employs dual storylines with considerable skill resulting in a captivating book that fans of Kate Morton’s novels will want to add to their reading lists.

Once Upon a Time



Chance, Mia. [Cinderella Six Feet Under](#) (Berkley, 7.99)

American variety hall actress Ophelia Flax intends on putting her continental adventures behind her just as soon as she is able to reunite

her friend Prudence Bright with her long-lost mother Henrietta. However, when the two arrive at Henrietta's Parisian home, they discover the mansion is a mouse-infested ruin, and Henrietta has inexplicably vanished, leaving behind an evasive husband, two sinister stepsisters, and a bullet-riddled corpse in the pumpkin patch decked out in a ball gown and one glass slipper - a corpse that also happens to be a dead ringer for Prue. Chance started this fun series off with [*Snow White Red Handed*](#) in which Ophelia and Prue find themselves mixed up in murder when a dwarf corpse is found in a tiny cottage in the Black Forest. Both books are a beguiling mix of historical fiction, mystery, and just the right *soupcou* of romance wrapped up in a witty, whimsical writing style.

More Fairy Tale Fun

[*Brackston, P.J. Once Upon a Crime*](#) (Pegasus Crime, 24.95)

Gretel (yes, that Gretel) is now all grown up, living with her brother Hans in Gesternstadt and working as a private eye. Even though Gretel is Bavaria's most famous (and fashion forward) detective, cases (and money) are few and far between. Since beggars can't be choosers, Gretel finds herself agreeing to look into the mysterious disappearance of three of Frau Hapsburg's cats. But what starts out as a simple case of missing felines turns into something much more dangerous involving a manipulative princess, a greedy troll, a legendary giant, and murder. This clever spoof of Brothers Grimm fairy tales by Brackston, who writes historical fiction dipped in magic as Paula Brackston, is just plain funny. *Gretel and the Case of the Missing Frog Prints* came out earlier this year with *The Case of the Fickle Mermaid* coming next January.

[*Coyle, Cleo. Once Upon a Grind*](#) (Berkley, 7.99)

New York City coffeehouse manager Clare Cosi has given her coffee truck a "Jack and the Beanstalk" makeover and she is all set for the fairy tale festival in Central Park when the body of a model is discovered. The police think "Sleeping Beauty" simply overdosed on drugs, but Clare decides to pursue her own investigation despite

all the big, bad characters that are just waiting in the woods. The yummy recipes included are a wonderful bonus!

[*Jasper Fforde. Big Over Easy*](#) (Penguin, 16.00)

Inspector Jack Spratt, head of Reading's Nursery Crime Division, investigates when celebrity has-been Humpty Dumpty is found shattered to death beneath a wall in the shabby area of town. Fforde, who is known for his delightful "Thursday Next" books, launched a richly imaginative new series with *The Big Easy*, which cleverly spoofs some of the literary conventions of the hard-boiled school of mysteries.

[*Maguire, Gregory. After Alice Signed*](#) (William Morrow, 26.99)

On the 150th anniversary of the publication of the original *Alice in Wonderland*, Maguire picks up the tale of the girl who fell down the rabbit hole by sending Alice's best friend Ada Boyce after her. Is *After Alice* ingenious, wacky, and full of clever wordplay? Well, of course, since it is written by the author responsible for the multi-million copy best-seller *Wicked*. Maguire manages to capture some of the unique brilliance of the original classic novel while at the same time introducing his own distinctive voice into the story. Ultimately, *After Alice* is a dazzling – sometimes challenging – meditation on the power of the imagination. Signed copies while they last.

Blast from the Past

[*Du Maurier, Daphne. Jamaica Inn*](#) (William Morrow, 14.99)

The coachman tries to warn young Mary Yellan away from staying at Jamaica Inn, but Mary promised her dying mother she would go and help her Aunt Patience. Now Mary finds herself entangled in the villainous schemes being hatched within the inn's crumbling walls while at the same time falling for an enigmatic stranger. Over the last year or so, elements of the classic gothic novel have been all the literary rage. If you enjoy that spooky sense of atmosphere why not treat yourself and go back one of the first (and possibly best) gothic chillers.

[Weinman, Sarah, ed. *Women Crime Writers: Four Suspense Novels of the 1940s* & *Women Crime Writers: Four Suspense Novels of the 1950s*](#) (Library of America, 35.00 each)

Each of these elegantly produced volumes contains four landmark novels published during a decade by women authors, who have paved the way for today's crop of female crime writers. The 1940's set contains Vera Caspary's evocatively written *Laura*, the story of the murder of a career woman (and the basis of the terrific Academy award-winning film), Helen Eustis's *The Horizontal Man*, the Edgar award-winner about murder on a college campus, Dorothy B. Hughes' *In a Lonely Place*, a terrifyingly intimate portrait of a serial killer, and Elizabeth Sanxay Holding's *The Blank Wall*, in which a wife in wartime is forced to take extreme measures when her family is threatened. The 1950s set contains Charlotte Armstrong's *Mischief*, a dramatic tale in which a child is entrusted to a psychotic babysitter, Patricia Highsmith's *The Blunderer*, a subtle tale of two different men driven to murder, Margaret Millar's *Beast in View*, a study in madness, and Dolores Hitchens' *Fool's Gold*, a hard-edged tale of robbery and redemption. Some of these authors like Hitchens, Armstrong, and Eustis have been out of print for years so now is your chance to stock up!