

Midmonth BookNotes

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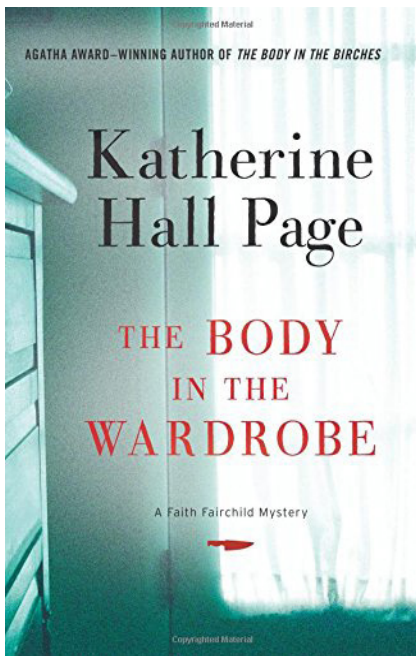
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Magical May



Page, Katherine Hall. [The Body in the Wardrobe Signed](#) (Harper \$27).

Sophie Maxwell knows she saw a body in the wardrobe. However, when the Savannah police arrive to check things out, there is no body for them to find. With her new husband Will in Atlanta on a job and no real friends yet in the city, Sophie calls Faith Fairchild back in Massachusetts for some sleuthing (and marital) advice. Page introduced Sophie Maxwell in last year's *The Body in the Birches* when she teamed up with Faith to find a killer on Sanpere Island in Maine, and now the two new friends once again find themselves mixed up murder, but this time its Southern style. The 23rd entry in Page's long-running series is another comfortable mix of domestic details and clever murder with lots of interest-

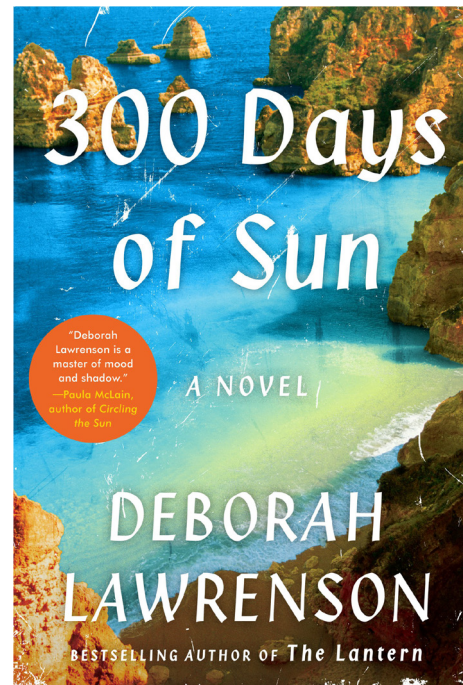
ing historic tidbits about Savannah as well as its food and culture deftly folded into the plot.

Katherine Hall Page: An Appreciation

This year's recipient of Malice Domestic's Lifetime Achievement Award is Katherine Hall Page. So with the publication of her latest Faith Fairchild mystery, *The Body in the Wardrobe*, it only seems apropos that we take a moment and acknowledge this author's significant contribution to the mystery genre. Born in New Jersey, Page attended Wellesley College and Tufts University and then went on to receive her doctorate in education from Harvard University. Before turning to writing, Page taught English and history as well as serving as a director of programs for adolescents with special emotional needs. Page's first book, *The Body in the Belfry*, was published in 1990, and went on to win the Agatha Award for best first mystery in 1991. In addition to her adult mysteries, Page is the author the "Christie and Company" series of YA mysteries, as well as having written another YA novel *Club Meds* and a cookbook *Have Faith in Your Kitchen*. Page is currently the only author to date to have won the Malice Domestic trifecta of best first mystery, best mystery novel, and best short story.

Page writes exactly the kind the mysteries that she herself likes to read, or, in her own words "suspenseful with a good puzzle, an interesting sleuth, a strong sense of place, humor, and

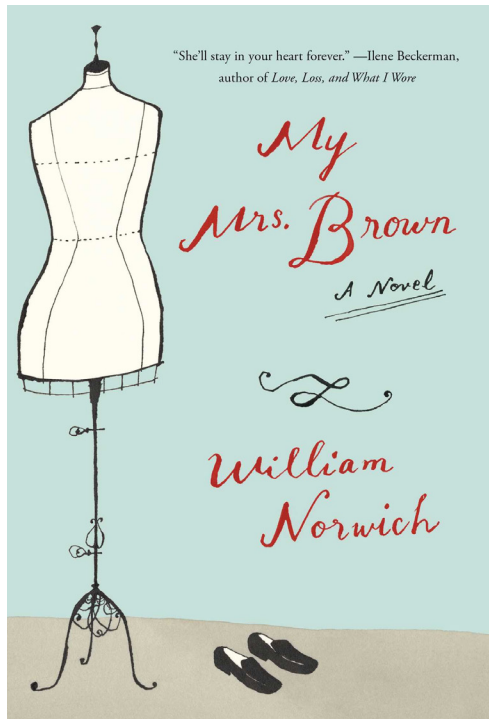
food.” When readers are first introduced to Faith in *The Body in the Belfry*, she has just moved to the small town of Aleford, MA with her new husband clergyman Tom and their baby Ben. While out walking one day, Faith stumbles across the body of the youth leader from Tom’s church in the belfry. Uncertain as to if the killer might still be nearby; Faith rings the bell in the belfry to summon help and soon finds herself involved in finding the murderer. With her first book, Page not only perfectly captures the deceptively serene sense of what life is like in a small New England town, she neatly infuses her writing with a deliciously clever sense of humor (a perfect example of this being the spirited debate among Aleford residents as to whether Faith should have rung the bell in the belfry to summon help). Over the years, Page has managed to keep her Faith Fairchild series fresh by not only shifting the settings of the books from Aleford other locales such as France (*The Body in the Vestibule*), Norway (*The Body in the Fjord*), and Italy (*The Body in the Piazza*), but she also has given other characters the chance to take center stage such as in *The Body in the Basement*, which is mainly told from the viewpoint of Faith’s best friend and neighbor Pix Miller. Readers who enjoy traditional mysteries will not want to miss a single one of Page’s wonderful books, all of which are gracefully served up with puzzling plots, engaging characters, a generous helping of delicious dishes, and just the right pinch of dry wit.



Lawrenson, Deborah. [300 Days of Sun](#) (Harper \$15.99)

Leaving behind a less than stellar, overly clingy boyfriend and a journalism career that has fizzled out way too fast, Joanna Millard arrives in Faro, Portugal hoping to sort out her life. While taking a class in Portuguese, Joanna meets Nathan Emberlin, but Joanna soon discovers there is more to Nathan than his party-boy façade suggests. Because he believes he might be connected to the disappearance of a child in Faro two decades earlier, Nathan wants Joanna’s helping investigating the incident. Joanna’s initial digging into the matter leads her to English expat Ian Rylands, who suggests she read *The Alliance*, a novel written by an American woman recounting her adventures in Portugal during World War II, to find the answers she seeks. The more Joanna learns about the book, the more she begins to suspect that there is a connection between the past the present that must be untangled in order to discover the truth. Lawrenson’s first novel was the smash success *The Lantern*, a fun take on Du Maurier’s *Rebecca* transposed to present day Provence. With *300 Days of Sun* (the title refers to the popularity of Portugal with tourists since it is almost always sunny), she once again delivers a strongly evoked sense of place while deftly mingling past and present mysteries with a master’s touch. The book is told in flashbacks between the present day as Joanna searches for answers to Nathan’s

questions and the 1940s as American Esta Hartford recounts her adventures while writing *The Alliance*. During World War II, Lisbon was a fascinating and frightening place since Portugal, as a neutral country, was a magnet for people fleeing the Germans and hoping to escape Europe which makes the sections of the book featuring Esta particularly thrilling. Mix a bit of Helen MacInnes, a smidge of Mary Stewart, and a dash of Alan Furst and you will have some idea of the appeal of this marvelously entertaining book.



Norwich, William. [*My Mrs. Brown*](#) (Simon & Schuster \$24).

It was the most beautiful dress Emilia Brown had ever seen. While helping inventory the estate of the recently deceased Mrs. Groton, the town of Ashville's much beloved grand dame, Emilia discovers the perfect little black dress hanging in one of Mrs. Groton's closets. Emilia has spent all of her life living within her modest means, but she just knows if she had a dress like this one, it would mean the world to her. How Emilia Brown goes about achieving her dream is the subject of Norwich's heart-warming debut novel. The real brilliance of this book is how it celebrates the worth all of those women of a certain age, who have quietly gone about their way doing their jobs and fulfilling their societal duties, and how truly important what they do can be to other people. And in a time when it seems

that unreliable, unlikeable protagonists are all the literary rage, I can't tell you how refreshing to read about a character who is genuinely kind and who achieves her heart's desire without having to stomp all over someone else's dreams in order to do so. With *My Mrs. Brown*, Norwich also pays homage to an earlier book by Paul Gallico called *Mrs. Arris Goes to Paris* about a London charwoman who wins the lottery and buys a Dior gown. Like Gallico's book, *My Mrs. Brown* also explores the transformative powers of fashion, and how sometimes a dress can be something more than just a garment to wear. Upon hearing about Mrs. Brown's plans, one of her neighbors thinks to herself "even if it was just a dress and jacket, it was a beginning. How people endure the complexities of their lives with faith and cheer, finding their own measure of hope, is one of the constant miracles, and often surprises, of life." This quote perfectly sums up the charm of this modest and unassuming novel, which is an old-fashioned joy in every sense of these words.

Andrews, Mary K. [*Beach Town*](#) (\$15.99)

Movie location scout Greer Hennessy is looking for the perfect sleepy, little beach town to blow up, and she thinks Cypress Key would be perfect. The only problem is the mayor, born again environmentalist Eb Thibadeaux, isn't about to let anyone mess with his town, even someone as irresistibly sexy as Greer.

Andrews, Mary K. [*Weekenders*](#) (St Martins \$27.99)

Riley Griggs summer vacation is not off to a great start. While waiting for her husband to arrive on the ferry to Belle Isle to join her for the weekend, Riley is served with foreclosure papers for their island home. So now not only is Riley about to lose her home, she also seems to be missing a husband as well. With her husband AOL, Riley turns to her island friends for help only to discover that everyone on Belle Isle seems to have a secret or two of their own as well. Andrews has a light and breezy writing style that is tailor made for summertime or beach reading, and her latest women's fiction title is no exception. Andrews' zesty sense of humor is also

a major component in the wonderfully amusing “Callahan Garrity” mysteries she wrote as Kathy Hogan Trocheck.

Balogh, Mary. [Only Beloved](#) (NAL \$7.99)

After a family scandal leaves her caring for her younger sister, music teacher Dora Debbins has given up all of hopes of marriage, but when she is unexpectedly reunited with the recently widowed George Crabbe, the Duke of Stanbrook, Dora begins to wonder if she might now have a second chance at love and happiness. Balogh concludes her exquisitely romantic Regency-set “Survivor’s Club” series with this emotionally intense tale of two old lovers reunited at last.

Bradford, Laura. [Eclair and Present Danger](#) (Berkley \$7.99)

Bakery owner Winnie Johnston hoped that the bequest left to her by her wealthy neighbor Gertrude Redenbacher would help save her business, but instead of a hefty gift of cash, Winnie just inherits Gertrude’s cranky tabby, Lovey, and a vintage ambulance. While using the ambulance to deliver a peach pie to elderly widow Bart Wagner, Winnie stumbles across Bart’s body lying on his kitchen floor leaving Winnie no choice but to temporarily trade her baker’s toque for a sleuthing cap in order to bring Bart’s killer to justice. Bradford, who is also the author of the “Amish Mystery” series and the “Southern Sewing Circle” series as Elizabeth Lynn Casey, will be at the Poisoned Pen on Saturday June 11th at 2 PM with author Paige Shelton and Kate Carlisle to launch her new “Dessert Emergency” series, so mark your calendar for a fun afternoon filled with a lively discussion about books, cozy mysteries, and why everything is better with dessert!

Bradley, Celeste. [I Thee Wed](#) (NAL \$7.99).

Orion Worthington has mapped out a very logical future for himself. After securing a position as acclaimed scientist Sir Geoffrey Blayne’s new lab assistant, Orion plans on marrying the daughter of his mentor since the calm, cool, and collected lady would make the perfect spouse for an aspiring scientist. Instead, Orion finds himself distracted by Sir Geoffrey’s unruly niece, Francesca Penrose,

whose brilliant mind and independent spirit capture his heart. Any reader who loves sexy and funny Regency historicals and hasn’t discovered Bradley’s “Wicked Worthington” books yet is in for a treat.

Brown, Helen. [Tumbledown Manor](#) (Kensington \$15)

After a less than stellar birthday party – the highlight of which involves her husband announcing he was leaving her for another woman – author Lisa Trumperton decides a few changes in her own life are in order. With nothing left to keep her in New York City, Lisa heads home to Australia, where she discovers Trumperton Manor – the house that once belonged to her great-grandfather – is on the market. While it is true that the place is in desperate need of renovation, Lisa isn’t afraid of the challenge, and as the house gradually is brought back to life, Lisa discovers Tumbledown Manor isn’t the only thing experiencing a transformation. British author Brown hit the *NYT* best-seller list with two nonfiction books about cats and daughters and her fiction debut also explores the bonds between a mother and her children (as well as having a cat in the mix). While the novel’s protagonist can be a bit overly prickly at times, the colorful Australian setting is nicely integrated into the plot and the resolution to the story will definitely resonate with older readers, who will appreciate the idea that it is never too late in life to make your dreams come true.

Cleave, Chris. [Everyone Brave is Forgiven Signed](#) (SimonSchuster \$26).

Defying her family’s expectations for her, London socialite Mary North volunteers to stay behind in the city while others are being evacuated during the Blitz and teach at a school for students who are too disabled, disturbed, or different to find a home in the countryside. As the bombs fall on London, Mary finds herself romantically bonding with her boss Tom Shaw. However, Mary’s feelings for Tom are tested by her growing desire for his best friend Alistair Heath. The author loosely based his latest beautifully written novel on his grandparents experiences during World War II, and the result is a heartbreaking tale about hope and sacrifice very

much in the literary vein of Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* or Kristin Hannah's *The Nightingale*.

Cox, Michelle. [*A Girl Like You*](#) (She Writes Press \$16.95)

Even though President Roosevelt promises that things will get better, Henrietta Von Harmon knows that times are tough for everyone, which is why she finally gives in and accepts her friend Polly's offer to get her a job as a taxi dancer at the local dance hall. However, when Mama Leone, the floor matron, is murdered, Henrietta is worried that she will lose the only means she has of supporting her mother and siblings. So when Clive Howard, the Chicago police detective in charge of investigating Mama Leone's death, offers her a new position working undercover for him, Henrietta doesn't see that she really has any choice but to say yes. The first in a new series, *A Girl Like You* offers readers a realistic look at the less than glamorous side of life during the Great Depression as families struggled to put food on the table and any job – even one working in a burlesque theater – was worth its weight in gold. Add in a bit of sexy flirtation between protagonists, and you have a new pair of sleuths that just might appeal to fans of Rhys Bowen's "Molly Murphy" series.

Disclafani, Anton. [*The After Party*](#) (Riverhead \$26.95)

In 1950s Houston, tall, blonde, and beautiful Joan Fortier, with her best friend Cece Buchanan at her side, rules over the glamorous world of Texas society. But Joan wants more out of life than just a wealthy husband and being able to attend lots of swanky soirees, and soon her willingness to break the rules of society and live life on the edge have consequences for both her and Cece. The *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Yonahlossee Riding Camp for Girls* delivers another mesmerizing, book club worthy take on the complex friendship between two women.

Donati, Sara. [*The Gilded Hour*](#) (\$17)

The year is 1883, and although young surgeon Anna Savard and her cousin, Sophie, have become successful physicians, they never recovered from the losses they suffered as children. So when Anna

encounters a child who's lost nearly everything, she must decide whether she's willing to let go of the past and let love into her life. Meanwhile, Sophie's memories of being left alone in the world propel the young obstetrician to help a desperate mother – and catapult her into the orbit of a very dangerous man.

Foye, Meghann. [*Meternity*](#) (Mira \$15.99)

After working at *Paddy Cakes*, a New York parenting magazine, for nearly a decade, Liz Buckley has come to the realization that the only acceptable excuse for not being overworked and underpaid is if you have a baby. In the hopes advancing her career as an editor, Liz has sacrificed hundreds of her nights and weekends picking up the office slack for her coworkers with kids. But it is never enough. So one morning at work her boss mistakes Liz's nausea for morning sickness, Liz decides to go with it and begins planning her "meternity" leave. After all, it is just a little white lie, and Liz can use the time to really figure out what she wants to do with her life. At least that is Liz's plan in the beginning... If you miss watching *Sex in the City*, this Chick Lit debut, which is getting a major push by the publisher, is the next best thing. I especially enjoyed the author's deliciously acerbic sense of humor.

Gray, Shelley Shepard. [*A Daughter's Dream*](#) (Harper \$12.99)

In the second of her "Charmed Amish" series, Gray pairs up Rebecca Kinsinger, whose dream has always been to become a schoolteacher, with new resident Jacob Yoder, whose niece Lilly needs some help adjusting to her new school. Gray bases the setting of her new Amish series on the real-life town of Charmed, Ohio, and her faith-based novels are perfect for anyone who enjoys a sweet romance with a nicely detailed small-town setting.

Green, Jane. [*Summer Secrets*](#) (\$15.99)

After London journalist Cat Coombs discovers her mother had an affair and that her real father is an American, Cat plans a trip to Nantucket to meet her new family. But once there, Cat's over-the-top drinking leads her to betray her new

half-sister. Now after hitting rock bottom, Cat finally achieves sobriety, and she is determined to make amends to her new family in America. But is it too late? Green's latest delivers plenty of realistically flawed characters while at the same time giving readers hope that people can change their lives for the better.

Grey, Iona. [Letters to the Lost](#) (\$15.99)

After escaping from her abusive boyfriend, Jessica Moran finds temporary shelter in a vacant house in one of London's older neighborhoods. While hiding out there, Jess stumbles across a letter addressed to Mrs. S Thorne. After opening the letter (well, she has already broken into the house so what is opening one letter in the grand scheme of things) Jess discovers it is from an American named Dan, who was a B-17 Bomber pilot during World War II, and who is now seeking the Englishwoman with whom he fell in love during the war. The plot in Grey's beautifully written debut novel switches back and forth between the present day as Jess tries to reunite the old lovers while resolving her own romantic problems and World War II when a vicar's wife named Stella meets a brash American pilot and falls in love with him. When it came out in hardcover last year, *Letters to the Lost* won the British Romantic Novelists Association's Book of the Year award.

Gutcheon, Beth. [Death at Breakfast](#) (Harper \$25.99)

Recently retired Maggie Detweiler and her old friend socialite Hope Babbin decide to test the waters as travel companions by taking a weekend trip to attend a cooking class held at the Oquossoc Mountain Inn in the small Maine town of Bergen. However the moment wealthy Alexander Antippas and his Hollywood socialite wife and her sister show up at the registration desk, any hope Maggie and Hope have of enjoying a peaceful weekend in the country is shattered. Within less than a day, the rude and demanding tycoon manages to not only tick off most of the staff but several of the inn's guests as well. So when Alexander winds up dead as the result of a fire caused by his smoking in bed, many at the inn are relieved until the official verdict of mur-

der is released. There is nothing really flashy or trendy about Gutcheon's latest book, which is the first in a new series featuring amateur sleuths Maggie and Hope. Instead, it is simply a very well-executed traditional mystery written with a dash of tart humor and some nicely nuanced characters that reminded me of Amanda Cross's old "Kate Fansler" books or even Virginia Rich's "Eugenia Potter" mysteries (albeit with less recipes and cooking but the same cozy small town New England setting).

Howard, Linda. [Troublemaker](#) (Harper \$26.99)

After someone tries to ambush Morgan Yancy outside his apartment building, Morgan's boss Alex MacNamara is concerned that whoever took the shots at Morgan that missed killing him might return to finish the job. Because Alex isn't sure who else on the Go-Team he can trust, he decides to temporarily stash the slowly recovering Morgan in the last place anyone would think of looking: his ex-stepsister Isabeau "Bo" Maran's home in the tiny West Virginia town of Hamrickville. While Bo isn't thrilled with the idea of having a temporary new "roommate," she can use the money Alex is giving her to keep Morgan with her. Howard's latest high-adrenaline romantic suspense novel is chock full of dangerous twists and smoking hot sexual chemistry.

Hoyt, Elizabeth. [Duke of Sin](#) (Grand Central \$7.99)

The only reason Bridget Crumb took the job of housekeeper to Valentine Napier, the Duke of Montgomery, is to find the letters he is using to blackmail her mother. As housekeeper, Bridget will have access to every part of Valentine's London townhouse, so locating the letters should prove to be a snap. However, when Valentine catches her riffling through the drawers in his bedroom one morning, Bridget thinks she might not have adequately planned for every contingency. The latest in Hoyt's Georgian-set "Maiden Lane" historical romance series is another superbly entertaining mix of nuanced characters, a vividly detailed historical setting, and plenty of potent passion.

Karon, Jan. [Come Rain or Come Shine](#) (\$16)

Dooley Kavanagh, Father Tim Kavanaugh's adopted son, is finally graduating from Veterinary School and he is ready to get married to his longtime sweetheart Lace Harper. However, the couple's plans for a simple, affordable wedding in the barn on the farm they have just purchased don't turn out as exactly as they first imagined when the weather, a stubborn bull, and some unexpected guests have to be factored into the event.

Logan, Kylie. [Irish Stewed](#) (Berkley \$7.99).

After her career as a personal chef to a movie star goes up in smoke, Laurel Inwood goes back home to Hubbard, Ohio, to help her aunt Sophie with the family restaurant: Terminal at the Tracks. Laurel is determined to do her best to bring the down-at-the-dumps diner back up to speed by introducing the idea of different ethnic foods as specials on the menu. But finding the body of investigative reporter Jack Lancer in at one of the tables is doing nothing to help business! This is the first in a fun new cozy mystery series by Logan, who is also the author of the "Literary Ladies" and the "Chili Cook-off" mysteries.

MacKenzie, Sally. [How to Manage a Marquess](#) (Kensington \$7.99).

With her father about to remarry, Anne Davenport knows she needs to find a new place to live as soon as possible. As far as Anne is concerned, the town's Spinster House, a cottage owned by the Duke of Hart, would be the perfect new home for her. Unfortunately, Anne faces some tough competition for Spinster House from several other women including her good friend Cat. But when Cat takes a sudden romantic interest in Marcus, the new Duke of Hart, Anne thinks she might have found a way to get rid of at least one of her competitors by encouraging romance to blossom between Cat and Marcus. The only obstacle in Anne's plan comes in the person of Nathaniel, the Marquess of Haywood, who promised his mother that he would always look out for his cousin Marcus by keeping him away from any marriage-minded females. The latest

in MacKenzie's "Spinster House" series another mirthful treat brimming over with madcap adventures, humorous escapades, and an abundance of sexy romance.

Scottoline, Lisa. [Most Wanted Signed](#) (St Martins \$29).

Nature or nurture? Christine Nilsson, the heroine in Scottoline's latest high-stakes standalone suspense novel, is hoping the answer as to whether a killer is born (nature) or made (nurture) is nurture once she discovers that the anonymous sperm donor #3319, who is responsible for her finally conceiving, may be Zachary Jeffcoat, a twenty-something medical supply salesman, who has just been arrested as the notorious "Nurse Murderer." Despite the wealth of medical data that maintain serial killers are made not born, Christine is determined to discover if she is carrying the child of a serial killer even if it means putting her own life in danger in order to do so. Don't let the book's cute cover fool you. Scottoline throws plenty of suspenseful twists into the plot of *Most Wanted*, which also sympathetically explores what can happen to a marriage when a husband and wife desperately want a child but can't conceive.

Patrick, Phaedra. [The Curious Charms of Arthur Pepper](#) (Mira \$24.99)

Finding a mysterious gold charm bracelet among his late wife Miriam's possessions, sixty-nine-year-old Arthur Pepper breaks from his routine life in York for the first time since her death and embarks on a quest to learn exactly who his wife was as a person before she married him. Arthur's journey to understand Miriam's past will take him to some unusual places and have him do some unexpected things, but the most surprising thing of all is that Arthur will end up learning just as much about himself as he does Miriam by the time his quest is done. Patrick's debut novel is a wonderfully sweet (yet never saccharine) story about the importance of taking chances and embracing the unknown in life.

Quick, Amanda. [Garden of Lies](#) (\$7.99)

Ursula Kern, the proprietor of a secretarial agency for wealthy individuals, simply can't believe that Anne Clifton, her best secretary, would commit suicide. So Ursula hires archaeologist and adventurer Slater Roxton to look into her death. But Ursula insists on adding one proviso to their contract: she is going to help Slater with his investigation.

Sykes, Lucy. [Knockoff](#) (Anchor \$15.95)

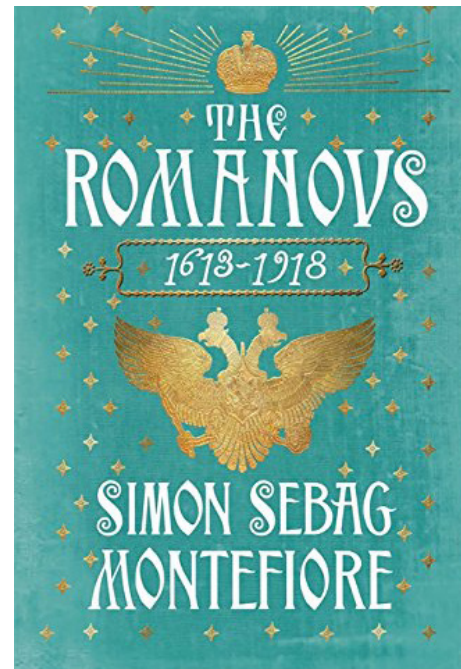
After being away on medical leave for six months, Imogene Tate, the editor-in-chief of *Glossy* magazine returns to work only to find everything is changed. The print magazine has gone the way of a new web-based, app-driven model, and Imogene's former assistant Eve Morton is now editor in charge of digital content at the new Glossy.com. All the old staff has been replaced by a cadre of perky twenty-somethings led by Eve, who tweet, blog, and text their way through the office. While she may know fashion inside and out and have all the top designers on speed-dial, Imogene knows her days at *Glossy* are numbered unless she can figure out a way to beat Eve at her own game. *The Knockoff* is an absolute hoot. Sykes and Piazza are definitely channeling the spirit of a certain classic woman's film starring Bette Davis (right down to the killer closing sentence in the novel) with a generous dollop of *The Devil Wears Prada* thrown in for good measure. All of which make *The Knockoff* a most fun and fashionable beach read.

Nonfiction

Geroux, William. [The Mathews Men](#) (Viking \$28)

Even before the U.S. declared war on Germany in World War II, Hitler's U-Boats were targeting American ships crossing the Atlantic with vitally needed supplies for Great Britain and the Allies. Not only did the sailors on board these ships risk torpedo attacks from the Germans, they also had to deal with natural killers in the forms of hungry sharks and storms that could sink a ship and leave its crew fighting to survive on lifeboats.

Geroux frames his story around the Hodges family of Mathews County, who sent seven sons to war in the Merchant Marines, and his thrilling book is a wonderful acknowledgement of the often overlooked contributions those civilians in the Merchant Marine made to the war effort. What I found especially fascinating to learn is that the German U-Boat attacks were not limited to just the Atlantic theater but also took place in the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean, where the Americans were desperately trying to shuttle food and supplies to the Soviets. Anyone who loves books about World War II or U.S. Naval history will love this gripping account of the sacrifices made by a group of courageous men and their families.



Montefiore, Simon. [The Romanovs: 1613-1918](#) (Knopf \$35)

After tackling Stalin in his award-winning series on that Russian ruler, Montefiore now takes on 300 years of the ruthless and autocratic Russian czars beginning with Michael I of Muscovy in 1613 to Michael II (who ruled for one day after his brother Alexander II's abdication in 1917) using new available material from the Soviet archives. There are a lot of details to take in, but fans of Russian history (as well as anyone who savored Robert Massie's old books about the Czars) will be thrilled with this detail-rich tome.

