

# Midmonth BookNotes

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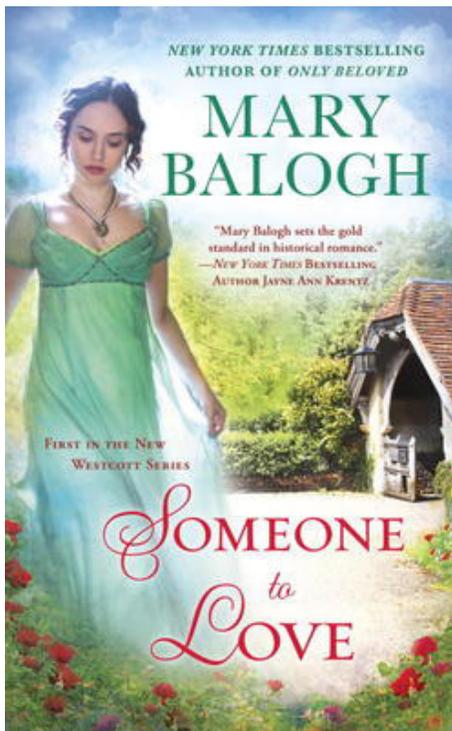
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## November's Book Bounty



*Balogh, Mary. [Someone to Love](#) (NAL, \$7.99)*

It takes something really unusual to shake Avery Archer, Duke of Netherby, out of his perpetual state of boredom. Anna Snow's recent arrival at the will reading of the late Earl of Riverdale turns out to be just such an event. Everyone expected that Anna Snow, the recently discovered illegitimate daughter of the Earl, would be given some nominal sum and then sent on her way. Instead, it turns out that Anna is really the Earl's legitimate heir and the vast majority of his wealth now belongs to her. Of course Anna's education as the new Lady Anastasia Westcott must begin immediately, but understandably none of her newly disinherited relatives is

terribly anxious to help. Already intrigued by Anna, Avery decides to lend a hand, because if he is correct, the whole thing might just prove to be very entertaining. Balogh writes some of the best Regency historical romances ever, and *Someone to Love*, the first in her new Westcott series, proves once again why she is the heir apparent to Georgette Heyer's literary crown.

*Chance, Maia. [Teetotaled](#) (Minotaur, \$24.99)*

So far business is next to nonexistent at the Discreet Retrieval Agency, and the rent is coming due fast. All of which means Lola Woodby and her Swedish cook Berta Lundgren can't really be picky about any job offers. So when New York society matron Sophronia Whiddle wants them to steal her daughter Grace's diary, Lola and Berta really don't have a choice. Since the soon-to-be-married Grace is currently at Willow Acres, a "health farm" run by Lola's ex brother-in-law, with her future mother-in-law Muffy, both Lola and Berta find themselves checking in as guests. However, just as Lola and Berta are about to get their mitts on Grace's diary, the bride-to-be takes a powder leaving behind the dead body of her mother-in-law. Chance introduced Lola and Berta in last year's *Come Hell or Highball*, and now the unlikely detecting duo are back for another bright and breezy attempt at untangling a murder. Chance writes with a deliciously dry sense of wit that seems all the more apropos given Lola's love of a good cocktail. If you enjoy Carola Dunn's Daisy Dalrymple series, I think you will find Chance's books to be equally entertaining.

*Crispell, Susan Bishop. [The Secret Ingredient of Wishes](#)* (St. Martin's \$25.99)

Rachel Monroe has a very unusual secret: she can make wishes come true. Unfortunately, sometimes granting someone's deepest wish can have some disastrous consequences, which is why when Rachel accidentally grants an outlandish wish for the first time in years, she decides it's time to leave her hometown—and her past—behind for good. Rachel isn't on the road long before she runs out of gas in a town that's not on her map: Nowhere, North Carolina—also known as the town of "Lost and Found." In Nowhere, Rachel is taken in by a spit-fire old woman, Catch, who possesses a strange gift of her own: she can bind secrets by baking them into pies. Rachel also meets Catch's neighbor, Ashe, a Southern gentleman with a complicated past, who makes her want to believe in happily-ever-after for the first time in her life.

*Crosby, Ellen. [Champagne Conspiracy](#)* (Minotaur \$25.99)

In the seventh sparkling installment in her Wine Country mystery series, Cleland presents Lucie Montgomery, owner of the Montgomery Estate Vineyard in Atoka, Virginia, with two different puzzles, both whose roots go back in history. While Lucie and her winemaker Quinn Santori are working out the kinks on producing their own champagne, Quinn's uncle, celebrity California winemaker Gino Tomassi, unexpectedly turns up on their doorstep one afternoon, demanding help in solving the mystery of what happened to Zara Tomassi, the first wife of his grandfather, who died in a San Francisco hotel in 1923 under suspicious circumstances. Gino needs their help before his blackmailer takes him for all he's worth—or exposes an explosive family secret. While Lucie searches for answers as to what may have happened to Zara, she also finds herself involved in another investigation by an old friend Faith Eastman, who believes Roxy Willoughby, her neighbor at the assisted living facility where Faith now lives, may have been murdered soon after changing her will. I loved the historical twist Crosby neatly integrates into her story as well as her flair for crafting easily relatable characters. Crosby will be joining author

Jane Cleland for a talk at the Poisoned Pen on Saturday December 10<sup>th</sup> at 2 PM.

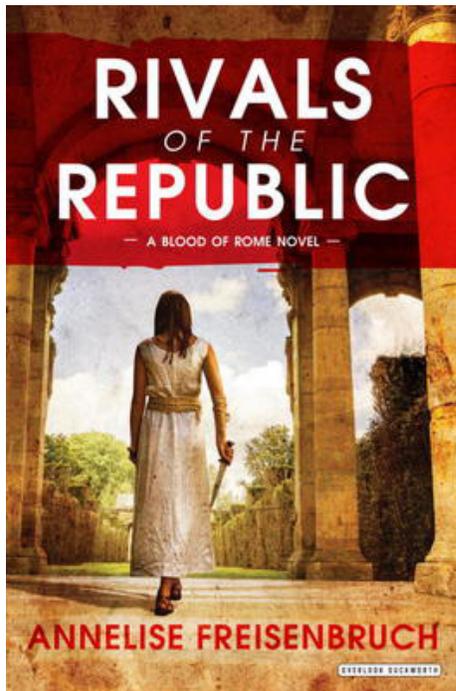
*Daniels, J. [Four Letter Word](#)* (Grand Central, \$14.99)

In an effort to avoid dealing with the shocking end of her marriage, Sydney Paige high-tails it Dogwood Beach, North Carolina to vent her anger onto the man who broke her best friend's heart. But when she unknowingly dials the wrong number, Syd's newly single world is turned upside down by a stranger who wants to keep her on the line. Brian Savage is living a life he's quickly come to hate—until Sydney and her innocently wild voice. But Brian has secrets, ones that could destroy everything between them. And when the woman on the phone becomes the lover in his bed, shielding her from the mistakes of his past becomes harder and harder.

*Flagg, Fannie. [The Whole Town's Talking](#)* (Random, \$27.99)

If you were to look up the definition of quirky in the dictionary, you would almost certainly find the novels of Fannie Flagg. From *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistlestop Café* to *Can't Wait to Get to Heaven*, Flagg revels in creating endearingly eccentric characters, and her latest sweetly funny, warm and wise novel is chock-a-block full of them. "Over the years, the mail-order bride business had been fraught with pitfalls and disappointments." Not this time. The big, ambitious Swede Lordor Nordstrom and the nearsighted little wife who answers his ad fall quickly, madly in love. Lordor goes on to start a family, to incorporate Elmwood Springs, Missouri, and become its mayor, and also to donate a panoramic parcel of land for its community cemetery. And then he dies. "Shortly after the funeral, the strangest thing happened. Lordor Nordstrom woke up." Turns out, after people die, they remain as spirits in the cemetery, at least for a while; at a certain point the souls disappear from the gossipy spirit *kaffeeklatsch* for parts to be revealed. As this tale winds through the decades and generations, two communities flourish, one of the living and one of the dead. Elmwood Springs, Missouri, is a small town like any other, but something strange is happening out at the cemetery. "Still Mead

ows,” as it’s called, is anything but still.



*Freisenbruch, Annelise. [Rivals of the Republic](#)* (Overlook, \$26.95)

Given the fact that her father Hortensius Hortalus is one of Rome’s most famous orators, it isn’t surprising that Hortensia is a skillful speaker herself. Unfortunately, Roman custom dictates that women can be seen but should not be heard in court. However, when Drusilla, the wife of one of her husband’s clients, approaches her hoping that Hortensia can do something to help her get her dowry back and custody of her children, the newly married Hortensia can’t refuse. Hortensia’s successful defense of Drusilla in court brings her to the attention of the Chief Vestal Virgin, who asks Hortensia to look into the death of one of the Vestal Virgins and the “disappearance” of an important document from the Vestal’s temple. Freisenbruch knows a thing or two about ancient Rome. Her first book was *Caesar’s Wives: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Roman Empire*, and she sets her debut novel in the year 70 BC right after Rome suffered through a bloody civil war. It is a period of great drama in politics as Pompey and Crassus battle for control as the Republic’s two consuls. The author expertly brings the time period to life while cleverly inserting real historical figures – including the newly rising star of the court circuit (i.e. Cicero) - among her vividly drawn fictional creations. And the mystery itself is nicely done as well. If

you love Steven Saylor’s novels or the historical fiction of Robert Harris, you will not want to miss this terrific historical mystery.

*Hannah, Sophie. [Closed Casket](#)* (Harper-Collins, \$26.99)

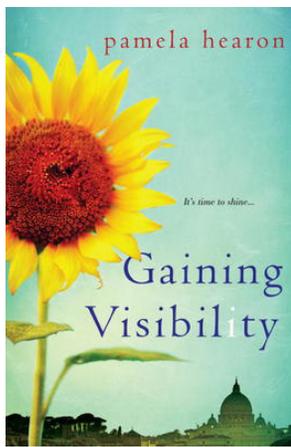
At first, Scotland Yard Inspector Edward Catchpole can’t figure out why both he and Hercule Poirot have been invited to a house party at Lady Athelinda Playford’s estate in Clonakilty, County Cork. However, everything becomes much clearer when the famous children’s writer announces at dinner the first night of the party that she intends on revising her will by disinheriting her two children and leaving her entire estate to her secretary Joseph Scotcher. Obviously, Lady Athelinda is concerned that someone in her family might object the news and take matters into their own hands. What puzzles both Catchpole and Poirot is that Scotcher is dying of Bright’s disease. Why would Lady Playford stir up such a maelstrom of ill will among her family by leaving her money to Scotcher if he will probably die long before his employer?

Die-hard fans of Agatha Christie’s legendary sleuth from Belgium can relax since it is evident that beginning with *The Monogram Murders* and now with *Closed Casket*, Hannah takes her responsibilities for carrying on the literary career of Hercule Poirot very seriously. Not only does Hannah come up with a fiendishly clever motive for murder in *Closed Casket* – and one that Christie herself would applaud for its simple brilliance – but Hannah also skillfully plants all the clues needed to solve the case into the plot, thus providing readers with the same armchair sleuthing fun they had with Christie’s mysteries. With its polished writing deftly infused with just the right dash of dry, Christie-esque wit and its engaging cast of characters, *Closed Casket* is a rare treat for devoted readers of the Queen of Crime as well as anyone, who enjoys an expertly written, Golden Age flavored mystery. Hannah will be at the Poisoned Pen on Monday December 5<sup>th</sup> at 7 PM to talk about her latest fabulous book!

*Harper, Karen. [Chasing Shadows](#)* (MIRA, \$7.99)

Claire Britten knows it is an opportunity to good to pass up. Despite the fact that they were on op

posing sides in a recent court case, attorney Nick Markwood wants to hire Claire to use her skills as a certified fraud examiner help him with a cold case involving the death of Francine Montgomery. Mark is positive that Francine's daughter Jasmine did not kill her mother, and he knows that if Claire interviews Jasmine and the other people in Francine's life, she will uncover the truth. However, once Claire arrives at Shadowlawn Hall, the Montgomery's plantation home in St. Augustine, she begins to wonder if she really can crack this case wide open given the fact that her own medical condition and her growing attraction to Mark is making Claire question exactly whom - if anyone - she can trust. In the start of what is billed as a new trilogy, Harper does a great job extracting plenty of spooky gothic atmosphere from her novel's setting as well as creating a heroine with realistic flaws.



*Hearon, Pamela. [Gaining Visibility](#)* (Kensington, \$15)

Interior decorator Julia Beckwith feels like she suddenly has become invisible. Her husband Frank decided to trade her in for a newer model of wife and moved to Hawaii. Her daughter Melissa is in Alaska for a long-term academic assignment. And her beloved mother-in-law and friend Hettie is stuck in a nursing home. But even though some people might think Julia is invisible, she isn't dead yet. To celebrate her successful recovery from a double mastectomy, Julia decides to travel to Italy and hike the Cinque Terre. Once Julia arrives in Italy, she seems unstoppable, until she's injured by a rock—one that happens to belong to thirty-something stone mason Vitale DeLuca. Reluctantly, Julia accepts Vitale's insistent offer of lodging while she re-

covers. But in his home, amid his exquisite sculptures, Julia sees beyond his charm and looks to something special: a talent she must bring to the world's attention. And once she does, she plans to step aside to leave him in the spotlight. But Vitale has seen something in Julia too, something she is no longer able to recognize in herself. And he is determined to find a way to show it to her. Hearon's latest novel is a beautifully affirming – and surprisingly sexy – tale of an older woman regaining a sense of purpose in life. With its vividly evoked Italian setting and irrepressible heroine don't be surprised if you are reminded a bit (in a good way) of the equally entertaining movie *Under the Tuscan Sun*.

*Howell, Dorothy. [Pocketbooks and Pistols](#)* (Kensington, \$25)

Nothing disrupts a new employee orientation like finding a dead body. At least, that is what Haley Randolph learns when she takes a group of new Holt's Department Store clerks on a tour of the loading dock and they find the body of former Holt employee Asha McLean. Of course, given Haley's history of finding other dead bodies, the local police are more than interested in trying to connect her with the crime. Combine this with the news that the resulting negative publicity might force the company to close the store, and Haley has two very good reasons for finding the real killer. Mix the snappy sense of humor characteristic of most Chick Lit romances with a fashion-obsessed amateur sleuth and you have an idea of the bright and breezy flavor of the Haley Randolph books. If you like your cozies served up with plenty of humor and a generous splash of romance, Howell is your author. (Though seriously, given the number of references the author makes to Starbucks, that company should be cutting her a check for free advertising).

*Kinsey, T. E. [A Quiet Life in the Country](#)* (Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95)

Lady Emily Hardcastle has just moved from London to the countryside with Florence Armstrong, her maid and confidante. The two women expect to enjoy a bucolic new lifestyle, but that expectation is quickly shattered when the two women stumble across a dead body while

out walking in the woods. While the police originally suspect suicide, Lady Hardcastle's unique talents tell her the man was murdered and since the local constabulary are quickly proceeding down the wrong path, Lady Hardcastle, with some assistance from Florence, decides to give them a "helping hand." I absolutely adored this new historical mystery. The endearing unique relationship between Emily and Florence is handled with a deft touch, the cozy British setting is perfection itself, and the author's writing is richly imbued with a deliciously dry sense of wit.

*Krentz, Jayne Ann. [When All the Girls Have Gone](#) (Berkley, \$27)*

As a former FBI profiler, private investigator Max Cutler was trained to notice patterns. Now with his latest job, Max is beginning to sense a pattern developing. Daniel Flint has hired Max to investigate the suspicious death of his cousin Louise. Max is just beginning to go through Louise's apartment when Charlotte Sawyer calls to see if she might drop by. Before she died, Louise mailed a package to Jocelyn Pruitt, Charlotte's stepsister. Since Jocelyn is away on a retreat, Charlotte has been taking care of her apartment, and when she finds the package, Charlotte wonders if it might shed some light on Louise's death. What Max and Charlotte discover after opening the package is that Louise's death is no coincidence and that Charlotte's stepsister Jocelyn may now be in grave danger. Krentz never disappoints readers when it comes to crafting sexy, suspenseful stories that are tempered with just the right dash of sharp humor.

*McKinlay, Jen. [Better Late Than Never](#) (Berkley, \$25)*

Briar Creek Library Director Lindsey Norris knew that an amnesty day – a day during which anyone could return any overdue library item without incurring a fine – would be a success, but she never expected that someone would return a book due twenty years ago. The book in question – a copy of J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* – proves to be even more interesting once Lindsey finds out that the last person to check the novel out was a high school English teacher named Candice Whitley. What is even worse is that Candice checked out the book on the very

same day she was later found murdered under the high school's football bleachers. Given her reputation for meddling in murder investigations, Lindsey knows she will wind up trying to discover if Candice's killer was the one to return the book. Because if that is the case, Lindsey is determined that this will be one murderer who won't escape paying the crime. All of the books in McKinlay's "Library Lover's" mysteries have been terrific treats for fans of cozy crimes, but *Better Late than Never*, lucky number seven in the series, is a real knockout. McKinlay deftly finesses the cleverly crafted plot of the story while at the same time skillfully developing the ongoing relationships between her charmingly quirky cast of characters. The end result is a marvelous mystery that neatly walks the line between humorous and heartfelt.

*McQuiston, Jennifer. [The Perks of Loving a Scoundrel](#) (Avon, \$7.99)*

No one loves books more than Miss Mary Channing. Perhaps that's why she's reached the ripe old age of six-and-twenty without ever being kissed. Her future may be as bland as milk toast, but Mary is content to simply dream about the heroes and adventures she reads about in her books. That way she won't end up with a villain instead. But sometimes only a scoundrel will do. When she unexpectedly finds herself in the arms of Geoffrey Westmore, London's most notorious scoundrel, it feels a bit like a plot from one of her favorite novels. Suddenly, Mary understands why even the smartest heroines can fall prey to a handsome face. And Westmore is more handsome than most. But far worse than the damage to her reputation, the moment's indiscretion uncovers an assassination plot that reaches to the highest levels of society and threatens the course of the entire country.

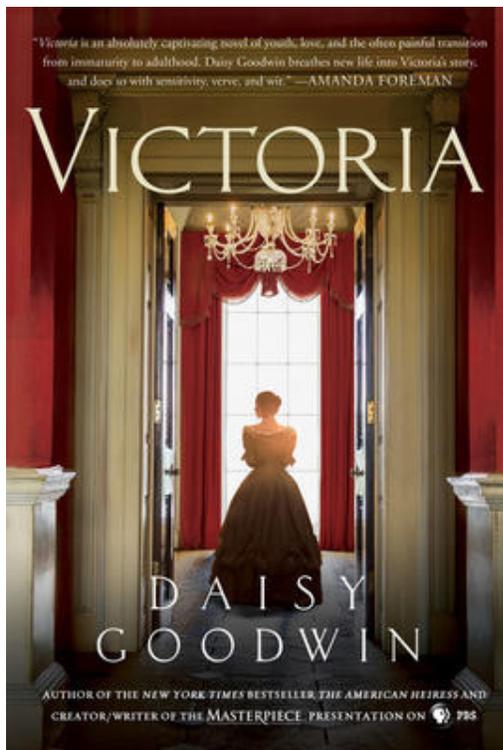
*Roads, Abbie. [Race the Darkness](#) (Sourcebooks Casablanca, \$7.99)*

Criminal investigator Xander Stone doesn't have to question you-he can hear your thoughts. Scarred by lightning, burdened with a power that gives him no peace, Xander struggles to maintain his sanity against the voice that haunts

him day and night—the voice of a woman begging him to save her. Isleen Walker has long since given up hope of escape from the nightmare of captivity and torture that is draining her life, her mind, and her soul. Except...there is a man in her feverish dreams. A strangely beautiful man, who beckons her to freedom. And when he comes, if he comes, it will take all their combined fury and faith to cover a madman bent on fulfilling a deadly prophecy.

## *We Are Amused*

*Baird, Julia.* [\*Victoria\*](#) (Random, \$35) Julia Baird is a journalist, broadcaster, and author based in Australia, who received her Ph.D. in history from the University of Sydney. Drawing upon new unpublished sources, Baird sees Victoria as an “adoring wife, overbearing mother, and a clever and forceful political calculator.” The author also delves into Victoria’s relationship with the “blunt, bearded Scotsman” John Brown. A well-researched, comprehensive look at the British monarch’s life and times.



*Goodwin, Daisy.* [\*Victoria\*](#) (St. Martin’s, \$26.99) Before she was the dour dumpling of a queen

perpetually dressed in black bombazine, Victoria was actually a young woman determined to make her own way in life and love. Goodwin’s superbly written new historical novel begins in 1837 with an eighteen-year old Victoria learning that her uncle has just died and she is now the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland. Victoria (one of her middle names she decided to use as Queen rather than her first name Alexandra) immediately seized the opportunity to get away from her helicopter mother and her mother’s perpetually critical advisor John Conroy and take control of her own life by meeting with her ministers alone. One of those ministers, Lord Melbourne, became Victoria’s private secretary. Perhaps he might have become more than that, except everyone argued she was destined to marry her cousin, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. But Victoria had met Albert as a child and found him stiff and critical: surely the last man she would want for a husband. Goodwin was inspired to write her latest novel after reading through the diaries of Queen Victoria, and Victoria will definitely appeal to historical fiction fans, who enjoy authors like Philippa Gregory and Elizabeth Freemantle (or those of us of a certain vintage, who remember Jean Plaidy’s books). Goodwin also wrote the screenplay for the upcoming PBS series about Victoria based on her novel (as well as the companion guide to the series due out in late January), so expect to see more of her take on Victoria in the future!

## *Holiday Romance, Mysteries and More*

*Blake, Toni.* [\*Christmas in Destiny\*](#) (Avon, \$7.99)

To honor his late father’s wishes, Shane Dalton, on his way to Miami to start a new life, stops off in Destiny, Ohio. However, Shane didn’t factor in a busted pickup truck and an unexpected blizzard into his travel plans. Despite her initial reluctance, Candice Sheridan is persuaded to let Shane spend the night at her home until the blizzard blows over and he can get his truck repaired. After all, it is just one night, right?

*Crusie, Jennifer et al. [It Must Be Christmas](#)* (St. Martin's, \$7.99)

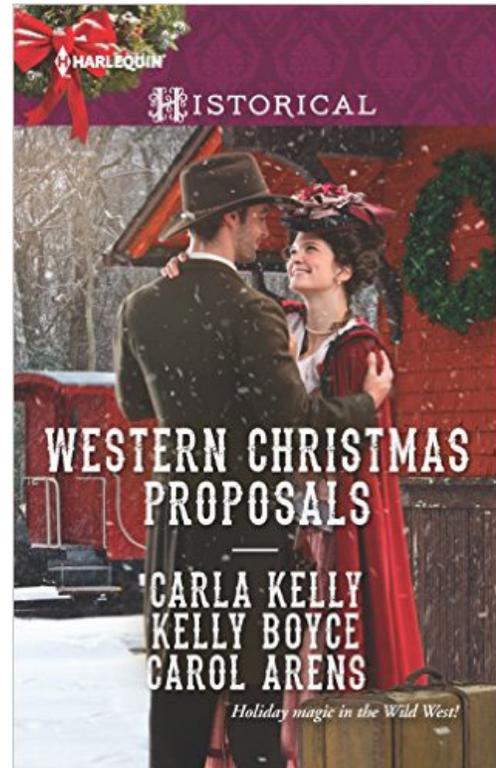
Three different contemporary-set romances can be found in this holiday anthology. "Hot Toy" by Crusie is a reprint of her incredibly funny tale about a determined shopper who grabs the last action figure toy off the shelf at a store only to become tangled up with sexy secret agent in the process. A wealthy rancher and the founder of a charity for at-risk kids engage in a steamy yuletide romance in Mandy Baxter's "Christmas with the Billionaire Rancher. In Donna Alward's "Christmas at Seashell Cottage," doctor Charlie Yang's plans for a quiet holiday are interrupted by an abandoned baby in a nativity manager and sexy ex-SEAL.

*Fluke, Joanne. [Christmas Caramel Murder](#)* (Kensington, \$20)

The holidays have arrived, and Hannah and her good pal Lisa have agreed to provide all the goodies for the town's annual production of *A Christmas Carol*. But before anyone can say "Bah, humbug!" a Santa-sized sackful of trouble ensues. Like the fact that Lisa's husband will be playing Mr. Claus to his ex-girlfriend Phyllis Bates' Mrs. Claus. Or that before the curtains even go up Phyllis is found dead in the snow — wearing a costume that the real Mrs. Claus would put on the naughty list. Soon after the suspects pile up faster than snowdrifts in a blizzard, while a merry murderer remains on the loose. So now in addition to baking up a storm for the holidays, Hannah must add "find the real killer" to her list of tasks to be check off. As usual, Fluke offers up a tempting array of holiday treats along with her usual warm and cozy mystery plot.

*Harbison, Beth. [A Shoe Addict's Christmas](#)* (St. Martin's, \$17.99)

Locked in Simon's Department Store on Christmas Eve, Noelle finds herself facing the "ghosts" of Christmases past, present, and future with a little help from a batty old lady who claims to be her guardian angel and a number of pairs of different designer shoes.



*Kelly, Carla et al. [Western Christmas Proposals](#)* (Harlequin, \$6.50)

This trio of holiday romances are all set in the old west. Carla Kelly's "Christmas Dance with the Rancher" is a stellar tale about Katie Peck, who after becoming stranded in Cheyenne, accepts a job as "chore girl" for Ned Avery, who needs someone to run his household and help with his ailing father. Kelly wrote some of the best traditional Regency romances in the 1990s before turning to historical romances (usually set in the American West), and she is truly one of the genre's most gifted writers. Not only does Kelly perfectly capture the day-to-day details of what life in the west was like in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, she writes with a spare eloquence that perfectly suits her story's setting. Sweet romantic, beautifully poignant, and unforgettable, "Christmas Dance with the Rancher" is an instant classic. This terrific collection also includes Kelly Boyce's "Christmas in Salvation Falls," which features Willa Stanford, whose plans on starting a new life in the small town of Salvation Falls takes an unexpected turn when her former sweetheart turns up unexpectedly at her door, and Cal Arens's "The Sheriff's Christmas Proposal," in which widower sheriff Roy Garner isn't sure he made the right choice proposing to Belle Key when he discovers the lady has a secret.

*Macomber, Debbie. [Twelve Days of Christmas](#)* (Ballantine, \$20)

Friendly and bubbly, Julia Padden likes nearly everyone, but her standoffish neighbor, Cain Maddox, presents a particular challenge. No matter how hard she's tried to be nice, Cain rudely rebuffs her at every turn, preferring to keep to himself. But when Julia catches Cain stealing her newspaper from the lobby of their apartment building, that's the last straw. She's going to break through Cain's Scrooge-like exterior the only way she knows how: by killing him with kindness. Macomber is known and loved for her sweet holiday romances, and her latest makes the perfect gift for anyone (you, your mother, your favorite aunt) who needs a little more Christmas warmth this season.

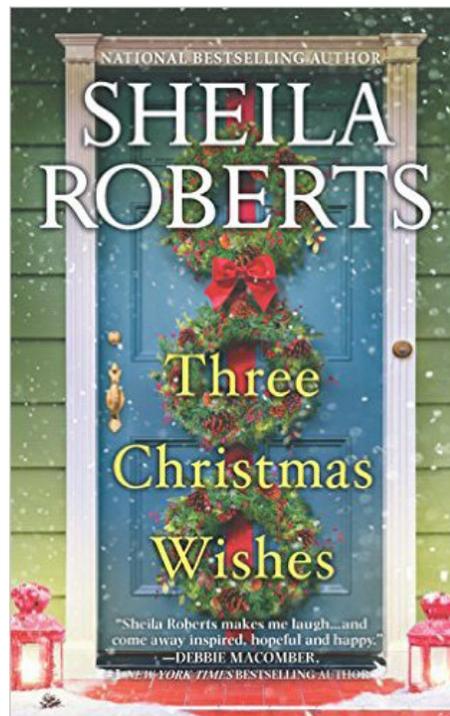
*Meier, Leslie et al. [Eggnog Murder](#)* (Kensington, \$25)

Eggnog proves to be quite deadly in this trio of holiday-themed mysteries. In "Eggnog Murder" by Leslie Meier all Lucy Stone wants to do is track down whoever is using a gift-wrapped bottle of eggnog as the basis for some deadly holiday drinks. In Lee Hollis's "Death by Eggnog," there has never really been any love lost between food columnist Hayley Powell and Bar Harbor's grumpy town librarian Agatha Farnsworth, but when Agatha suffers a fatal reaction to supposedly non-dairy eggnog, Hayley has no choice but to track down the culprit and serve up some well-deserved justice. Julia Snowden's tenant Imogen Geinkes is not having the best of holidays. First Imogen's "killer eggnog" gives her co-workers a bad case of food poisoning. Then body of Imogen's boyfriend shows up in Julia's moving truck. Can Julia find out who is trying to ruin Imogen's Christmas before she winds up spending the holiday behind bars?

*Morgan, Sarah. [Miracle on 5th Avenue](#)* (HQN, \$7.99)

Crime writer Lucas Blade hates Christmas. The best he ever hopes for is to get through the holidays with as little human contact as possible. This year is especially difficult since Lucas is way behind on writing his new thriller. So Lucas tells his friends and family he will be in Vermont while he secretly hides out in his Manhattan

apartment hoping he can get through his writer's block and deliver the manuscript he promised to his publishers. Eva Jordan loves Christmas. So Eva is more than happy to accept a new job from her friend Mitzy to decorate her grandson Lucas Blade's apartment while he is in Vermont. However, when Eva turns up at the apartment during an old-fashioned New York City blizzard, she is more than a bit startled to discover Lucas lurking there in the dark. What's even worse is that by the look on Lucas's scowling face, he doesn't exactly look thrilled to discover he will have some company during the holidays! Morgan's latest sweet and sexy contemporary is lots of fun.



*Roberts, Sheila. [Three Christmas Wishes](#)* (MIRA, \$7.99)

All Riley Erickson wants for Christmas is a decent, honest man to love. Or, in other words, someone completely different from her cheating ex-fiancé, who dumped Riley for her bridesmaid right before the wedding. All Jo Wilton wants for Christmas is for the U.S. Navy to give Jo her husband back. Now that they are expecting their first child, Jo would really like to have him around to help out and not be on a submarine somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. All Noel Bijou wants is to be able to buy the house she is currently renting before the house-flipping real estate shark eyeing the property scoops it out from under her. However, when the three friends

decide to visit the mall before the holidays, they never expect that telling their wishes to Santa might result in their dreams coming true. Roberts whips up a sweet standalone romantic treat for her fans that is brimming over with holiday warmth and heartfelt charm.

*Wilde, Lori. [A Wedding for Christmas](#) (Avon, \$7.99)*

When bodyguard Ryder Southerland sees his best friend's sister Katie at an L.A. Christmas party, he mistakes the slinky blonde for a celebrity stalker and tackles her. Then they tackle each other . . . at his place. The next morning, Katie's gone, and Ryder tells himself it's for the best. It isn't. Now, one Christmas later, Ryder's falling for the woman he's been missing in the town he hasn't missed at all.

## *Holiday Gift Book Ideas*

With the holidays fast approaching, it is never too early to begin thinking about presents. Books make a terrific gift for that special person in your life.

(Or even yourself because you're special too!)



*Aldridge, Mark. [Agatha Christie on Screen](#) (Palgrave, \$29.99)*

Drawing on extensive archival, the author explores 90 years of film and television adaptations of the world's best-selling novelist's work in-

of which have been unseen for more than half a century. From 1974's Academy award-winning *Murder on the Orient Express* to the Poirot and Marple television series to the recently acclaimed 2016 BBC version of *And Then There Were None*, this history offers intriguing insights into the discussions and debates that surrounded many of these screen projects – something that is brought to life through previously unpublished correspondence from Christie herself and a new wide-ranging interview with her grandson, Mathew Prichard.



*Archer, Sterling. [The Art of Archer](#) (HarperCollins, \$29.99)*

This comprehensive look behind the scenes of the Emmy award-winning animated series features 240 pages of concept art, exclusive interviews, script excerpts, and the never-before-released original pitch for the series.

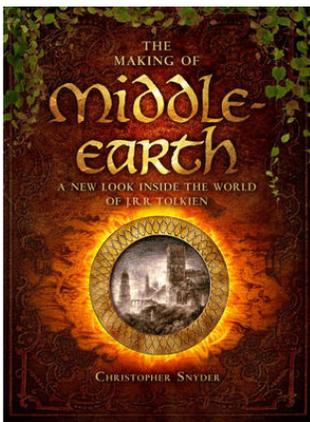


*Butchart, Amber. [The Fashion of Film](#) (Mitchell Beazley, \$39.99)*

Fashion historian Amber Butchart takes a journey through the last 100 years of cinema style and its influence on the catwalks. With beautiful imagery and thoroughly-researched text, she looks at how our most iconic movies such as *Metropolis* (which influenced Karl Lagerfeld) and *Dr. Zhivago* (who can forget all those big, puffy hats!) have transformed the world of high fashion.

*Cook, Blanche Wiesen. [Eleanor Roosevelt: Volume 3](#) (Viking, \$40)*

Volumes 1 and 2 in Cook's magisterial biography of Eleanor Roosevelt were published in 1992 and 1999. Now with the concluding volume in her definitive portrait of the First Lady, Cook focuses on Eleanor's post World War II years, covering subjects ranging from FDR's death to Eleanor's efforts to promote key initiatives through the UN. Rich in the details of Eleanor's life and legacy, the trio of books also serves as an excellent introduction for the general reader to one of history's most remarkable ladies.



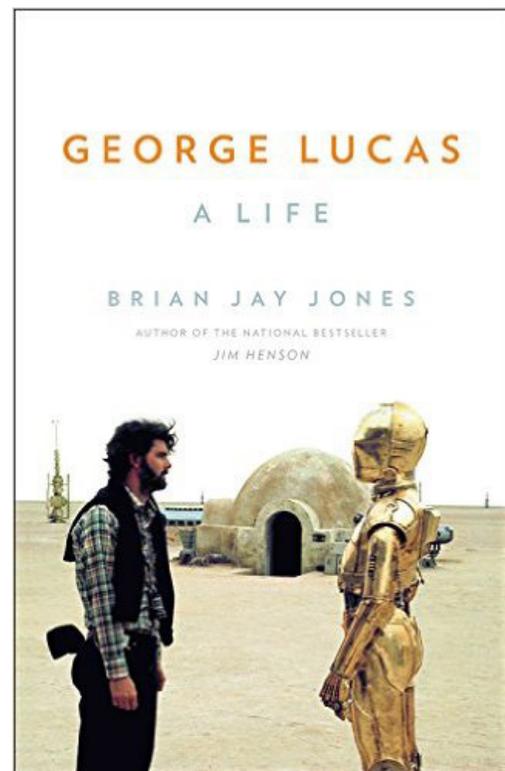
*Falconer, Daniel. [The Making of Middle Earth](#) (HarperCollins, \$75)*

Going region by region and culture by culture in the fantasy realm created for the *Lord of the Rings* and the *Hobbit* trilogies, Falconer describes how each area was created for the films, what made it unique, and what role it played in the stories. Lavishly illustrated with final film imagery, behind-the-scenes pictures and conceptual artwork (including places not seen in the final films), this monumental compilation offers unique and far-reaching insights into the world known as Middle-earth.

*Franklin, Ruth. [Shirley Jackson](#) (Norton, \$35)*

Franklin restores writer Shirley Jackson (1916-1965) to her proper place as one of America's great writers, illuminating this "rather haunted woman." Jackson juggled a writing career and life as a mother and wife to her husband, the prominent New Yorker critic and professor Stanley Edgar Hyman. A master of suspense and psychological horror, she exploded on the literary scene with her New Yorker short story

"The Lottery," which elicited hate mail and bewilderment by readers (I know when I read it in school, it scared the bee-jeebers out of me). Weaving the occult into her work about motherhood and marriage, she explored the isolation of married women, eventually turning to amphetamines and tranquilizers to manage her stressors. Franklin examines the effects on Jackson of a hypercritical mother, her husband's infidelities, domineering behavior and professional jealousy (though he touted her fiction as among the most brilliant he had ever seen), childrearing, and publisher deadlines.



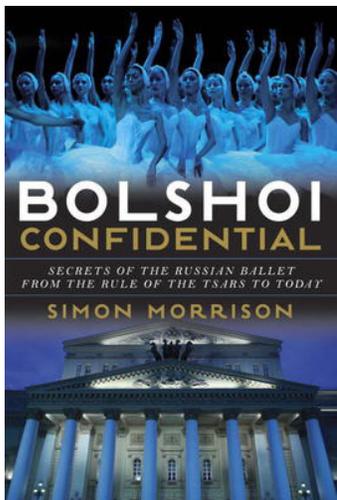
*Jones, Brian Jay. [George Lucas: A Life](#) (Little Brown, \$32)*

Jones, the best-selling author of *Jim Henson: The Biography* exhaustively traces the story of the man behind such blockbuster franchises as Star Wars and Indiana Jones, offering insight into the challenges he overcame and his influential legacy.

*MacIntyre, Ben. [Rogue Heroes](#) (Random House, \$27.99)*

Britain's Special Air Service—or SAS—was the brainchild of David Stirling, a young, gadabout aristocrat whose aimlessness in early life belied

a remarkable strategic mind. Where most of his colleagues looked at a battlefield map of World War II's African theater and saw a protracted struggle with Rommel's desert forces, Stirling saw an opportunity: given a small number of elite, well-trained men, he could parachute behind enemy lines and sabotage their airplanes and war material. Paired with his constitutional opposite, the disciplined martinet Jock Lewes, Stirling assembled a revolutionary fighting force that would upend not just the balance of the war, but the nature of combat itself. He faced no little resistance from those who found his tactics ungentlemanly or beyond the pale, but in the SAS's remarkable exploits facing the Nazis in the Africa and then on the Continent can be found the seeds of nearly all special forces units that would follow. Bringing his keen eye for psychological detail to a riveting wartime narrative, Ben Macintyre uses his unprecedented access to SAS archives to shine a light inside a legendary unit long shrouded in secrecy. Those hoping for a measured, scholarly history of the group may be disappointed in MacIntyre's account (one reviewer was quite put out by the lack of footnotes). But anyone who just wants a "rip-roaring" tale of action and adventure should be delighted with this tremendous war story about a fascinating group of men of whom history and country asked the most.



*Morrison, Simon. [Bolshoi Confidential](#)* (Norton, \$35)

Who would have thought the graceful and elegant world of the ballet could be so cut-throat and deadly? On January 17, 2013, a hooded assailant hurled acid into the face of the artistic di-

rector of the Bolshoi Ballet, making international headlines. A lead soloist, enraged by institutional power struggles, later confessed to masterminding the crime. The scandal, though shocking, is not an anomaly in the turbulent and tormented yet magnificent history of the Bolshoi. Music critic Morrison pulls back the curtain on the Bolshoi beginning with its creation in 1776 and continues right up to the recent \$680 million dollar renovation of the theater. Along the way readers are treated to a thrilling account of the men and women who danced across its stage as well as those power players pulling strings behind the scenes.

*Richards, Justin and George Mann. [Doctor Who: The Whoinverse](#)* (HarperCollins, \$45)

Complete with full-color illustrations, maps, charts, and artifacts, this is a never-before-seen history of the Human race – from the formation of the Earth around the Racnoss eggs through the eventual expansion of the sun and the end of the world and beyond to the New Earth and Utopia. Along the way the book explores the untold histories of other planets and other lifeforms such as the Daleks and Cybermen, the Ice Warriors, and Sihurians as they have interacted with humanity. To be honest, I really don't understand a single word about what this book covers, but if you are a Dr. Who fan, would probably be the perfect gift!

*Penwick, Pam. [The Water-Saving Garden](#)* (Ten Speed, \$19.99)

Many of us would love to have a water-thrifty garden, but we dread the idea of living with an outdoor space that consists solely of cactus and rocks. Fortunately, Penwick's wonderfully encouraging new gardening book offers plenty of ideas on how to get maximum green results from minimal water usage. Along with ideas for different landscape designs and information on rainwater harvesting, gray water usage and permeable paving, a directory of 100 plants appropriate for a variety of drought-prone regions is included. For innovative ideas about becoming more water thrifty in the garden, this guide can't be beat.

*Quinn, Susan. [Eleanor and Hick](#)* (Penguin, \$30)

This intimate dual biography of the legendary First Lady and the Associated Press journalist illustrates how their close three-decade friendship transformed their lives and empowered them to play the roles they did in American politics. Lorena Hickok ("Hick") first met Eleanor Roosevelt while she was covering Franklin D. Roosevelt's first presidential election in 1932. On the surface, the two women were exact opposites with Hick being loud, brash, outgoing while Eleanor was shy and reserved in public. But somehow the two women bonded forging a personal relationship that lasted their entire lives.

*Silver, Johanna with Marion Brenner. [The Bold Dry Garden](#)* (Timber, \$34.95)

Written by a garden editor for *Sunset* magazine, this lavishly illustrated book focuses the Ruth Bancroft Garden, a public garden in Walnut Creek, California, which became one of the leading examples of "dry" gardening in the 1970s. Not only does the book cover the history of this garden and the back story about the lady who created it, it offers tons of growing and maintenance tips, profiles of signature plants for dry gardens, and innovative design ideas for low water use gardens that gardeners today in dry climates can use.

*Stewart, Rory. [The Marches](#)* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$27)

Stewart follows his 2006 *New York Times* best-seller *The Places In Between* (which detailed his adventures walking across Afghanistan) with this lively account of his adventures trekking the 1,000 mile border between England and Scotland. Given his own personal history – Stewart serves as a member of parliament for Cumbria while his father lives Scotland, where they have family roots going back two centuries – Stewart is the perfect person to explain the fascinating if sometimes complicated story of this historically important geographical border region.

*Turner, Steve. [Beatles '66: The Revolutionary Year](#)* (Ecco, \$27.99)

1966 was the year that everything changed for the Beatles. It was the year of their last concert

and their first album, *Revolver*. It was the year the musical group experimented with avant-garde ideas and spoke their minds on the issues of politics, war, and religion. It was the year their records were burned in America after John's explosive claim that the group was "more popular than Jesus." It was the year they were hounded out of the Philippines for "snubbing" its First Lady, the year John met Yoko Ono, and the year Paul conceived the idea for Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. Now on the fiftieth anniversary of that year, musical journalist and Beatles expert Steve Turner looks at the historic events that had an impact on the group and the music they made that in turn profoundly affected the culture around them.

*Wagner, Robert J. and Scott Eyman. [I Loved Her in the Movies](#)* (Viking, \$27)

Robert Wagner's acting career spanned six decades from the Golden Age of Hollywood through the rise of television as the public's entertainment medium *du jour*. During those years, Wagner become acquainted with and/or worked with a glittering galaxy of stars including Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Marilyn Monroe, Raquel Welch, Glenn Close; and the two actresses he ultimately married: Natalie Wood and Jill St. John. In *I loved Her in the Movies*, his third Hollywood memoir, Wagner writes his own love letter to these ladies, who had to be tougher and fight harder than any man to survive in Tinsel Town. While Wagner serves up snippets of gossip (who knew he had a brief fling with Crawford?), the book itself is wonderfully breezy in tone yet still respectful to the women in his life.

*White, Ronald C. [American Ulysses](#)* (Random, \$35)

Does the world really need another biography of Ulysses S. Grant? Well, if the author is Ronald C. White, the answer is "yes, we do." White's biography of Lincoln landed on the *New York Times* best-seller list, and now the author tackles one of Lincoln's key Civil War generals in an attempt to rescue Grant's reputation from a century of "bad press." White's mastery of his research material is evident in this exhaustive yet surprisingly engaging account of Grant. While the author effectively makes his case that Grant was smarter

than many critics give him credit for, he is less successfully championing the idea that Grant's drinking was the result of accidents and illness. All in all, a fascinating look at the sometimes enigmatic Grant and his life.



