

# Midmonth BookNotes

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## Cool Off with a Good Book!

### **Baker, Bree.** [Live and Let Chai](#)

(Sourcebooks \$7.99)

Seaside café and iced tea shop owner Everly Swan finds herself steeped in a murder investigation when the body of the man who opposed her opening her store is found with a jar of her proprietary tea next to it. Looking for an easy, breezy mystery? This debut definitely fits the bill. From the expertly evoked North Carolina beachy small-town setting to the interesting tidbits about ice tea brewing (a recipe or two is included) everything about this mystery just hits the spot. Throw in a cast of charmingly quirky characters (the protagonist's bee-keeping great-aunts are particularly memorable) and a hint of sweet romance, and you have the perfect book to wile away the dog days of summer.

### **Bradford, Laura.** [Portrait of a Sister](#)

(Kensington \$15.95).

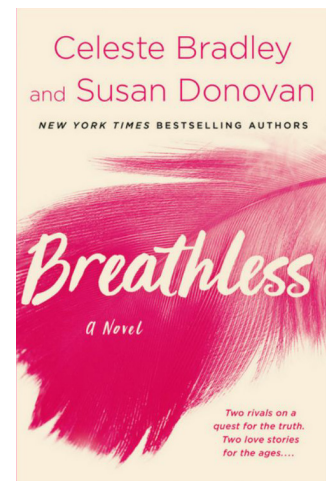
All of her life Katie Beiler has done her best to follow the rules of the Amish faith. Even when it hasn't been easy for her as is the case with Katie's gift for drawing. Because her religion frowns on Katie's attempts to practice her drawing, Katie must work at her art late at night and then hide her efforts in her bedroom. What is even more difficult to process is that according to her faith, Katie must accept that fact that her mother is dying as being a part of "God's will." However, when Katie's twin sister Hannah, who left her family before becoming baptized as an Amish and now lives as an Englisher, returns home for their mother's funeral, Katie slowly finds herself beginning to question many of the choices she has made in life. Bradford, the au-

thor of several notable mystery series including one set in the Amish world, writes with great sensitivity about love, loss, faith, and family in this quietly powerful novel. In addition to expertly capturing the old-fashioned appeal of the Amish way of life, Bradford gifts Portrait of a Sister with an engaging protagonist, whose endearing efforts to find her own path in life rings true. Sweetened with just the right dash of romance, this thoughtful book is both emotionally moving and truly memorable.

### **Bradley, Celeste.** [Breathless](#)

(St Martins \$16.99).

About to lose her post at Harvard, art professor Brenna Anderson thinks she has found a way to hold onto her job when she stumbles across a dusty portrait of a woman painted in 1828 in a house in France. Brenna is positive that if she can identify the subject of the portrait – known only as the mysterious Siren – she will be able to write her own ticket at Harvard. The only problem is that in order to gain access to some other paintings in the series, Brenna will have to find a way to work with frustrating, irritating, and way-to-sexy-for-his-own-good art hunter Fitch Wilder. Romance authors Celeste Bradley and Susan Donovan team up to write a fascinating novel that alternates storylines between a Regency



artist and his subject (once London's premiere courtesan) and the present day, where art professor Brenna and art hunter Fitch do their version of Romancing the Stone.

**Burdette, Lucy.** [Death on the Menu](#)

(Crooked Lane \$26.99)

Hayley Snow, fiery food critic for Key Zest magazine, has just landed a ticket to one of the most prestigious events in Key West: a high-brow three-day conference at the Harry Truman Little White House. Even though she'll be working the event helping her mother's fledgling catering business, there's plenty of spicy gossip to go around. But just before her mother's decadent flan is put to the test, Key West's most prized possession, Hemingway's Nobel prize gold medal for *The Old Man and the Sea*, is discovered stolen from its case. Composed of equal measures of detective work and culinary insights that are then seasoned with a generous pinch of fascinating historical tidbits and a soupcon of romance, the eighth yummy addition to Burdette's Key West Food Critic Mysteries is another tasty treat for fans of Joanne Fluke and Diane Mott Davidson.

**Camden, Elizabeth.** [Daring Venture](#)

(Bethany \$15.99).

Dr. Rosalind Werner is at the forefront of a groundbreaking new water technology--if only she can get support for her work. Nicholas, Commissioner of Water for New York, is skeptical--and surprised by his reaction to Rosalind. While they fight against their own attraction, they stand on opposite sides of a battle that will impact thousands of lives. The fight for clean water for the public in early 20th century New York City provides the fascinating backdrop for Camden's latest impeccably crafted historical romance.

**Connolly, Sheila.** [Murder at the Mansion](#)

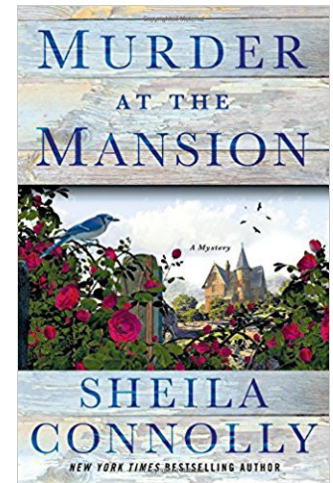
(St. Martin's Press \$26.99)

Not having a job to go to every morning – the Baltimore hotel where she worked was recently bought out and all the staff made “redundant” – has given Kate Hamilton plenty of free time. So, when her best friend from high school asks Kate to come back to her hometown of Ashford to lend her expertise to a problem that town faces, Kate is more than happy to accommodate her. Fifteen years after she left, Kate arrives back in

Ashford and discovers the problem facing the town council. Ashford is a pleasant little town in the middle of nowhere that is dying a slow civic death. The town has used its last remaining reservoir of funds to purchase a large Victorian home outside the town

proper that was once owned by a late 19th century business tycoon named Henry Barton.

While Kate does have some initial ideas about how the town might be able to utilize the mansion to help revitalize Ashford, she faces some steep roadblocks, including one in the person of her old high school nemesis Cordelia Walker, who has her own plans for the Barton estate. However, when Cordelia winds up dead on the doorstep of the Barton mansion, it does remove one roadblock for Kate but it does put into place several others! Best-selling Connolly, author of four other popular cozy mystery series including the Orchard Mysteries, launches her new Victorian Village series with a marvelously entertaining detective story that is certain to tick off all the boxes for fans of traditional mysteries. From the engaging protagonist/amateur sleuth to the charmingly realized small town setting to the intriguing historical mystery the author deftly weaves into the plot, *Murder at the Mansion* is just the ticket for fans of Katherine Hall Page and Carolyn Hart.



**Doan, Amy Mason.** [Summer List](#)

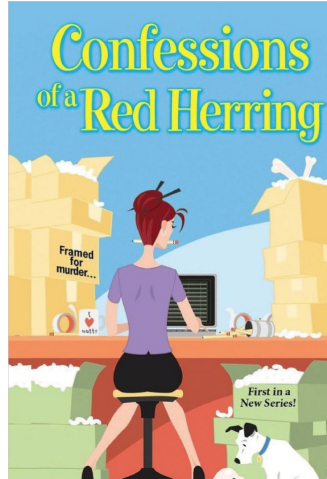
(Graydon \$16.99).

Laura Christie and Casey Shepherd were once the best of friends growing up in Coeur-de-Lune until one summer night when their friendship unraveled forever. Now seventeen years later, Casey mother is determined to bring the two back together using the premise of a scavenger hunt. If you loved Judy Blume's *Summer Sisters* or Iris Dart's classic novel *Beaches* (or the wonderful tearjerker movie with Bette Midler Barbara Hershey), this is right up your reading alley.



**Dratch, Dana.** [Confessions of a Red Herring](#)  
(Kensington \$7.99)

Newly minted PR rep Alex Vlodnachek will do almost anything to keep her job, but she draws the line at being pimped out by her boss to one of the agency's biggest clients. So, of course when Alex's boss is found dead a few days after he fired her, almost everyone – including the police – assume she is the culprit. Now, Alex is going to have to draw upon the investigative skills she learned as a journalist as well as rely on a little help from her family and friends if she is going to have any hope of clearing her name and beating a rap for murder. This debut mystery, the start to a new series, is an absolute hoot! The author's lively writing style is richly seasoned with a wickedly sharp sense of humor, and the book's expertly etched cast of characters provide the perfect foils for sharp-tongued and sharp-witted Alex.



**Dunn, Carola.** [The Corpse at the Crystal Palace](#)  
(St. Martin's \$26.99)

When her young cousins decide to visit London, Daisy Dalrymple immediately begins putting together a list of attractions to visit, and at the top of the list is the Crystal Palace. With her whole family as well as assorted friends in tow – including strict Nanny Gilpin – Daisy sets off for a pleasant day at the exhibits. However, when Nanny Gilpin uncharacteristically abandons her charges, Daisy sets off to retrieve her only to find the body of a man dressed in a nanny's uniform in the ladies' lavatory instead. Readers who demand a tightly knit mystery plot, may find the latest in Dunn's engaging and long-running series featuring Daisy to be something of a challenge to untangle. But anyone who reads historical mysteries more for the setting and characters, will definitely enjoy this.

**Gortner, C.W.** [The Romanov Empress](#)  
(Ballantine \$27.99)

Born the daughter of Denmark's King Christian IX, Maria Feodorovna (or "Minnie" as she was

better known) was slated to marry into one of the royal families of Europe, and that is exactly what she did by marrying the Romanov heir, Alexander, who ascends the imperial Russian throne as Alexander II. Alexander's reign is marked by increased opposition to the royal family, which Alexander does his best to crush. However, the winds of reform and change that are blowing through Russia can't be stopped, and when Minnie's son Nicholas II assumes the crown, Minnie tries to do everything she can to change the fate of her family before a wave of revolution sweeps the four-century royal family out of power.

**Grant, Sofia.** [Daisy Children](#)  
(Harper \$15.99).

Somewhere and somehow, Katie Garrett's life had taken a wrong turn, and now she has no idea how to get things back on track. While Katie didn't exactly love working as a package designer for Nickell, March & Co., she certainly hadn't expected to see her job eliminated as part of a company cutback. Katie did love her husband Liam, but lately it seemed like the gulf between them was expanding and not contracting. Now with no job and a distracted-at-best husband, Katie isn't exactly sure what she is going to do when she receives word that she has been named in her recently deceased maternal grandmother Margaret's will. With nothing really keeping her in Boston, Katie decides to head to New London, Texas to see exactly what her grandmother has left her. What Katie never expects she would find in the small, rural Texas town are the answers she never



knew she needed about her family's past as well as the keys she needs to unlock her own future. Grant, pseudonym for award-winning novelist Sophie Littlefield, used the school explosion that occurred in New London, Texas on March 18, 1937 as the literary lynchpin for an unforgettable novel that not only explores the after effects

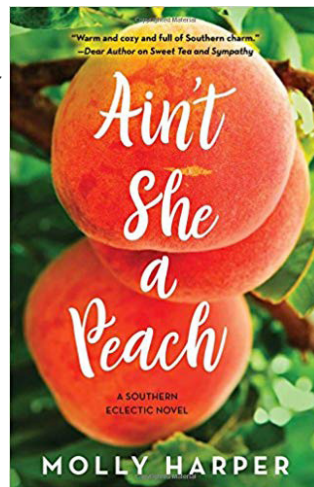
of that tragedy on the town – and how it led to the idea of the “Daisy Children” – but also how much power the past has to affect future generations without us even knowing it. Grant’s poignant and keenly observed story about family, friendship, and forgiveness is tempered with just the right measure of the author’s deliciously acerbic sense of wit. Once in a great while, a book comes along that is pure reading magic. The Daisy Children is exactly that kind of novel.

**Harbison, Beth.** [Every Time You Go Away](#)  
(St Martins \$26.99).

Willa Bennett has never fully recovered from the sudden death of her cheating husband, Ben. She became an absent mother to her young son, Jamie, unable to comfort him while reeling from her own grief. Now, years after Ben’s death, Willa finally decides to return to the beach house where he passed. It’s time to move on and put the Ocean City, Maryland house on the market. However, it seems that before Willa can unload the house, she is going to have to figure out a way to get rid of Ben’s ghost, who keeps reappearing in the hopes of correcting the mistakes he made in the past. Think *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* for the 21st century.

**Harper, Molly.** [Ain’t She a Peach](#)  
(Gallery \$16).

Lake Sackett’s new sheriff Eric Linden and the eccentric town embalmer and county coroner Frankie McCready team up to investigate a series of mysterious break-ins and end up spilling secrets they thought were buried forever. The second in Harper’s delightfully quirky “Southern Eclectic” series is another hoot for fans of small-town contemporary romances.



**Henry, Veronica.** [How to Find Love in a Bookshop](#)  
(Penguin \$16).

Nightingale Books, nestled on the main street in an idyllic little village, is a dream come true for book lovers--a cozy haven and welcoming getaway for the literary-minded locals. But owner Emilia Nightingale is struggling to keep the shop

open after her beloved father’s death, and the temptation to sell is getting stronger. The property developers are circling, yet Emilia’s loyal customers have become like family, and she can’t imagine breaking the promise she made to her father to keep the store alive. This is a lovely and heartfelt tale about the ties that bind a bookstore and its readers together as well as the power books can have to heal broken hearts.

**James, Eloisa.** [Born to Be Wilde](#)  
(Avon \$7.99)

While Parth Sterling, the wealthiest bachelor in England, isn’t about to accept beautiful and witty – and let’s be honest fashion-obsessed and a bit reckless - Lavinia Gray’s proposal of marriage, he is willing to help her find a husband. In fact, Parth will do Lavinia proud by securing an offer of marriage for her from a prince! The only problem is that once Parth begins spending some quality time with Lavinia, he is finding it more and more difficult to think about handing her off to another man! James’ latest Georgian-set historical romance is potently sensual and delightfully witty.

**King, Janna.** [The Seasonaires](#)  
(WW Norton \$25.95)

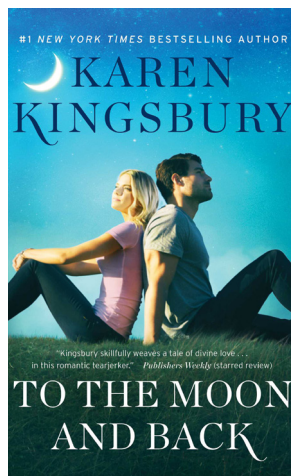
Six young twenty-somethings – scrappy Mia, beautiful Presley, handsome Cole, sultry Jade, ambitious J.P. and party-boy Grant – have been chosen as the latest brand ambassadors for Lyndon Wyld, a popular clothing line (think a more WASPy version of Abercrombie and Fitch, if that is even possible). All the group has to do is spend the summer living together in an outrageous house on Nantucket working as “seasonaires” for the company. Of course, Lyndon Wyld, the owner of the eponymous business, expects all six to constantly post their every move – dressed, of course, in Lyndon Wyld togs – to every influential social media platform in existence – in return for the cool \$20,000.00 each one will earn at the end of the summer. Everything is just “chill” until corporate greed, professional rivalries, and personal conflicts – fueled by plenty of sex and illicit substances – led to a murder that could tarnish every one of the seasonaire’s picture-perfect lives. For the right reader in the right frame of mind, this could be the perfect summer read. Apparently, I am not that reader (many of the trendy references sailed right over



my head and there were times I just wanted to smack some common sense into most of the cast of characters). However, PW gave this debut a coveted star ending their assessment with “The seasonaires’ scandalous shenanigans have a tabloid appeal, and King slips in some commentary on consumer culture and those who live their lives on social media. The introspective Mia provides a good foil for the rowdier seasonaires, and while the identity of the killer may not come as a surprise, readers will be having too much fun to mind.”

**Kingsbury, Karen.** [To the Moon and Back](#) (Howard \$23.99).

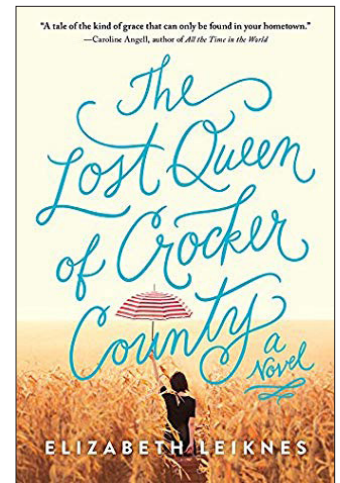
Is a shared tragedy enough of a foundation upon which to build a future? Award-winning Inspirational novelist Kingsolver explores this theme in her latest emotion-rich novel. Brady Bradshaw was a child when the Oklahoma City bombing killed his mother. Every year, Brady visits the memorial site on the anniversary to remember her. A decade ago on that day, he met Jenna Phillips, who was also a child when her parents were killed in the attack. Brady and Jenna shared a deep heart connection and a single beautiful day together at the memorial. But after that, Brady never saw Jenna again. Every year when he returns, he leaves a note for her in hopes that he might find her again. This year, Ashley Baxter Blake and her sister Kari Baxter Taylor and their families take a spring break trip that includes a visit to the site to see the memorial’s famous Survivor Tree. While there, Ashley spots a young man, alone and troubled. That man is Brady Bradshaw. A chance moment leads Ashley to help Brady find Jenna, the girl he can’t forget.



**Leiknes, Elizabeth.** [The Lost Queen of Crocker County](#) (Sourcebooks \$15.99).

Crocker County crowns a new Corn Queen every year, but Jane Willow’s the one you would remember. She can’t forget Iowa, either. Even though she fled to LA to become a film critic

years ago, home was always there behind her. But when a family tragedy happens, she’s forced to drive back to Crocker County. The rolling farmlands can’t much hide the things she left behind: the best friend she abandoned who now runs a meatloaf hotline, the childhood front porch that sits hauntingly empty, and that fiasco of a Corn Fest that spun her life in a different direction. Before Jane can escape her past a second time, disaster strikes, and she will have to find a way to right her mistakes and save herself from her regrets. An unflinchingly love letter to the Midwest that unfolds through a celebration of movies, this ferociously endearing novel brings home the saving grace of second chances.



**MacLean, Sarah.** [Wicked and the Wallflower](#) (Avon \$7.99)

When a mysterious stranger finds his way into her bedchamber and offers his help in landing a duke, Lady Felicity Faircloth agrees—on one condition. She’s seen enough of the world to believe in passion and won’t accept a marriage without it. Bastard son of a duke and king of London’s dark streets, Devil has spent a lifetime wielding power and seizing opportunity, and the spinster wallflower is everything he needs to exact a revenge year in the making. All he must do is turn the plain little mouse into an irresistible temptress, set his trap, and destroy his enemy.

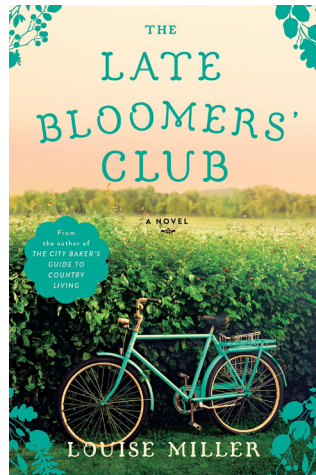
**Macomber, Debbie.** [Cottage by the Sea](#) (Random \$27).

Returning to the Pacific Northwest after a tragedy, Annie Marlow begins to heal, with help from Keaton, a local painter who offers comfort and reprieve from her grief. This standalone novel by Macomber, is an excellent introduction to her heartwarming brand of women’s fiction and romance.

**Miller, Louise.** [The Late Bloomers’ Club](#) (Penguin \$26).

Nora Huckleberry, the owner of the Miss Guth-

rie Diner, is perfectly content serving up apple cider donuts, coffee, and eggs-any-way-you-like-em, and she takes special pride in knowing what “the usual” is for each of her customers. But Nora’s comfortable life is soon turned upside down when she learns that she and her free-spirited younger sister Kit have inherited the home and surrounding land of the town’s beloved cake lady, Peggy Johnson. Trying to decide whether to keep their inheritance intact or sell the land for big bucks is difficult enough without having to deal with competing factions in their town, each of which has a different idea as to what the sisters should do. I gobbled up Miller’s delectable debut novel – *The City Baker’s Guide to Country Living* – and her second warm and emotionally nourishing novel is every bit as good.



**Page, Libby.** [The Lido](#)

(Simon and Schuster \$25)

Rosemary Peterson has lived in Brixton, London, all her life but everything is changing. The library where she used to work has closed. The family grocery store has become a trendy bar. And now the lido, an outdoor pool where she’s swum daily since its opening, is threatened with closure by a local housing developer. Twentysomething Kate Matthews has moved to Brixton and feels desperately alone. A once promising writer, she now covers forgettable stories for her local paper. That is, until she’s assigned to write about the lido’s closing. Soon Kate’s portrait of the pool focuses on a singular woman: Rosemary. And as Rosemary slowly opens up to Kate, both women are nourished and transformed in ways they never thought possible. The current trend for “feel-good” fiction (think *A Man Called Ove*) continues with this British import that was a best-seller across the pond. Sweet and charming, this is a marvelous story about how it is never too late to make friends or make a difference in life.

**Parker, Miriam.** [The Shortest Way Home](#)

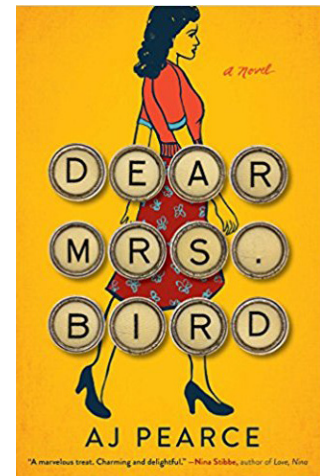
(Dutton \$26).

When a moment’s hesitation unravels all of her carefully organized life goals, grad student Hannah Greene impulsively accepts a job in Sonoma, where new friends and an unexpected romance shape her efforts to save a family winery.

**Pearce, AJ.** [Dear Mrs. Bird](#)

(Scribner \$26).

When Emmeline Lake spots an ad for a job at the *London Evening Chronicle*, she thinks her dreams of becoming a Lady War Correspondent are about to come true. However, Emmy should have read the fine print, since it turns out that the job she has just landed is that of junior typist working for the *Women’s Friend*, a sister publication of the newspaper. Emmy’s new boss is the magazine’s redoubtable advice columnist: Henrietta Bird, and her task is to sort through all the letters Mrs. Bird receives and weed out those deemed “unpleasant.” Emmy quickly discovers Mrs. Bird has a very broad definition of what she considers unpleasant – letters involving pre-marital relations, marital relations, post-marital relations, etc. – and that her typical response to those letters to which she



does reply, is to tell the correspondent to “buck up and buckle down.” For a few weeks, Emmy reluctantly follows the rules by shredding the undesirable notes, but one day a poignant letter from a young woman seeking romantic advice strikes a chord with her. Before she knows it, Emmy is secretly replying to the girl as “Mrs. Bird.” I absolutely adored this charming British debut. The author drew inspiration from real-life women’s magazines of the era, and she perfectly captures the mix of grit and pluck that Londoners exhibited as they kept calm and carried on during the German Blitz of the city. If you loved the Maggie Hope mysteries by Susan Elia MacNeal or that marvelous novel *The Guernsey Literary Potato Peel Pie Society*, you really mustn’t miss this terrific book.

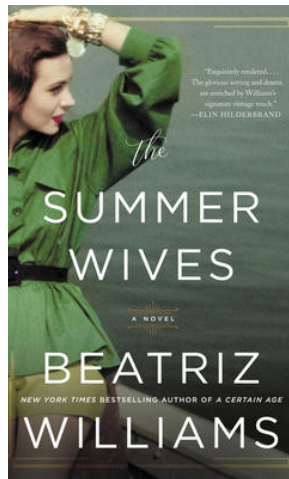


**Vincenzi, Penny.** [A Question of Trust](#)  
(Overlook \$28.95).

In 1950s London, Tom Knelston is charismatic, charming, with a passion for politics and reform. He is a man with ambition—and someone to watch. His wife Alice, a former nurse, shares his ideals. It seems they are the perfect match. Then, out of the blue, Tom meets an old childhood acquaintance, the beautiful and unhappily married Diana Southcott, a fashion model. In many ways, she is everything Tom fights against, but she is also irresistible and so, flirting with danger, they embark on an affair that is potentially damaging to both. And when his child becomes ill, Tom is forced to make decisions about his principles, his career, his marriage, and, most of all, his love for his child. International bestselling British author Vincenzi made her name with glitz and glam novels like *Old Sins* and *Windfall*, romantic blockbusters very much in the literary style of Judith Krantz and Sidney Sheldon (or if you need a television reference shows like *Dynasty* and *Dallas*). Sadly, Vincenzi, whose novels were called “seductively readable” by *The Times*, passed away earlier this year.

**Williams, Beatriz.** [The Summer Wives](#)  
(William Morrow \$26.99)

When celebrated movie star Miranda Thomas arrives back on Winthrop Island eighteen years after she left, nothing is the same. Greyfriars, her stepfather’s once elegant estate, is now being run by Miranda’s mother as an “artists’ colony” in order to make ends meet. Miranda’s once vivacious stepsister Isobel Fisher is now a somber shadow of her former self, and Miranda is about to meet her teenage half-brother Hugh for the first time. If this isn’t enough to take in, Joseph Vargas, the son of a local lobsterman and the first boy to ever break Miranda’s heart, has escaped from prison, where he has spent the last eighteen years serving time for murder. Everything and everyone seems to have changed including Miranda herself. The real question, however, is will Miranda’s return to Winthrop Island stir up new interest in



events that almost everyone else would prefer remain quietly buried in the past? In the latest binge-worthy addition to her loosely connected Schuyler family novels, Williams deftly fashions an unforgettable, almost operatic story brimming with enough secrets, scandals, and seduction to give *Peyton Place* a good run for its money. At the same time Williams’ luscious, evocative prose style would make Daphne Du Maurier green with envy. Put both these elements together with a splendidly nuanced cast of characters and a cleverly conceived and brilliantly executed plot that neatly shifts between three different historical time periods (each one rendered perfectly down to the last detail), and you have all the necessary ingredients for this year’s most sought after as well as superbly satisfying summer read.

**Woods, Eva.** [Something Like Happy](#)  
(Graydon \$15.99).

Annie Hebden has absolutely no reason in the world to be happy. After a bitter divorce, Annie lives in a dingy flat with a messy and clueless roommate. Annie dreads going to work every day because her job is a mindless, joyless series of routine tasks, and her co-workers couldn’t be more irritating if they tried. If that wasn’t enough to cope with, Annie’s mother has been hospitalized and is now being treated for early dementia. So, when Annie bumps into zany, bubbly, friendly Polly Leonard at the hospital, her first inclination is to run the other way. After discovering that Polly has been diagnosed with a brain tumor and has just months left to live, Annie can’t figure out why she is so outrageously cheerful. But Polly is determined to show Annie that life is worth living, by convincing Annie to join her as she tackles a popular new trend known as the one hundred days project. Each day they will do something like having lunch outdoors in the park or bringing in donuts to work to make someone else happy. One hundred days, one hundred different ways to find the sunny side of life. But what happens when Annie discovers her new friend may not live to see the completion of their joint project? Woods (a pseudonym for crime writer Claire McGowan) has written a marvelously moving novel. If you are open to the idea that doing small things can make a difference, Woods’ latest has the potential to change your life (well, unless you the most hard-hearted of cynics). If you loved *Jo Jo Moyes Me Before You*, don’t miss this uplifting, funny, teary, heart-felt, remarkable novel.