

Midmonth BookNotes

Volume 5 Issue 11 November BookNotes 2018

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A Cornucopia of Good Reading

Adams, Ellery. [The Whispered Word](#)

(Kensington \$26).

Nora Pennington, owner of Miracle Books, calls upon the other members of the Secret Book and Scone Society for help when she discovers a reed-thin girl wearing a hospital gown hiding in the fiction section of her bookstore. The only information the girl will provide to Nora and her friends is that her name is Abilene, but when Nora discovers Abilene shared a connection with a customer who supposedly commits suicide, she vows to dig deeper into the girl's past for some answers. Adams' *The Secret Book and Scone Society* was a bit hit with readers last year.

Bell, Maymee. [Cake and Punishment](#)

(\$15.99).

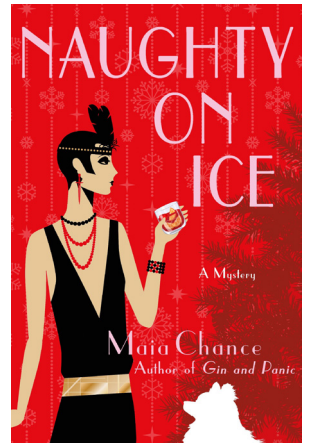
Bucolic Rumford, Kentucky has glowing fields of bluegrass, a fine selection of bourbons, and now a professional pastry chef returned home from New York. Sophia Cummings, pastry chef extraordinaire, must craft the perfect cake for an old friend's wedding while sifting through the suspects in a murder. Debuts a Southern baking cozy series.

Chance, Maia. [Naughty on Ice](#)

(St Martins \$26.99).

Just when Lola Woodby and her business partner (and former cook) Berta are growing a bit bored with the business of retrieving lost parcels, missing grandmas, and stolen wreaths, an intriguing new case opens up for the Discreet Retrieval Agency. The two women receive a mysterious Christmas card requesting their professional help in retrieving

an antique ring at a family gathering in Maple Hill, Vermont. Sure, the card is a bit threatening and it is signed Anonymous, but it will offer the gal pals the opportunity to get out of New York. However, soon after Lola and Berta arrive at the Goddard family holiday event in Maple Hill and recover the ring, the two discover the real reason they have been invited to the party: to act as scapegoats for the murder of the woman from whom they stole back the ring. Chance's humor-tinged writing and breezy style of characterization make for a fast and fun read.



Alexander, Victoria. [Lady Travelers Guide to Deception with an Unlikely Earl](#)

(Harlequin \$7.99).

Harry Armstrong has spent years in Egypt, recovering relics and disregarding rules. Now he's back in England with a new title and a new purpose: penning his exploits. But his efforts are overshadowed by London's favorite writer about Egypt—a woman they call The Queen of the Desert, of all things. Worse, her stories—serialized in newspapers and reprinted in books—are complete rubbish.

Miss Sidney Honeywell didn't set out to deceive anyone. It's not her fault readers assumed her *Tales of a Lady Adventurer in Egypt* were real! Admitting her inadvertent deception now would destroy her reputation and her livelihood. But when the Earl of Brenton

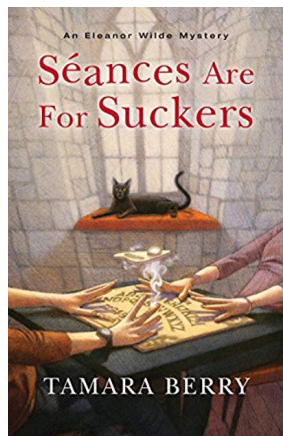
challenges her to travel to Egypt to prove her expertise, accompanied by his dashing, arrogant nephew, what choice does she have but to pack her bags?

Balogh, Mary. [Someone to Trust](#)
(Penguin \$7.99)

Widow Elizabeth Overfield and Lord Hodges, despite their mutual attraction, agree to find each other more suitable matches during the London season but fate keeps throwing them together time and time again forcing them to rethink their plans. Balogh puts her own twist on the usual younger heroine/older hero plot trope in her latest beautifully written and emotionally nuanced Regency historical romance.

Barry, Tamara. [Séances Are for Suckers](#)
(Kensington \$26).

When something goes bump in the night, fake medium Eleanor Wilde is happy to investigate and cleanse your home of spectral presences—for a fee—but when an apparent ghostly presence at an ancestral estate in England turns deadly, things get serious. Barry's writing reminded me a bit of Elizabeth Peters' early books (like *Devil May Care* and *Summer of the Dragon*), and her new series launch is the perfect ticket for mystery readers who enjoy their contemporary cozies served up with a generous dose of wry wit and a dash of the paranormal.



Bradford, Barbara. [Master of His Fate](#)
(St Martins \$28.99).

Best-selling Bradford made her literary name with *A Woman of Substance*, and now she goes back to her literary roots with this Victorian-set saga about the Falconer and Malvern families. James Lionel Falconer, who spends his days working at his father's market stall, is determined to become a merchant prince. James quickly rises through the ranks, proving himself both hardworking and trustworthy, and catching the eye of Henry Malvern, head of the most prestigious shipping company in London. But when threats against his reputation – and his life – begin to emerge, James will have to prove that he truly is the master of his fate.

Bradford, Laura. [Just Plain Murder](#)
(Penguin \$7.99)

In the latest addition to Bradford's Amish Mysteries series, Jakob and Claire have been enjoying more time together in lovely Heavenly, PA. With Claire's help, the detective is making slow progress reconnecting with the members of his Amish family who shunned him when he left to pursue a career in law enforcement. Jakob's mentor, However, soon after they arrive, Russ Granger, the long-retired police chief who inspired Jakob to become a cop, is murdered. Jakob can only imagine that his old friend must have been killed by someone outside of the Amish community. He and Claire soon find that things are not as they seem--and that Russ may have stumbled into something sinister before he was killed.

Brady, Eileen. [Penned](#)
(Poisoned Pen \$26.95 or \$15.95 Signed).

Dr. Kate Turner, DVM, is seven months into her one-year contract to cover for a Hudson Valley vet taking a year-long world cruise. She's getting used to the hospital and house-call workload but not to the sometimes dangerous, if not deadly, critters – animal and human – when she meets eighty-something-year-old Gloria LaGuardia, who has been installed at an assisted living center by her niece. They bump into Kate at the Oak Falls annual Halloween street bash. And while Gloria's conversation indicates some mental confusion – she asks a couple dressed as rabbits if they are real or not – she's still sharp. And she says, "Someone evil is here. I saw him." The almost Agatha Christie like opening (think *By the Pricking of My Thumbs*) sets into motion another murder investigation for Kate and company in the latest of Brady's engaging series.

Copperman, A. J. [Bird, Bath and Beyond](#)
(St. Martin's \$26.99)

Kay Powell, theatrical agent to non-human animals, is babysitting—that is, birdsitting—her client, a parrot named Barney, on the set of his new TV show, *Dead City*. When the show's charismatic star is shot in his trailer between scenes, the only eyewitness to the crime is—you guessed it—Barney. And even though Kay keeps explaining that even a "talking" parrot doesn't actually converse with people, the investigators insist on interrogating the bird for information he clearly can't communicate. Suspects accumulate

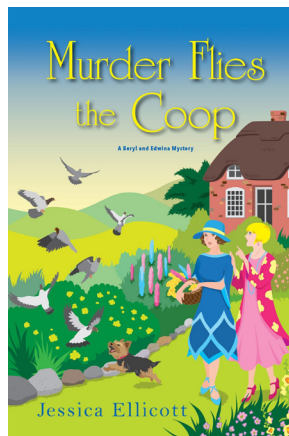
like birdseed, and before long it's clear the killer believes Barney might actually be able to supply useful evidence. Even Barney can't fly away from this one. Copperman is the author of a number of cozy-esue mystery series, but the Kay Powell books are by far my favorite. The author injects a nice dry sense of humor into his writing, and the theatrical setting reminds me (in a good way) of those marvelous old mysteries written by Jane Dentinger.

Crosby, Ellen. [Harvest of Secrets](#) (St Martins \$26.99 Signed).

When the untimely death of a fellow winemaker is blamed on an innocent migrant worker whose community threatens to boycott her harvest unless she clears his name, Lucie Montgomery is blindsided by a decades-old family secret.

Ellicott, Jessica. [Murder Flies the Coop](#) (Kensington \$26).

Sharing lodging in the sleepy English village of Walmsley Parva has eased some of the financial strain on old school chums Edwina Davenport and Beryl Helliwell, but money is still tight in these lean years following the Great War, especially since Beryl's ex-husbands have proven reluctant to part with her alimony, which is most inconvenient. So, when the local vicar offers them a chance to earn a bit of cash by doing some discreet sleuthing, the ladies are more than willing. All Beryl and Edwina need to do is to find the local pigeon-racing club's treasurer, who has taken flight with the club's funds and several prized birds. But when they visit the man's loft, they find their elusive quarry lying in white feathers and a pool of crimson blood, stabbed to death—the only witnesses cooing mournfully. Ellicott is spot-on with her 1920s setting, and that combined with her two engaging amateur sleuths (and an adorable dog named Crumpet) make this great fun. Start off the series with [Murder in an English Village](#) (\$15.95), which introduces Beryl and Edwina, when Beryl shows up in the seemingly quiet hamlet of Walmsley Parva and reunites with her old friend Beryl only to find the sleepy little English village has a dark and dangerous side neither of them would have expected.



George, Margaret. [The Splendor Before the Dark](#) (Berkley \$28)

With the beautiful and cunning Poppaea at his side, Nero Augustus commands the Roman empire, ushering in an unprecedented era of artistic and cultural splendor. Although he has yet to produce an heir, his power is unquestioned. But in the tenth year of his reign, a terrifying prophecy comes to pass and a fire engulfs Rome, reducing entire swaths of the city to rubble. Rumors of Nero's complicity in the blaze start to sow unrest among the populace—and the politicians. For better or worse, Nero knows that his fate is now tied to Rome's—and he vows



to rebuild it as a city that will stun the world. But there are those who find his rampant quest for glory dangerous. George began chronicling Nero's story in *The Confessions of Young Nero*, and now she picks up the action with the Great Fire of Rome, which marked a significant change in the character of the notorious emperor. Four years later, Nero was dead, but George continues her story for twenty-three years after, since he "was one of the few historical personages to have a busy posthumous existence. In the two decades following his death, there were at least three Nero impersonators who claimed to be the late emperor and gathered followers." George immerses readers in the world of first century AD Rome, and her meticulously researched novels are tailor-made for readers, who also love authors like Steven Saylor, Lindsey Davis, and Dorothy Dunnett.

Guillory, Jasmine. [Proposal](#) (Berkley \$15).

When freelance writer Nikole Paterson goes to a Dodgers game with her actor boyfriend, his man bun, and his bros, the last thing she expects is a scoreboard proposal. Saying no isn't the hard part—they've only been dating for five months, and he can't even spell her name correctly. The hard part is having to face a stadium full of disappointed fans. At the game with his sister, Carlos Ibarra comes to Nik's rescue and rushes her away from a camera crew. He's even there for her when the video goes viral and Nik's social media blows up—in a bad way. Nik knows that in the wilds of LA, a handsome doctor like Carlos

can't be looking for anything serious, so she embarks on an epic rebound with him, filled with food, fun, and fantastic sex. But when their glorified hookups start breaking the rules, one of them has to be smart enough to put on the brakes.

Howard, Linda. [Woman Left Behind](#) (Harper \$7.99).

In the aftermath of an attack that leaves her separated from the rest of the elite paramilitary team, communications expert Jina Modell escapes to the desert determined to evade the enemy and reconnect with her unit before they are exfiltrated.

Lindsey, Erin. [Murder on Millionaire's Row](#) (St. Martin's \$28.99)

Rose Gallagher might dream of bigger things, but she's content enough with her life as a housemaid. After all, it's not every girl from Five Points who gets to spend her days in a posh Fifth Avenue brownstone, even if only to sweep its floors. But all that changes on the day her boss, Mr. Thomas Wiltshire, disappears. Rose is certain Mr. Wiltshire is in trouble, but the police treat his disappearance as nothing more than the whims of a rich young man behaving badly. Meanwhile, the friend who reported him missing is suspiciously unhelpful. With nowhere left to turn, Rose takes it upon herself to find her handsome young employer.

Moriarty, Liane. [Nine Perfect Strangers](#) (Flatiron \$28.99).

Gathering at a remote health resort for a 10-day fitness program, nine strangers and their enigmatic host become subjects of interest to a brokenhearted novelist who develops uncomfortable doubts about the resort's real agenda. Moriarty is the author of numerous best-selling women's fiction titles including *Big Little Lies*, which became the basis for the wildly popular HBO series. Personally, I have never gotten the appeal of her books, but millions of other readers adore her. Critical acclaim has been good on this title as well with PW raving calling the book a "cannily plotted, continually surprising, and frequently funny pager turner."

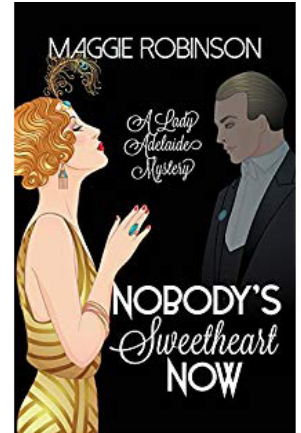
Quinn, Julia. [The Other Miss Bridgerton](#) (Avon \$7.99)

Determined to wed a suitor whose intellect matches her own, independent Poppy Bridgerton is acciden-

tally kidnapped by a privateer who must hide his true identity from her in spite of their growing passions.

Robinson, Maggie. [Nobody's Sweetheart Now](#) (Poisoned Pen \$26.95 or \$15.95).

All Lady Adelaide Compton wanted to do was host a simple weekend house party for some friends, but now she finds herself smack dab in the middle of a murder investigation when the ex-wife of one of the guests Adelaide invited to her party is found death in the estate's tithe barn. Now if dealing with a murder investigation is not enough for Adelaide, she finds herself equally distracted when her husband Major Rupert Charles Cressleigh Compton, a World War I hero suddenly makes an unexpected appearance. The unexpected part comes from the fact that Rupert died by smashing his Hispano-Suiza on a Cotswold country road while carrying a French made-moiselle in the passenger seat.



Now in between wondering which one of her guests might be a murderer and dealing with the very determined Scotland Yard inspector Devenand Hunter, who is not about to let this murder investigation get swept under the rug, Adelaide must also do something about her spectral late husband Rupert, who has to perform a few good deeds before becoming welcomed to heaven - or, more likely, thinks Addie, to hell. This series debut by Robinson, who cut her writing teeth in historical romance, is an absolute delight. From the novel's breezy writing tone, which is tinged with just the right dash of dry wit, to the charmingly eccentric cast of characters everything about the story is done to perfection. Fans of Carola Dunn, Kerry Greenwood, and K. K. Beck will not want to miss this.

Rose Karen. [Death Is Not Enough](#) (Berkley \$7.99)

Baltimore defense attorney Thorne, who has dedicated himself to helping young people in trouble, believes he has overcome his past until he wakes to find a dead woman in the bed, blood on his hands, and no idea what happened. Rose writes the kind of gripping, dark suspense that Lisa Gardner does so well.

Trigiani, Adriana. [Tony's Wife](#)
(Harper \$28.99).

Falling in love during a pre-World War II Jersey Shore summer, two aspiring singers find their marriage tested when they must decide which of them will pursue career opportunities while the other stays at home to raise a family.

Truss, Lynn. [A Shot in the Dark](#)
(Bloomsbury \$27).

In 1957 Brighton, a famed theater critic is shot dead just as he was about to reveal the criminal mastermind behind a 1945 mystery, leaving Constable Twitten and Sergeant Jim Brunswick to solve both the decade-old crime and the more recent murder. British author, screenwriter, columnist, and broadcaster, Truss made her name with her surprising nonfiction bestseller *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*, a guide to the English language and its usage, and now she makes her mystery debut with this historical detective story. I really wanted to love this book, but the writing just fell flat for me, and so I gave up halfway through (because life is short and there are just too many other books to read). That isn't to say that other readers may not love this and find something in Truss's writing that I am just missing. Reviews have been lavish in their praise, if that helps you any, with *Kirkus* raving "Truss piles up ingenious plot twists, preposterous coincidences, snarky asides, and characters out of P.G. Wodehouse, this time replacing her murderous felines with a setup out of the genre's golden age. Readers who can suspend their disbelief are in for quite a workout."

Willan, Jane. [The Hour of Death](#)
(Crooked Lane \$26.99).

As Yuletide settles upon Gwenafwy Abbey, the rural Welsh convent's peace is shattered when Tiffany Reese, president of the Village Art Society, is found dead on the floor of the parish hall. Sister Agatha, whose interests lie more with reading and writing mystery stories than with making the abbey's world-renowned organic gouda, is not shy about inserting herself into the case. With the not-entirely-eager assistance of Father Selwyn, she begins her investigation.

Holiday Reading

Avon, Joy. [In Peppermint Peril](#)
(Crooked Lane \$26.99).

In the run-up to Christmas Eve, organizer of book-themed tea parties Callie Aspen and her lovable Boston terrier will have to conquer threefold trouble—a mysterious will, a missing heirloom and a dead body—to restore the festive spirit to their small town of Heart's Harbor, Maine where her great aunt runs Book Tea, a vintage tearoom where every sweet treat contains a bookish clue.

Colgan, Jenny. [Christmas on the Island](#)
(William Morrow \$14.99)

It's a time for getting cozy in front of whisky barrel wood fires, and enjoying a dram and a treacle pudding with the people you love—unless, of course, you've accidentally gotten pregnant by your ex-boss, and don't know how to tell him. In the season for peace and good cheer, will Flora find the nerve to reveal the truth to her nearest and dearest? Will her erstwhile co-parent Joel think she's the bearer of glad tidings—or is this Christmas going to be as bleak as the Highlands in midwinter? Meanwhile Saif, a doctor and refugee from war-torn Syria is trying to enjoy his first western Christmas with his sons on this remote island where he's been granted asylum. His wife, however, is still missing, and her absence hangs over what should be a joyful celebration. Can the family possibly find comfort and joy without her?

Cox, Natalie. [Mutts and Mistletoe](#)
(Putnam \$13)

Her boyfriend has left her for his personal trainer, her mother has absconded with her latest husband for the holidays, and--adding insult to (literal) injury--her London apartment has just been destroyed by a gas leak. Single, mildly concussed and temporarily homeless, Charlie realizes there's only one place to go: Cozy Canine Cottages, where she'll spend the season looking after her cousin Jez's doggy day care center. And if she's not exactly a dog person, well, no one has to know.

Frost, Jacqueline. [The Twelve Slays of Christmas](#)
(\$15.99).

When Holly White's fiancé cancels their Christmas Eve wedding with less than two weeks to go, Holly

heads home with a broken heart. Lucky for her, home in historic Mistletoe, Maine is magical during Christmastime—exactly what the doctor prescribed. Except her plan to drown her troubles in peppermints and snickerdoodles is upended when local grouch and president of the Mistletoe Historical Society Margaret Fenwick is bludgeoned and left in the sleigh display at Reindeer Games, Holly’s family tree farm.

Haines, Carolyn. [*A Gift of Bones*](#)
(St. Martin’s \$24.99)

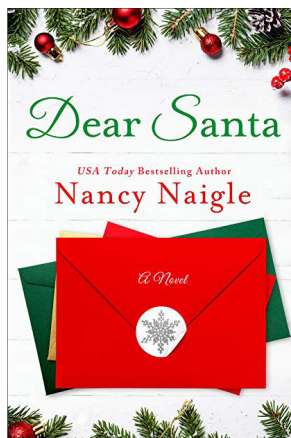
A much-needed break during the holiday season in Zinnia, Mississippi, is upended when a friend begs Sarah Booth for help rescuing a pregnant estranged family member. If humorous, Southern-set cozies with a paranormal twist are your literary catnip, Haines delivers all that and more.

Gray, Shelley Shepard. [*His Promise*](#)
(Avon \$7.99)

Grace King’s lonely Christmastime pet-sitting job is complicated by her budding relationship with John Michael Miller, the firefighter who broke her sister’s heart five years earlier. Gray excels at capturing the appeal of the Amish lifestyle while also demonstrating that the Amish – just like the rest of us – come in all different flavors.

Naigle, Nancy. [*Dear Santa*](#)
(St. Martin’s \$15.99)

Angela Carson has built her entire life around her family’s business: The Heart of Christmas. Ever since she was a young girl helping out her beloved grandmother Momma Grace in the holiday store, Angela dreamed of the day when she would be able to work there full time. Heart of Holiday has weathered over sixty tourist seasons, several major hurricanes, and the loss of Momma Grace, but now it is about to face its biggest challenge. Mega chain store Christmas Galore has arrived in the small North Carolina Town of Pleasant Sands, and Geoff Pasiley, who runs the corporation with his mother, seems hell-bent on driving Angela out of business. Can a small store that prides itself on quality and



not quantity survive? Inspired by the classic *You’ve Got Mail* (which in turn was inspired by *The Shop Around the Corner*), Naigle’s charming and cozy tale is a delightful celebration of the holidays that will warm the heart of even the Grinchiest of readers.

Roberts, Sheila. [*Winter at the Beach*](#)
(MIRA \$7.99)

When Mother Nature ruins her “Seaside with Santa” holiday event, Jenna Jones, the new proprietor of The Driftwood Inn, soon discovers, with the help of others, that life—and Christmas—is always good at the beach.

Schaler, Karen. [*Christmas Camp*](#)
(William Morrow \$14.99)

Haley Hanson’s idea of the perfect Christmas is escaping to the Caribbean to work so she can avoid all the traditional Christmas distractions. Over the years, she’s sacrificed her personal life to climb the corporate ladder at a prestigious Boston advertising agency. Now she just needs to land a coveted Christmas toy company account to make partner. But first, her boss, Larry, thinks she needs a holiday attitude adjustment, so he ships her off to a Christmas Camp at Holly Peak Inn to help her find her Christmas spirit. Arriving at the charming mountainside inn, Haley meets the owner’s handsome son, Jeff, and feels an instant spark, but resists the attraction, refusing to be distracted from her goal of doing all the required Christmas tasks as fast as possible so she can get back to work

Wilde, Lori. [*The Christmas Key*](#)
(Avon \$7.99)

Arriving in Twilight, Texas to keep a solemn promise to his best friend who died on the battlefield, Marine Mark Shepherd, keeping his real identity a secret, plays Santa to his friend’s orphan son while falling in love with his friend’s sister, Naomi Luther.

Teen Fiction

Boecker, Virginia. [*An Assassin’s Guide to Love and Treason*](#). (Little Brown \$17.99)

When her father is executed for being a Catholic, Lady Katherine disguises herself as a male Shakespearean actor as part of a plot to assassinate Elizabeth I and is unknowingly cast opposite Toby Ellis, a young spy for the queen. The publisher has billed this witty and thrilling historical novel of star-crossed as-

sassins as *The Other Boleyn Girl* meets *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* meets *Shakespeare in Love*.

Braswell, Liz. [Part of Your World](#)
(Disney Press \$17.99)

It has been five years since the infamous sea witch Ursula defeated the little mermaid Ariel and took King Triton's life in the process. A voiceless Ariel now rules over Atlantica while Ursula runs Prince Eric's kingdom on land. But when Ariel discovers her father might still be alive, she finds herself returning to a world – and a prince – she never imagined she would see again. A interesting twist on the Disney classic.

Heilig, Heidi. [For a Muse of Fire](#)
(Greenwillow \$17.99)

Sixteen-year-old Jetta, who possesses secret, forbidden powers, hopes her skill with puppets will help her gain access to a hidden spring that may cure her mental illness, but as rebellion seethes, daunting obstacles stand between her and her goal. This teen novel is garnering lots of critical praise including this snippet from *Kirkus*, which said “readers will be rewarded with vividly drawn settings reminiscent of Hawaii and Southeast Asia, exciting action scenes, and a complex protagonist who contends not only with her Malheur, but also ambition, anger, and family loyalty.

Legrand, Claire. [Sawkill Girls](#)
(Katherine Tegen Books \$17.99)

The Edgar award nominated author of *Winterspell* returns with the dark and scary tale of a lovelorn newcomer, a grief-stricken pariah and a privileged liar intersect on the island of Sawkill Rock, where they become unlikely defenders against an insidious monster that has been preying upon the girls in their community for decades.

Schaeffer, Rebecca. [Not Even Bones](#)
(HMH \$17.99)

Nita doesn't murder supernatural beings and sell their body parts on the internet—her mother does that. Nita just dissects the bodies after they've been “acquired.” Until her mom brings home a live specimen and Nita decides she wants out; dissecting a scared teenage boy is a step too far. But when she decides to save her mother's victim, she ends up sold in his place—because Nita herself isn't exactly “human.” She has the ability to alter her biology, a talent

that is priceless on the black market. Now on the other side of the bars, if she wants to escape, Nita must ask herself if she's willing to become the worst kind of monster. The author writes “I didn't want Nina to be the kind of character you'd want to be best friends with. I wrote her to be the kind of character you'd want to read about.” Schaeffer succeeded beyond her wildest dreams with this dark and intense debut novel that forces us to delve into moral complexity by asking ourselves exactly how we define good and evil. This is normally not the type of book I would every pickup, but once I started it, I could not put it down.



Weymouth, Laura E. [The Light Between Worlds](#)
(Harper Teen \$17.99)

Six years ago, sisters Evelyn and Philippa Hapwell were swept away to a strange and beautiful kingdom called the Woodlands, where they lived for years. But ever since they returned to their lives in post-WWII England, they have struggled to adjust. Ev desperately wants to return to the Woodlands, and Philippa just wants to move on. When Ev goes missing, Philippa must confront the depth of her sister's despair and the painful truths they've been running from. As the weeks unfold, Philippa wonders if Ev truly did find a way home, or if the weight of their worlds pulled her under.

Zoboi, Ibi. [Pride](#)
(Balzar + Bray \$17.99)

Zuri Benitez has pride. Brooklyn pride, family pride, and pride in her Afro-Latino roots. But pride might not be enough to save her rapidly gentrifying neighborhood from becoming unrecognizable. When the wealthy Darcy family moves in across the street, Zuri wants nothing to do with their two teenage sons, even as her older sister, Janae, starts to fall for the charming Ainsley. She especially can't stand the judgmental and arrogant Darius. Yet as Zuri and Darius are forced to find common ground, their initial dislike shifts into an unexpected understanding. National Book Award finalist Zoboi gives *Pride and Prejudice*, a fun and fresh makeover while retaining all the core elements that made Austen's novel a beloved classic.