

Midmonth BookNotes

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4014 N. Goldwater Blvd., Scottsdale, AZ 85251

(888) 560-9919 • (480) 947-2974

poisonedpen.com • sales@poisonedpen.com



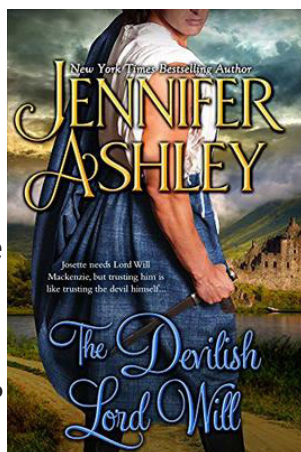
A Selection of Literary Valentines for Readers

Adkins, Mary. [When You Read This](#)
(Harper \$26.99)

Hired as an intern by PR maven Smith Simonyi to fill the spot formerly taken by Iris Massey who has died, Carl Van Synder discovers a blog written by Iris during her last six months on the job. Iris's last wish was for Smith to turn her blog posts into a book, but before Smith, with some help from Carl, can do this, he must first get permission from Iris's big sister Jade, a personal chef, who has been knocked sideways by the loss of her sister. Told in a series of e-mails, blog posts, online therapy submissions, text messages, legal correspondence, home-rental bookings, and other snippets of our virtual lives, *When You Read This* is a deft, captivating romantic comedy—funny, tragic, surprising, and bittersweet—that candidly reveals how we find new beginnings after loss. This beautifully bittersweet debut will find a ready audience with readers who loved Jo Jo Moyes' *Me Before You* or Cecelia Ahern's *P.S., I Love You*.

Ashley, Jennifer. [Devilish Lord Will Signed](#)
(Ivy \$12.99)

Will Mackenzie returns to Scotland determined to take back everything that they Mackenzie clan has lost when he crosses paths with Josette, his old love, who is on a quest of her own. Josette desperately needs Will's help, but can she trust him after what he did to her heart the last time, they were together? We have a limited number of



signed copies of the latest thrilling entry in Ashley's richly romantic Mackenzie series.

Ashley, Jennifer. [Murder in St Giles Signed](#)
(\$12.99) Captain Lacey #13.

Captain Lacey investigates a crime in the notorious slum of St. Giles while at the same time helping his wife when the late Lord Breckenridge's family threatens to take away her son. The 13th sterling addition to Ashley's Regency-set Captain Lacey mysteries has all the same ingredients – impeccable historical research, engaging characters, and a dash of romance - that fans of C.S. Harris Sebastian St. Cyr series love. Signed copies while they last.

Castellani, Christopher. [Leading Men](#)
(Penguin \$27)

In July of 1953, at a glittering party thrown by Truman Capote in Portofino, Italy, Tennessee Williams and his longtime lover Frank Merlo meet Anja Blomgren, a mysteriously taciturn young Swedish beauty and aspiring actress. Their encounter will go on to alter all of their lives. Ten years later, Frank revisits the tempestuous events of that fateful summer from his deathbed in Manhattan, where he waits anxiously for Tennessee to visit him one final time. Anja, now legendary film icon Anja Bloom, lives as a recluse in the present-day U.S., until a young man connected to the events of 1953 lures her reluctantly back into the spotlight after he discovers she possesses the only surviving copy of Williams's final play. Castellani neatly blends fact and fiction in this fascinating tale of literary what if set amidst the glamorous and glittering literary and film world of 1950s Italy.

Cole, Alyssa. [Unconditional Freedom](#)
(Kensington \$15.95)

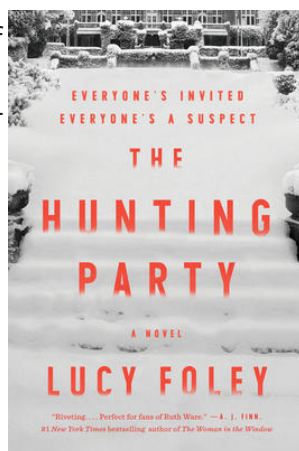
Daniel Cumberland, born free in Massachusetts, dreams of using the law to help his people end the night he is kidnapped and sold into slavery. After being rescued by the Loyal League, a secret organization of Black spies, Daniel is more willing to join the league as a way of fighting back against the Confederacy. Daniel is paired up with Janeta Sanchez on a mission to intercept Jefferson Davis and thwart European interference in the American Civil War, but what Daniel doesn't know is that Janeta, in an effort to save her imprisoned father, is actually a double agent working for the Confederates.

Cornick, Nicola. [The Woman in the Lake](#)
(Grand Central \$16.99)

Lady Isabella Gerard, a respectable member of Georgian society, orders her maid to take her new golden gown and destroy it, its shimmering beauty tainted by the actions of her brutal husband the night before. Three months later, Lord Gerard stands at the shoreline of the lake, looking down at a woman wearing the golden gown. As the body slowly rolls over to reveal her face, it's clear this was not his intended victim. 250 years later when a gown she stole from a historic home as a child is mysteriously returned to Fenella Brightwell, it begins to possess her in exactly the same way that it did as a girl. Soon the fragile new life Fen has created for herself away from her abusive ex-husband is threatened at its foundations by the gown's power over her until she can't tell what is real and what is imaginary.

Foley, Lucy. [Hunting Party](#)
(HarperCollins \$26.99)

For the last decade, a group of nine thirtysomething friends from Oxford have been spending New Year's together. This year Emma has chosen an exclusive and isolated estate in the Scottish Highlands as the locale where they can all relax and unwind. However, soon after they group arrives on December 30th, things begin unraveling. Old resentments and new grievances surface among the group while an unexpected blizzard leaves the estate cut



off from the rest of the world. Two days later one of their group is found dead, and according to the estate's manager, it doesn't look like an accident. Keep your friends close, the old adage goes. But just how close is too close? Historical novelist Foley makes a smooth transition to the world of thrillers with this claustrophobic, chilling book that packs enough twists and turns for at least three ordinary suspense novels. The author skillfully shifts the point of view between a half dozen different characters so instead of just one unreliable narrator, the reader now has an assortment of choices. Some critics have made comparisons between *The Hunting Party* and Agatha Christie's mysteries (possibly for the twisty ending), but I think the book is more in the darker psychological literary vein of Ruth Rendell or Patricia Highsmith.

Gloss, Susan. [Curiosities](#)
(Harper \$15.99)

Nell Parker and her husband Josh have been trying to have a baby of their own for years. When Nell's last pregnancy ends in the second trimester, Josh thinks Nell needs something else – like a job - to focus on other than a baby that may never be. However, jobs for those with a PhD in Art History are few and far between until Nell sees the ad seeking a director for a new nonprofit called the Mansion Hill Artists' Colony. The colony is the brainchild of the late, unconventional society dame Betsy Barrett, who left behind her vast fortune and a killer collection of modern art to establish an artist-in-residency program to be run out of her lakeside mansion. The executor of Betsy's estate simply hands Nell a set of house keys and wishes her luck, leaving her to manage the mansion and the eccentric personalities of the artists who live there.

Guhrke, Laura Lee. [Governess Gone Rogue](#)
(Avon \$7.99)

Disguising herself as a man to score her dream job as the tutor for James St. Clare's, the Earl of Kenyon's, wild young sons, Amanda Leighton, when her deception is exposed, vows to teach the Earl some lessons in love, seduction, and second chances. At first Jamie isn't sure what to make of his new employee, until he discovers beneath the ill-fitting suits is a woman!

Harper, Karen. [American Duchess](#)
(Harper \$26.99)

It was billed as "The Wedding of the Century." On a cold November day in 1895, a carriage approaches St

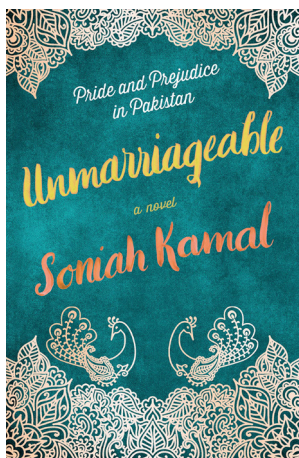
Thomas Episcopal Church on New York City's Fifth Avenue. Massive crowds surge forward, awaiting their glimpse of heiress Consuelo Vanderbilt. Just 18, the beautiful bride has not only arrived late, but in tears, yet her marriage to the aloof Duke of Marlborough proceeds. Bullied into the wedding by her indomitable mother, Alva, Consuelo loves another. But a deal was made, trading some of the vast Vanderbilt wealth for a title and prestige, and Consuelo, bred to obey, realizes she must make the best of things. At Blenheim Palace, Consuelo is confronted with an overwhelming list of duties, including producing an "heir and a spare," but her relationship with the duke quickly disintegrates. Consuelo finds an inner strength, charming everyone from debutantes to diplomats including Winston Churchill, as she fights for women's suffrage. And when she takes a scandalous leap, can she hope to attain love at last...?

Jones, Sherry. [Josephine Baker's Last Dance](#) (Gallery \$16)

From her young life mired in poverty and servitude in America, to her rise to fame as the dancer in the "banana skirt," Josephine Baker lived her life to the absolute fullest. From 1920s Paris to 1960s Washington, Baker fought discrimination on stage and in real life becoming a member of the French Resistance during World War II as well as an activist for Civil Rights while at the same time risking everything for love. Jones' extensive research into Baker's life allows her to effectively fill in the gaps that are missing from history books.

Kamal, Sibugag. [Unmarriageable](#) (Random House \$27)

Imagine *Pride and Prejudice* translated to modern day Pakistan. Well, Kamal has already done all the heavy literary lifting for you with her latest elegantly executed, wryly witty novel. After their family's decline in fortune, Alys Binat happily settles for life as an English teacher, where she introduces her young female students to Jane Austen and her other literary heroes and hopes to inspire the girls to dream of more. However, the arrival of an invitation to the biggest wedding in years convinces Mrs. Binat that her daughters'



romantic fortunes are about to change. On the first night of the festivities, Alys's lovely older sister, Jena, catches the eye of Fahad "Bungles" Bingla, the wildly successful—and single—entrepreneur. But Bungles's friend Valentine Darsee is clearly unimpressed by the Binat family. Alys accidentally overhears his unflattering assessment of her and quickly dismisses him and his snobbish ways. As the days of lavish wedding parties unfold, the Binats wait breathlessly to see if Jena will land a proposal—and Alys begins to realize that Darsee's brusque manner may be hiding a very different man from the one she saw at first glance.

Kendrick, Beth. [In Dog We Trust Signed](#) (Berkley \$15)

Part-time dog walker and full-time laundry and linen rental business owner Jocelyn Hillier never expected that when cranky, wealthy, and incredibly frugal Mr. Allardyce passed on, he would name her in his will. Jocelyn certainly didn't expect she would become co-trustee overseeing the considerable estate Mr. Allardyce left behind for his three beloved Labrador show dogs. However, living in a mansion in Black Dog Bay does have its benefits for Jocelyn until her late employer's estranged son Liam turns up in the small Delaware seaside town with every intention of contesting his father's will. Now it seems Jocelyn's life really has gone to the dogs but, truth be told, she really wouldn't have it any other way. Kendrick delivers another winning entry in her humorous and heartfelt Black Dog Bay series (where America goes to get over their romantic breakups) that will just the ticket for anyone who likes their romances served up with plenty of deliciously acerbic wit.

Kinsella, Sophie. [I Owe You One](#) (Random \$27)

Struggling to hold her late father's business together in spite of her less-motivated siblings, Fixie Farr cashes in an IOU from Seb Marlowe, an executive from an investment firm for whom Fixie did a favor, to find employment for her childhood crush Ryan Chalk-er. The best-selling author of the Shopaholic series returns with another fun and flirty contemporary romance about a woman who has always put everyone else's concerns ahead of her own who finally gets the happiness she deserves by putting herself first for a change.

Kleypas, Lisa. [Devil's Daughter](#)
(Avon \$7.99)

RITA award-winning Kleypas's romances are known for their lush writing and luscious sensuality, and the author delivers both in buckets in her latest impeccably crafted historical that brings characters together from her popular Wallflower and Ravenel series. The novel's heroine, Phoebe, Lady Clare, faces a personal dilemma when West Ravenel offers to give her the benefit of his hard-won knowledge of estate management. Phoebe knows it is up to her to keep her late husband Henry's own estate in good financial order until her sons come of age. However, Phoebe also knows just how much West tormented Henry when they two were boys at boarding school, and she is loath to accept any help from someone, who made her husband's life miserable when they were young. Phoebe's compromise is to allow West to give her some much needed farming tips but to insist he keeps his kisses to himself. Let's just see how long that lasts...



Knight, Renee. [The Secretary](#)
(Harper \$26.99)

Christine Butcher has served as a personal assistant to Mina Appleton for twenty years sacrificing her own personal life – including her husband and child – in order to be the perfect employee. Not only does Mina expect that Christine keep things running smoothly at work and home for her by anticipating her every need, Mina demands complete loyalty from Christine right down to keeping all of Mina's secrets. But Mina is about to discover that there is a fine line between obedience and obsession. And the old saying about a woman scorned is nothing compared to what can ensue when a devoted minion feels like they have been betrayed.

Letts, Elizabeth. [Finding Dorothy](#)
(Random House \$28)

Maud Gage Baum promised her husband Frank that she would always protect his greatest literary creation: Dorothy. So, when the seventy-seven-year-old Maud learns that MGM is adapting her late husband's book *The Wizard of Oz* into a movie, Maud

finagles her way into the set because she is the only person who can help the producers stay true to the spirit of the book—because she's the only one left who knows its secrets. In between helping protect her husband's vision as well as looking out for a young Judy Garland, who reminds Maud in many ways of Dorothy, Maud reflects back on her own life. The author of two *New York Times* bestselling nonfiction books, *The Eighty-Dollar Champion* and *The Perfect Horse*, Elizabeth Letts is a master at discovering and researching a rich historical story and transforming it into a page-turner. *Finding Dorothy* is the result of Letts's journey into the amazing lives of Frank and Maud Baum. Written as fiction but based closely on the truth, Elizabeth Letts's new book tells a story of love, loss, inspiration, and perseverance, set in America's heartland.

Liardet, Frances. [We Must Be Brave](#)
(Putnam \$27)

December 1940. In the disorderly evacuation of Southampton, England, newly married Ellen Parr finds a small child asleep on the backseat of an empty bus. No one knows who little Pamela is. Ellen professed not to want children with her older husband, and when she takes Pamela into her home and rapidly into her heart, she discovers that this is true: Ellen doesn't want children. She wants only Pamela. Three golden years pass as the Second World War rages on. Then one day Pamela is taken away, screaming. Ellen is no stranger to sorrow, but when she returns to the quiet village life she's long lived, she finds herself asking: In a world changed by war, is it fair to wish for an unchanged heart? In the spirit of *We Were the Lucky Ones* and *The Light Between the Oceans*, here is a novel about courage and kindness, hardship and friendship, and the astonishing power of love.

Lipman, Elinor. [Good Riddance](#)
(HMH \$25)

Daphne Maritch doesn't quite know what to make of the heavily annotated high school yearbook she inherits from her mother, June Winter Maritch, who held this relic dear. In a fit of decluttering (the yearbook did not, Daphne concluded, "spark joy"), she discards it when she moves to a small New York City apartment. But when it's found in the recycling bin by a busybody neighbor/documentary filmmaker, the yearbook's mysteries—not to mention her own family's—take on a whole new urgency, and Daphne finds herself entangled in a series of events both

poignant and absurd. Lipman's winningly witty and wryly romantic novels make her the true literary heir of Barbara Pym not to mention Jane Austen.

Long, Julie Anne. [Lady Derring Takes a Lover](#) (Avon \$7.99)

Upon discovering that her late and not very lamented husband the Earl of Derring has left her nothing but a mountain of debts, Delilah Swanpoole is at her wit's end. After meeting with her husband's attorney, however, Delilah learns there is one unencumbered asset to which she can lay claim: a ramshackle building down near the seedier part of London's docks. Now Delilah – with some help from her husband's mistress, who has been left equally high and dry by his death - vows to turn the ruin into London's newest and most exclusive boarding houses. Delilah is delighted when guests begin booking rooms, but what she doesn't realize is the one of them – notorious Custom Agent Captain Tristan Hardy – has his own reasons for wanting to stay with her. RITA award-winning Long launches a fabulous new series with this wickedly funny and warmly romantic Regency-set historical. If you love historicals by authors such as Loretta Chase and Eloisa James, you can't afford to miss this treasure.



Lungberg, Sofia. [The Red Address Book](#) (HMH \$25)

When Doris Alm was a girl, she was given an address book by her father, and ever since she has carefully documented everyone she met and loved throughout the years. Looking through the little book now, a 96-year-old Doris sees the many crossed-out names of people long gone and is struck by the urge to put pen to paper. In writing down the stories of her colorful past—working as a maid in Sweden, modeling in Paris during the 30s, fleeing to Manhattan at the dawn of the Second World War—can she help her American grandniece Jenny, haunted by a difficult childhood, unlock the secrets of their family and finally look to the future? And whatever became of Allan, the love of Doris's life? This charming, sweetly romantic story, which may remind some readers of another recent unexpected bestseller called *A Man Called Ove*, became a global literary sensation that

wound up being published in 32 different countries around the world.

McKinlay, Jenn. [The Good Ones Signed](#) (Berkley \$7.99)

Hired by Maisy Kelly to convert her late aunt's Victorian house into a romance bookstore, architect and single father Ryder Copeland finds his plans of leaving this small town behind thwarted by his attraction to this shy, curly haired professor. McKinlay launches a new contemporary romance series on a high note, with this expertly crafted tale that showcases her flair for creating compelling characters and lively writing seasoned with just the right dash of dry wit. And the icing on this scrumptious cupcake of a book is the myriad of references to classic and current romance novels and authors that McKinlay deftly slips into the story.

Mihalik, Jessie. [Polaris Rising](#) (HarperCollins \$16.99)

After trying to escape an arranged marriage, Royal Consortium Princess Ada von Hasenberg, the fifth of six children whose family is one of the High Houses that head the Royal Consortium and rule the universe, is caught and thrown into prison onboard a spaceship with the only other person in the galaxy whose bounty is equal to the of hers: rogue soldier and rumored murderer Marcus Loch a.k.a. Devil of Fornax Zero. When Ada's fiancé Richard Rockhurst shows up intent on springing her from her cell and taking her back, Ada knows deep in her soul that her only choice is to run. But in order to successfully escape, Ada must make a deal with a devil known as Marcus. This fun debut deftly mingles space opera sci fi with a generous dollop of sexy romance.

Postorino, Rosella. [At the Wolf's Table](#) (Flatiron \$26.99)

What would you do to survive during a war? That is the gut-wrenching premise underlying this fascinating historical novel. Germany, 1943: Twenty-six-year-old Rosa Sauer's parents are gone, and her husband Gregor is far away, fighting on the front lines of World War II. Impoverished and alone, she makes the fateful decision to leave war-torn Berlin to live with her in-laws in the countryside, thinking she'll find refuge there. But one morning, the SS come to tell her she has been conscripted to be one of Hitler's tasters: three times a day, she and nine other women go to his secret headquarters, the Wolf's Lair, to eat

his meals before he does. Forced to eat what might kill them, the tasters begin to divide into The Fanatics, those loyal to Hitler, and the women like Rosa who insist they aren't Nazis, even as they risk their lives every day for Hitler's. As secrets and resentments grow, this unlikely sisterhood reaches its own dramatic climax, as everyone begins to wonder if they are on the wrong side of history. The author was inspired to write this gripping novel after reading an Italian newspaper article in 2014 about Margot Wolk, the last living of Hitler's food tasters. After the war, Wolk had never told anyone about what she did, but now as she approached the end of her life (she was 96) she wanted to make it public. Postorino tracked Wolk down to Berlin a few months after the article appeared only to discover Wolk had passed away. So instead of the nonfiction book Postorino first envisioned, she decided to tell Wolk's story in the form of a historical novel.

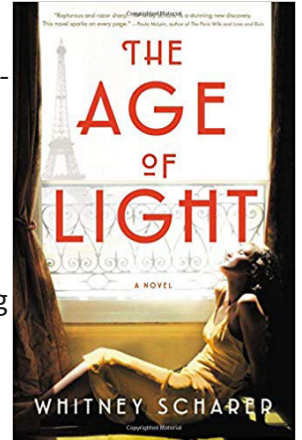
Santopolo, Jill. [More Than Words](#) (Putnam \$25)

Acclaimed children's and YA author Santopolo branched out into adult fiction with her *NYT* best-selling novel *The Light We Lost*. Now she is back with another emotionally wrenching tale (keep a box of Kleenex handy) about grief, loss, love, and self-discovery. Nina Gregory has always been a good daughter. Raised by her father, owner of New York City's glamorous Gregory Hotels, Nina was taught that family, reputation, and legacy are what matter most. And Tim--her devoted boyfriend and best friend since childhood--feels the same. But when Nina's father dies, he leaves behind a secret that shocks Nina to her core. As her world falls apart, Nina begins to see the men in her life--her father, her boyfriend, and unexpectedly, her boss, Rafael--in a new light. Soon Nina finds herself caught between the world she loves, and a passion that could upend everything.

Scharer, Whitney. [The Age of Light](#) (Little Brown \$28)

This incandescent debut begins in the 1960s with Lee Miller living in the English countryside about to host a dinner party for some friends and her editor at *Vogue*. By now, Miller has been reduced to writing the occasional cooking piece for the magazine, but her drinking has just about put an end to even that when her editor offers her one final assignment: write about her years spent in Paris with the famous photographer Man Ray. As Miller ruminates on her

own past, the reader is whisked back to Paris in the 1930s as then famous American *Vogue* model Miller arrives in the City of Light determined to become the person taking the pictures rather than the person standing in front of the camera. Initially Man Ray refuses to give her lessons, but Miller finesses her way into becoming his assistant, where she begins learning everything she can about the art and craft of photography; a journey that will take Miller from the streets of Paris to the horrors of the concentration camps of World War II and finally to the green quiet of the British countryside. If you love historical novels by authors such as Paula McLain or Melanie Benjamin, you can't afford to miss this stunning novel.



Shallcross, Lei. [The Beast's Heart](#) (Penguin \$15)

Long ago cursed with a wretched existence, the Beast prowls the dusty hallways of his ruined chateau with only magical, unseen servants to keep him company--until a weary traveler disturbs his isolation. Bewitched by the man's dreams of his beautiful daughter, Isabeau, the Beast devises a plan to lure her to the chateau. There, Isabeau courageously exchanges her father's life for her own and agrees to remain with the Beast for a year. But even as their time together weaves its own spell, the Beast finds winning Isabeau's love is only the first impossible step in breaking free from the curse. Shallcross's lushly written version of the classic romance of *Beauty and the Beast* is set in seventeenth-century France and is told from the viewpoint of the Beast himself.

Willig, Lauren. [The English Wife](#) (\$17.99)

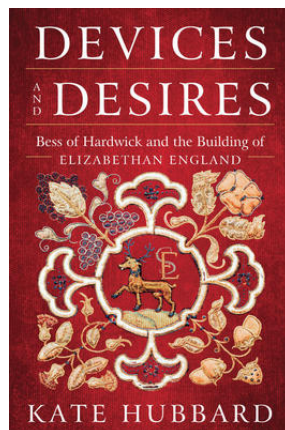
When Bayard Van Duyvil and his wife Annabelle are found dead on the night of their Shakespeare ball, everyone believes it to be a case of murder/ suicide. After the way Annabelle was carrying on with the architect who designed the couple's estate, could anyone really blame Bay for taking matters into his own hands? However, Janie Van Duyvil, Bay's sister, knows this simply can't be true. Teaming up with shabby around the edges journalist James Burke, Janie is determined to discover the truth about what

happened and clear her brother's name. Reminiscent of those splendid old gothics written by Barbara Michaels, Willig handles her dual timeline plot in *The English Wife* with perfect aplomb, and her vividly evoked historical setting and mesmerizing plot is more than enough to keep readers enthralled long past their normal bedtimes. Fans of Mary Stewart will also appreciate the graceful literary tip of her cap that Willig gracefully extends to that classic author.

Nonfiction

Hubbard, Kate. [Devices and Desires](#)
(HarperCollins \$29.99)

Like Melanie Griffith in *Working Girl*, Bess of Harwick had a head for business and a body for sin (well, at least enough of a sinful body to land four different husbands). Rising from humble beginnings, Bess parlayed her marriages and her business acumen into a family fortune along the way commissioning a number of glorious homes—the last and greatest built as a widow in her 70s—and was deeply involved in matters of the court, including the custody of Mary Queen of Scots. According to Hubbard, the problem with past accounts of Bess's life is that either they tended to cast her as some kind of man-eating monster—"a woman of masculine understanding and conduct, proud, furious, selfish and unfeeling"—or they branded her as a misunderstood and much maligned lady. The truth—like so much in life—lies somewhere in between. Hubbard draws on more than 230 of Bess's letters, including correspondence with the Queen and her councilors, fond (and furious) missives between her husbands and children, and notes sharing titillating court gossip. The result is a rich, compelling portrait of a true feminist icon centuries ahead of her time—a complex, formidable, and decidedly modern woman captured in full as never before.



Mizrahi, Isaac. [I.M.](#)
(Flatiron 28.99)

If your only knowledge of fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi comes from watching *Project Runway: All Stars*, you are in for a treat with this fascinating autobiography. From his childhood growing up in an ultracon-

servative Syrian Jewish home in NYC to becoming a celebrated designer dressing some of the biggest names in movies and television, Mizrahi manages to dish the dirt while still remaining positive and friendly towards those in his life. Mizrahi is also quite open and honest about his own struggles with mental health issues as well as the mistakes he made along the way to becoming a fashion celebrity.

Nelson, James Carl. [The Polar Bear Expedition](#)
(HarperCollins \$28.99)

Who knew that America attempted to invade Russia during the final year of World War I? I certainly didn't, but James Nelson did and it is the subject of this fascinating book. In August of 1918, 5,000 U.S. Army soldiers, nicknamed "The Polar Bears," were sent to Northern Russia to combat the threat of the newly formed Soviet Union's Red Army as well as become a bulwark against the German soldiers still fighting the war. Temperatures plummeted to sixty below zero. Their guns and their flesh froze. The Bolsheviks, camouflaged in white, advanced in waves across the snow like ghosts. The Polar Bears, hailing largely from Michigan, heroically waged a courageous campaign in the brutal, frigid subarctic of northern Russia for almost a year. Ten years after they left, a contingent of veterans returned to Russia to recover the remains of more than a hundred of their fallen brothers and lay them to rest in Michigan, where a monument honoring their service still stands. Nelson draws upon firsthand accounts of this tragic campaign to give readers a vivid sense of exactly what this band of "Polar Bears" endured.