

Midmonth BookNotes

Volume 8 Issue 12 December, 2021

4014 N. Goldwater Blvd., Scottsdale, AZ 85251

(888) 560-9919 • (480) 947-2974

poisonedpen.com • sales@poisonedpen.com



Happy Holidays, Happy Reading!

Cozy Corner

Bradford, Laura. [A Plus One for Murder](#)
(Berkley \$8.99)

When travel apps and internet-savvy customers spell the death knell for her travel planning business, Emma Westlake is at a loss as to what to do next for a career. Then an elderly friend suggests Emma try to get paid for doing something she's really good at—being a companion. Emma thinks it's a crazy idea until requests start pouring in. Big Max from down the block wants her to act as his wingman at the local senior center's upcoming dance, nurse practitioner Stephanie needs a workout partner, and writer Brian Hill asks Emma to be his cheering section at an open mic night. But when Brian, a "journalist" who has pretty much ticked off at least half the people in the audience, steps up to the mic and clears his throat to speak, he promptly drops dead. Since Emma is one of the last people to see him alive, she becomes an immediate suspect. Now she'll have to cozy up to a killer to save both her own skin and her new business.

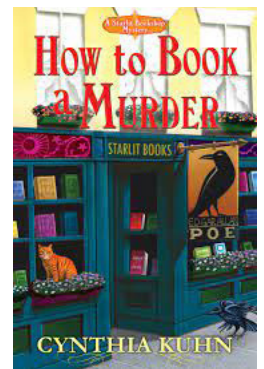
Byrne, M.V. [Isabel Puddles Investigates](#)
(Kensington \$15.95)

When she is hired by an extravagant recluse, newly licensed PI Isabel Puddles is plunged into the strange world of Rust Belt royalty and the Memorial Day disappearance of a handsome young heir - a case that

places her own life in danger. *Kirkus* ended their rave review with "A mellow mystery, down-home characters, and touches of humor add up to a very pleasant read." Byrne launched this charmingly cozy series with [Meet Isabel Puddles](#) (Kensington \$15.95)

Kuhn, Cynthia. [How to Book a Murder](#)
(Crooked Lane \$26.99)

To help save her family's floundering Colorado bookstore, Starlit Bookshop, which is being run by her sister Lucy, newly minted Ph.D. Emma Starrs agrees to plan a mystery-themed dinner party for her wealthy, well-connected high school classmate Tabitha Baxter. It's a delightful evening of cocktails and conjecture until Tabitha's husband, Tip—hosting the affair in the guise of Edgar Allan Poe's detective C. Auguste Dupin—winds up murdered. Now the question is if Emma, Lucy, and their famous mystery writer aunt Nora, can discover who in the artistic community of Silvercrest has murder on the mind.



Oliver, Katie. [Pride, Prejudice, and Peril](#)
(Berkley \$8.99)

Phaedra Brighton is perfectly content with her life of lecturing college students, gossiping with her

best friends, and dreaming of Mr. Darcy. As a young, respected (if somewhat peculiar) English professor, her expertise lies in all things Jane Austen—but she knows that the closest she'll ever get to being a real-life Elizabeth Bennet is in her dreams. When *Who Wants to Marry Mr. Darcy*, a new reality TV show, starts filming at her best friend Charlene's estate, Phaedra is intrigued. And when the producer asks her to lend her Austenian knowledge as a consultant on the show, she's over the moon. But on the first day of filming, when Charlene's new husband is found electrocuted and Charlene herself is accused of the crime, Phaedra comes crashing back to reality. Now with no Mr. Darcy in sight to help her, it is up to Phaedra to find the killer before her best friend ends up permanently behind bars. With murder on the syllabus and her best friend in dire straits, there's no Mr. Darcy around to help Phaedra—she'll have to get to the bottom of this mystery herself.

Ross, Barbara. [Jane Darrowfield and the Madwoman Next Door](#) (Kensington \$8.99)

When her new neighbor Megan, who has been having blackouts, hearing voices and feeling like someone's following her, vanishes into thin air, Jane Darrowfield decides to "help" the police look into the ambitious young lawyer's past only to discover there are some things that should stay buried. Agatha award-winning Ross launched this new series with [Jane Darrowfield, Professional Busybody](#) (Kensington \$7.99) which I think is one of the best titles ever for a cozy!

Fiction, Mysteries, Romance and More

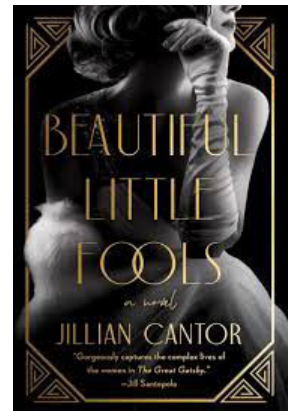
Bradford, Barbara Taylor. [A Man of Honor](#) (St. Martin's \$29.99)

Opening five years before the start of *A Woman of Substance*, *A Man of Honor* begins with 13-year-old Blackie O'Neill (whom fans of Bradford's Harte Family Saga will recognize as Emma Harte's early mentor Shane Patrick Desmond O'Neill) facing an uncertain future in rural County Kerry. Orphaned and alone, he has just buried his sister, Bronagh, and must leave his home to set sail for England, in search of a better life with his mother's brother in Leeds. There, he learns his trade as a navvy, amid the grand buildings and engineering triumphs of one of England's most prosperous cities, and starts to dream of greater things... And then, high on the Yorkshire moors, in the mists

of a winter morning he meets a kitchen maid called Emma Harte. Bradford published her first novel, *A Woman of Substance*, in 1979 and it went on to become a New York Times best-seller remaining on the list for 43 weeks!

Cantor, Jillian. [Beautiful Little Fools](#) (HarperCollins \$26.99)

First published in 1925, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* has been called the "great American novel." In *Beautiful Little Fools*, Jillian Cantor offers her own fascinating take on this iconic book using the viewpoints of three different women: Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, and Catherine McCoy. All three ladies are potential suspects in the murder of millionaire Jay Gatsby, who was found shot to death in the swimming pool of his estate in West Egg, N.Y. Detective Frank Charles' only clue that the killer was not George Wilson, a mechanic who had been led to believe that Gatsby was responsible for his wife Myrtle's death, is a diamond hairpin left at the scene of the crime. But to which woman did it belong? Cantor's flair for nuanced characterization shines in this compelling historical novel as she deftly illuminates the lives and loves of this trio of women and how each of their paths intersected with that of the enigmatic Gatsby. From the book's impeccably realized historical setting to the elegant ease of Cantor's writing, everything about this dazzlingly original take on a Jazz Age classic is spot-on.



Diliberto, Gioia. [Coco at the Ritz](#) (Pegasus \$25.95)

Though her name today is synonymous with elegance and chic, the iconic Coco Chanel had a complicated dark side, and in late August 1944, as World War II drew to a close, she was arrested and interrogated on charges of treason to France. In this brilliantly insightful and compulsively readable novel from the author of *I am Madame X*, Gioia Diliberto explores the motivations of this complex woman and portrays the gripping battle of wits that could have been her interrogation. Was Chanel truly a collaborator? Diliberto ably depicts Coco, who was set free after Win-

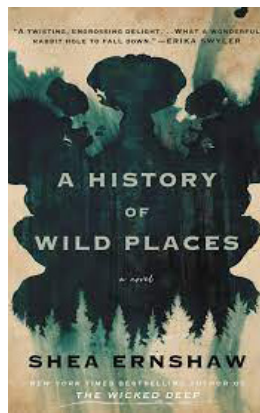
ston Churchill intervened, as a formidable woman of independence, massive wealth, and steely nature. From the opaque historical record emerges a satisfying take on a complicated woman.” (PW)

Dweylde, Saranna. [It Happened One Midnight](#) (Kensington \$15.95)

To keep her meddling grandmothers (and Ever After, Missouri’s resident fairy godmothers) Petunia, Jonquil, and Bluebonnet at bay, novelist romance novelist Juniper Blossom introduces her best friend Tomas as her “fiancé” until one kiss for show changes everything, making her wonder if happily ever after is possible for two people who aren’t on the same page when it comes to love. The latest installment in Dweylde’s Fairy Godmothers Inc. series delivers plenty of love, laughs, and just the right pinch of magical whimsy.

Ernshaw, Shea. [A History of Wild Places](#) (Atria \$27)

Travis Wren has an unusual talent for locating missing people. Hired by families as a last resort, he requires only a single object to find the person who has vanished. When he takes on the case of Maggie St. James—a well-known author of dark, macabre children’s books—he’s led to a place many believed to be only a legend. Called Pastoral, this reclusive community was founded in the 1970s by like-minded people searching for a simpler way of life. By all accounts, the commune shouldn’t exist anymore and soon after Travis stumbles upon it...he disappears. Just like Maggie St. James. Years later, Theo, a lifelong member of Pastoral, discovers Travis’s abandoned truck beyond the border of the community. No one is allowed in or out, not when there’s a risk of bringing a disease—rot—into Pastoral. Unraveling the mystery of what happened reveals secrets that Theo, his wife, Calla, and her sister, Bee, keep from one another. Secrets that prove their perfect, isolated world isn’t as safe as they believed—and that darkness takes many forms. “YA author Ernshaw (*Winterwood*) makes her adult debut with a lurid, fast-paced story of a reclusive commune.” (PW)



Glass, Seressia. [The Love Con](#) (Berkley \$16)

In order to join the reality show competition *Cosplay of No Way*, gamer Kenya Davenport is required to have a significant other. So Kenya, who is definitely single at the moment, asks her best friend Cameron Lassiter to pretend to be her fake boyfriend for the show. However, what starts out as a fauxmance between Kenya and Cameron, quickly turns very real. The problem is that if Kenya decides to act upon her feelings, it could cost her the best friend she’s ever had. LJ called this a “sassy, sexy romantic comedy that explores geek culture and issues in that community regarding diversity.”

Hughes, Lorena. [The Spanish Daughter](#) (Kensington \$15.95)

As a child in Spain, Puri always knew her passion for chocolate was inherited from her father. But it’s not until his death that she learns of something else she’s inherited—a cocoa estate in Vinces, Ecuador, a town nicknamed “París Chiquito.” Eager to claim her birthright and filled with hope for a new life after the devastation of World War I, she and her husband Cristóbal set out across the Atlantic Ocean. But it soon becomes clear someone is angered by Puri’s claim to the estate. When a mercenary sent to murder her aboard the ship accidentally kills Cristóbal instead, Puri dons her husband’s clothes and assumes his identity, hoping to stay safe while she searches for the truth of her father’s legacy in Ecuador. PW said this historical novel is “as addictive as chocolate,” while *The Washington Post* offered a similar tantalizing take saying “A lush Ecuadoran cacao plantation is the setting for this imaginative historical drama filled with sibling rivalry and betrayals. ***Threaded throughout this dramatic family saga are descriptions of cocoa-making that will leave your mouth watering for chocolate.***”

Kane, Darby. [The Replacement Wife](#) (HarperCollins \$16.99)

Elisa Wright is a mom and wife, living a nice, quiet life in a nice, quiet town. She’s also convinced her brother-in-law is a murderer. Josh has one dead wife and one missing fiancée, and though he grieved for them he starts dating someone new. Elisa fears for that woman’s safety, and she desperately wants to know what happened to her friend, Josh’s missing fiancée.

Searching for clues means investigating her own family. And she doesn't like what she finds. A laptop filled with incriminating information. Other women. But when Elisa becomes friends with Josh's new girlfriend and starts to question things she thinks are true, Elisa wonders if the memories of a horrible incident a year ago have finally pushed her over the edge and Josh is really innocent. With so much at stake, Elisa fights off panic attacks and a strange illness. Is it a breakdown or something more? The race is on to get to the truth before another disappearance because there's a killer in the family...or is there?

Kapelke-Dale. [The Ballerinas](#)
(St. Martin's \$27.99)

Returning to the Palais Garnier Opera House to choreograph the ballet that will kickstart her career—and finally make things right with her former friends and fellow dancers Lindsay and Margaux—ballerina Delphine Leger quickly discovers that some things have changed—and some secrets can't stay buried forever. There has been lots of pre-publication buzz about this debut novel, which is billed as *Dare Me* meets *Black Swan* meets *Luckiest Girl Alive* by its publisher, from Kapelke-Dale, a contributor to *Vanity Fair* and co-author of the memoir *Graduates in Wonderland*. *Bookpage* calls it “an unflinching, unapologetically feminist glimpse into the world of professional ballet,” while *PW* said “Kapelke-Dale nicely explores the power of female friendship, a woman's relationship with her body, and what it truly means to be seen.”

Kelly, Julia. [The Last Dance of the Debutante](#)
(Gallery \$27)

In 1958, the last year debutantes are to be presented in court to Queen Elizabeth II, Lily Nichols, while attending a glittering and grueling string of countless parties and balls, discovers a devastating secret about her entire family, forcing her to choose between her legacy or her own happiness. “Kelly's descriptions of the emotionally exhausting business of doing and wearing the right thing elicit empathy for characters whose circumstances depend on finding a husband. Kelly succeeds at bringing a bygone world to life.” (*PW*)

McMurray, Kate. [What the Cat Dragged In](#)
(Sourcebooks \$14.99)

While volunteering for a feral cat organization, Whitman Street Cat Café employee Paige Danvers falls for

a cute guy named Josh and realizes too late that it is her boss's brother, but is in too deep to walk away. Adorable cats and a hot hero, what more could readers ask for in a rom-com?

Natsukawa, Sosuke. [The Cat Who Saved Books](#)
(HarperCollins \$24.99)

This charming book was a No. 1 bestseller in Japan, and won the Shogakukan Fiction Prize. When a talking cat named Tiger demands that high school student Rintaro Natsuki help save books with him, Rintaro and Tiger embark on an amazing journey, liberating books from their neglectful owners and meeting a colorful cast of character along the way. “Lovers of traditional literature and books themselves will find validation in the lessons Rintaro learns (and teaches), while the story's structure and fanciful nature may hold appeal for a young adult audience more familiar with the conventions of gaming. Tiger gets the best lines of dialogue but...why not? Cats, books, young love, and adventure: catnip for a variety of readers!” (*Kirkus*)



Pellegrino, Amanda. [Smile and Look Pretty](#)
(Park Row \$16.99)

When four assistants to the most powerful men in the media and entertainment industries start an anonymous blog detailing their experiences, they find newfound fame and must keep their identities from being revealed while contending with what happens when you try and change the world. “Pellegrino shines in this intelligent and engaging debut about four friends who work as assistants in various high-profile industries, written in the tell-all tone of *The Devil Wears Prada* with a conceit reminiscent of *Gossip Girl*.” (*PW*)

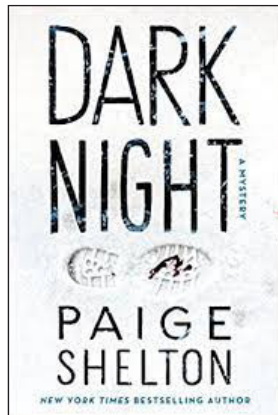
Saunders, Kate. [The Mystery of the Sorrowful Maiden](#) (Bloomsbury \$26)

In the spring of 1853, respectable vicar's widow turned part-time professional sleuth Laetitia Rodd takes a case that plunges her into the scandalous world of the theater where she becomes embroiled in family politics and rivalries that put the Capulets

and Montagues to shame.” Well-defined characters, an intricate plot, and a beguiling narrator make this a winner. Fans of Victorian historicals will be pleased.” (PW)

Shelton, Paige. [Dark Night](#)
(St. Martin’s \$26.99)

The dreaded “census man,” seemingly innocuous, is an unwelcome presence to those members of the isolated town of Benedict, Alaska, who would prefer to keep their business to themselves. Meanwhile, thriller writer Beth Rivers has received her own unexpected company: her mother Mill Rivers. The last Beth heard, Mill had gone underground in the lower forty-eight, in search of Beth’s kidnapper, and Beth can’t help but be a little alarmed at her appearance: If Mill was able to track down her daughter, who knows who else might be able to? Beth doesn’t have time to ponder this for long, after a battered woman stumbles into the town bar one night, and her husband is found dead the next morning. Suspicions immediately turn to the census man, but when he, too, goes missing, everyone in Benedict—including the police chief—is suspected, and Beth and Mill must work to uncover the truth. *Kirkus* loved the latest in Shelton’s series saying “A character-driven mystery in a near-mystical setting, a land of stark contrasts and self-reliant denizens,” while *Bookpage* chimed in with “Though she’s best known for her cozy mysteries, Shelton displays a talent for ratcheting up the tension in this series. You’ll want to bundle up against the cold dread, suspense and tension that permeate this mystery.”



Staub, Wendi Corsi. [Prose and Cons](#)
(Severn \$28.99)

Young widowed mom Bella Jordan, calling the guesthouse she runs home and her psychic medium neighbors friends, takes in two guests as a favor only to find her life in danger when one of them begins acting strangely. This is the latest in Staub’s series set in Lily Dale, N.Y., the “world’s largest center for the religion of Spiritualism.”

Sullivan, Emily. [The Rebel and the Rake](#)
(Forever \$8.99)

One of the crown’s most valuable agents, Rafe Davies is distracted from his latest mission by lady’s companion Miss Sylvia Sparrow, a secretive beauty who is resolved to avoid him at a house party they are both attending until a chance encounter reveals an attraction that’s impossible to ignore. “The subterfuge provides an intense backdrop that only enhances the complex romance between Sullivan’s intelligent, progressive protagonists. Readers will be taken by independent Sylvia’s quest for love and companionship.” (PW)

Thompson, Lara. [One Night, New York](#)
(Pegasus \$25.95)

At the top of the Empire State Building on a freezing December night, two women hold their breath. Frances and Agnes are waiting for the same man, who has wronged them both. Now the two plan to seek their revenge. Set over the course of a single night, *One Night, New York* is a detective story, a romance, and a coming-of-age tale. It is also a story of old New York, of bohemian Greenwich Village between the wars, of floozies and artists and addicts all coming together to light up their world while all around them America burned with the Great Depression. *PW* gave this a debut novel a rave review saying “Deep character development, relentless pacing, and understated noir atmospherics bode well for Thompson’s next.”

Teen

Gonzales, Sophie and Cale Dietrich. [If This Gets Out](#)
(St. Martin’s \$18.99)

Eighteen-year-olds Ruben Montez and Zach Knight are two members of the boy-band *Saturday*, one of the biggest acts in America. Along with their bandmates, Angel Phan and Jon Braxton, the four are teen heartthrobs in front of the cameras and best friends backstage. But privately, the pressure to stay in the closet has Ruben confiding in Zach. On a whirlwind tour through Europe with an unrelenting schedule and minimal supervision, the two come to rely on each other more and more, and their already close friendship evolves into a romance. But when they decide they’re ready to tell their fans and live freely, Zach and Ruben realize they will never truly have the

support they need. How can they hold tight to each other when their whole world is coming apart?

Martineau, Maxym M. [The Shattered Crown](#)
(Sourcebooks \$12.99)

When Leena Edenfrell swore herself to the Frozen Prince, Noc Feyreigner, she never dreamed she'd ignite the flames of war. And yet as their enemies combine forces against them, Leena and Noc have no choice but to gather their allies and fight. While Noc makes moves to reclaim their lost throne, Leena acts as the new Crown of the Charmer's Council, searching for a way to stop the enemy from raising an ancient creature destined to burn their world to ash. Martineau concludes her dazzling Beast Charmer trilogy that began with [Kingdom of Exiles](#) (Sourcebooks \$10.99) and continued on in [The Frozen Prince](#) (Sourcebooks \$10.99).

Nonfiction

Fideler, David. [Breakfast with Seneca](#)
(WW Norton \$26.95)

In *Breakfast with Seneca*, philosopher David Fideler mines Seneca's classic works in a series of focused chapters, clearly explaining Seneca's ideas without oversimplifying them. Best enjoyed as a daily ritual, like an energizing cup of coffee, Seneca's wisdom provides us with a steady stream of time-tested advice about the human condition—which, as it turns out, hasn't changed much over the past two thousand years. "Fideler keeps things accessible and offers plenty of real-world examples for applying philosophy to one's life, making for a great crash course. Philosophy newbies will find this a fine introduction." (*PW*)

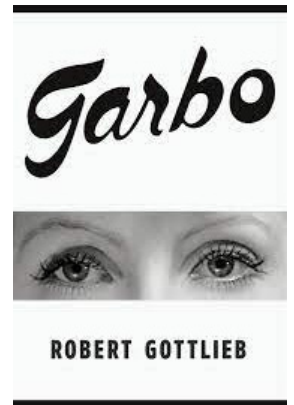
Gabriele, Matthew and David M. Perry. [The Bright Ages](#) (HarperCollins \$29.99)

If you really want to make medieval historians mad, simply refer to this time in history as the "Dark Ages," since nothing could be further from the truth. Gabriele, a professor of medieval studies at Virginia Tech, and Perry, a former professor of medieval history at Dominican University set out to prove this in their latest fascinating book, which covers ten centuries and crisscrosses Europe and the Mediterranean, Asia, and Africa and illustrates just how "bright" the Dark Ages truly were. "The result is an appealing account of a millennium packed with culture, beauty, science,

learning, and the rise and fall of empires. A fine single-volume overview of an age that was definitely not dark." (*Kirkus*)

Gottlieb, Robert. [Garbo](#)
(FSG \$40)

Acclaimed critic and editor Gottlieb examines the life and work of Greta Garbo, from her childhood in the slums of Stockholm to the peak of Hollywood fame in a fascinating look at the movie star who is famous for wanting to be alone. With 250 photos of the legend included, "the result is a masterful look at an elusive Hollywood giant." (*PW*). *The New York Times* book reviewer applauded Gottlieb's efforts at chronicling Garbo's life and work saying "To Gottlieb, the 1930s studio movies in which Garbo made her mark aren't relics of history to be discovered in film class or on TCM. They're just the stuff he grew up on, made efficiently to be consumed quickly, and he brings to his assessments a fan's appreciation, a connoisseur's acuity, and an amused impatience with aspects of them that are and always were ridiculous."



Rodsky, Eve. [Find Your Unicorn Space](#)
(Putnam \$27)

Rodsky, *The New York Times* bestselling author of *Fair Play*, has been called "the Marie Kondo of relationships." Now she has come up with an inspirational guide for setting new personal goals, rediscovering your interests, cultivating creativity, and reclaiming your Unicorn Space. It's never too early to start thinking about next year's resolutions.