

# BOOKNEWS from

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## WISHING ALL A HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY

Opening Hours M-Sat 10 AM-6 PM; Sun 12-5 PM

Note: Event times are Mountain Standard Time

Watch these virtual events on [Facebook Live](#) or on our [YouTube](#) channel and any time thereafter at a time that suits you. You don't have to belong to Facebook to click in.  
You also can listen to our [Podcasts](#) on [Google Music](#), [iTunes](#), [Spotify](#), and other popular podcast sites.

### TUESDAY FEBRUARY 1 5:00 PM

**Paul Vidich and David McCloskey**  
**McCloskey** discusses [Damascus Station](#) (Norton \$27.95)  
A debut CIA thriller set in Syria  
**Vidich** discusses [The Matchmaker: A Spy in Berlin](#) (Pegasus \$25.95)  
Signed copies available for both titles

### TUESDAY FEBRUARY 1 6:30 PM Virtual National Book Launch

**Brian Freeman** discusses [The Ursulina](#) (Blackstone \$28.99)  
The sequel to Edgar finalist [The Deep, Deep Snow](#) (\$16.95)  
Signed copies available

### WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 2 6:00 PM

**Remembering Caroline Todd**  
**Charles Todd** discusses [A Game of Fear](#) (Morrow \$28.99)  
Inspector Ian Rutledge in Essex  
Signed copies available

### THURSDAY FEBRUARY 3 4:45 PM

**Marty Wingate with Lesa Holstein**  
Wingate discusses [The Librarian Always Rings Twice](#) (Berkley \$26)  
Signed copies available

### THURSDAY FEBRUARY 3 6:00 PM

**Elle Cosimano with Megan Miranda and Ashley Elston**  
**Cosimano** discusses [Finlay Donovan Knocks 'Em Dead](#) (St Martins \$26.99)  
Here is [the link](#) to upload your preorder receipt and receive a special sticky notepad  
Signed copies available

### FRIDAY FEBRUARY 4 5:00 PM

**Jillian Cantor with Heather Gudenkauf**  
**Cantor** discusses [Beautiful Little Fools](#) (Harper \$26.99)  
February Notable New Fiction Book of the Month  
Signed copies available

### SATURDAY FEBRUARY 5 2:00 PM Live & Masked

**Stephanie Barron** discusses [Jane and the Year Without a Summer](#) (Soho \$27.95)  
Jane Austen  
Signed copies available

### MONDAY FEBRUARY 7 7:00 PM

**Gregg Hurwitz** discusses [Dark Horse](#) (St Martins \$28.99)  
Orphan X  
Signed copies available

### TUESDAY FEBRUARY 8 5:30 PM

**Rick Bleiweiss** discusses [Pignon Scorpion & the Barbershop Detectives](#) (Blackstone \$26.99)  
Humorous debut mystery in 1920s England  
Signed copies available

### TUESDAY FEBRUARY 8 7:00 PM National Book Launch

**Jonathan Kellerman** discusses [City of the Dead](#) (Ballantine \$28.99)  
Alex Delaware  
Signed copies available

### WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 9 7:00 PM

**Joe Ide** discusses [The Goodbye Coast](#) (LittleBrown \$28)  
Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe updated ...  
Signed copies available

### THURSDAY FEBRUARY 10 7:00 PM Live & Masked

**Heather Gudenkauf** discusses [The Overnight Guest](#) (Harper \$28.99)  
Signed copies available

### FRIDAY FEBRUARY 11 6:00 PM

**Sara Gran with Patrick**  
**Gran** discusses [The Book of the Most Precious Substance](#) (Dreamland Books \$18.95) A bibliomystery  
Signed copies available

### SATURDAY FEBRUARY 12 4:00 PM LIVE National Book Launch Live & Masked

**Mark Greaney** discusses [Sierra Six](#) (Berkley \$28)  
The Gray Man  
Signed copies available

### TUESDAY FEBRUARY 15 Virtual National Book Launch

**Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child** discuss [Diablo Mesa](#) (Grand Central \$29)  
Nora Kelly  
Signed copies available with exclusive trading card insert depicting Kelly and FBI Agent Cori Swanson

**WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 16 5:00 PM**

**Bonnie Kistler** discusses [The Cage](#) (Harper \$26.99)  
Signed books available

**THURSDAY FEBRUARY 17 6:00 PM**

**Deanna Raybourn** discusses [An Impossible Impostor](#) (Berkley \$26)

Veronica Speedwell Victorian Mystery  
Signed copies available

**FRIDAY FEBRUARY 18 12:00 PM**

**Iceland's First Lady Eliza Reid with Yrsa Sigurdardottir**  
They discuss [Secrets of the Sprakkar](#) (Sourcebooks \$26.99)  
How Iceland's Extraordinary Women Are Changing the World

**FRIDAY FEBRUARY 18 7:00 PM**

**SciFi Friday Club** discusses Rebecca Roanhorse, [Black Sun](#) (\$16.99)

**SATURDAY FEBRUARY 19 10:30 AM**

**Croak & Dagger Club** discusses Catherine Ryan Howard, [Rewind](#) (\$9.99)

**SATURDAY FEBRUARY 19 12:00 PM**

**The UK's Sarah Blake** with Pat King  
They discuss [Clean Air](#) (Algonquin \$26.95)  
Chasing a killer in a post-climate apocalypse world  
Signed Bookplates available

**MONDAY FEBRUARY 21 6:00 PM National Book Launch**

**Joseph Kanon** discusses [The Berlin Exchange](#) (Scribner \$28)  
Spy story 1963 East Berlin  
Signed copies available

**MONDAY FEBRUARY 21 7:30 PM**

**Robert Dugoni** discusses [The Silent Sisters](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$24.95)  
Charles Jenkins, Spy  
Signed copies available

**TUESDAY FEBRUARY 22 7:00 PM Live & Masked**

**Joanne Fluke** discusses [Caramel Pecan Roll Murder](#) (Kensington \$27)  
Lake Eden  
Signed copies available

**WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 23 7:00 PM Live & Masked**

**Stephanie Wrobel** discusses [This Might Hurt](#) (Berkley \$26)  
Signed copies available

**THURSDAY FEBRUARY 24 5:30 PM**

**JA Jance** discusses [Nothing to Lose: A JP Beaumont Novel](#) (Harper \$28.99)  
JP's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book  
Signed copies available March 14 when Jance plans to sign Live at The Pen

**THURSDAY FEBRUARY 24 7:00 PM**

**Hardboiled Crime** discusses Todd Downing, [Vultures in the Sky](#) (\$15.95)

**FRIDAY FEBRUARY 25 6:00 PM**

**Rob Hart** discusses [The Paradox Hotel](#) (Ballantine \$28)  
Signed copies available

**MONDAY FEBRUARY 28 5:30 PM**

**Ann Parker with Donis Casey**  
**Parker** discusses [The Secret in the Wall](#) (Poisoned Pen \$15.99)  
Inez Stannert in Jack London's San Francisco  
Signed bookplates available

**MONDAY FEBRUARY 28 7:00 PM National Book Launch**

**Cara Black** discusses [Murder at the Porte de Versailles](#) (Soho \$27.95)  
Aimee Leduc  
Signed copies available

**And calendar 3 National Book Launches**

Saturday March 5 2:00 PM: **Rhys Bowen/Claire Broyles**  
Sunday March 6 4:00 PM: **Brad Meltzer**  
Monday March 7 7:00 PM: **CJ Box Live**

**OUR FEBRUARY BOOKS OF THE MONTH**

**British Crime Club** One unsigned hardcover or paperback per month  
Hallett, Janice. [The Appeal](#)

**Cozy Crimes Club** One unsigned hardcover or paperback per month  
Jurczyk, Eva. [The Department of Rare Books and Special Collections](#)

**First Mystery Club** One Signed First Printing per month  
Slocumb, Brendan. [The Violin Conspiracy](#)

**The Crime Collectors Book of the Month Club** One Signed First Printing per month  
TBA – several choices and must pick one

**History/Mystery Club** One Signed First Printing per month  
Davis, Fiona. [The Magnolia Palace](#)

**Notable New Fiction** One Signed First Printing per month  
Cantor, Jillian. [Beautiful Little Fools](#)

**International Crime** One Unsigned Hardcover per month  
Feb: Foley, Lucy. [The Paris Apartment](#)

## SIGNED BOOKS SO FAR FOR FEBRUARY (Tip-ins and Bookplates noted)

Barron, Stephanie. [Jane and the Year Without a Summer](#) (Soho \$27.95). Jane Austen is using some of the profits from her novel *Emma* to treat herself and her sister, Cassandra, to two weeks at Cheltenham Spa in Gloucestershire in May 1816. Jane hopes that taking the waters there will alleviate her lassitude, back pain, and “want of spirits.” The new acquaintances the sisters meet include a beautiful invalid in her 20s, a heroic naval captain, and an evangelical clergyman (“Repent, Miss Austen—*Prepare*. The end of all things is upon us”), who’s accompanied by his impertinent sister (“*You* do not appear to suffer. *You* cannot claim ill health,” she tells Jane). When one of these sharply defined characters dies of poisoning, Jane once again turns sleuth. The Austen family’s financial constraints and Jane’s own failing health add verisimilitude to this taut, sometimes perplexing tale of lost opportunity and unfulfilled aspirations. Barron fans will hope Jane, who died in 1817, will be back for one more mystery.

“[Barron] has painstakingly sifted through the famed author’s letters and writings, as well as extensive biographical information, to create a finely detailed portrait of Austen’s life—with a dash of fictional murder . . . Some of the most enjoyable, well-written fanfic ever created.”—*O Magazine*. Dana Stabenow, like me a Barron fans, adds, “The period detail is as always superb and Barron as is her custom employs lines from Jane’s work in dialogue that provide lovely grace notes throughout the narrative.”

Black, Cara. [Murder at the Porte de Versailles](#) (Soho \$27.95). This is a March release but Black launches it virtually with The Pen on February 28. Our Signed copies should reach us from her hand in time, but they might show up in early March.

Here’s a rave review: “In bestseller Black’s riveting 20th Aimée Leduc investigation, tensions are high in Paris two months after 9/11. Still, life—including a birthday party for PI Aimée’s three-year-old daughter, Chloé—goes on as usual, at least until an explosion at the nearby police laboratory. The horror of that bombing becomes personal as Boris Viard, a lab employee and Aimée’s good friend, becomes a suspect when trace amounts of the explosive are found on him. Meeting resistance every step of the way from the police and Boris’s coworkers, Aimée tries to determine whether the crime might involve one of the unsolved cases of her late detective father. As Aimée wends her way through the darker parts of the City of Light in search of a possible tie to an Iranian terrorist organization, she must also resolve where her relationship with Melac, Chloé’s father, is headed just as another man reenters her life. Rich with detail about life in Paris, this entry illuminates the complications that friends and family can unwittingly create.”

Bleiweiss, Rick. [Pignon Scorbion & the Barbershop Detectives](#) (Blackstone \$26.99). Set in 1910 England, Bleiweiss’s entertaining debut introduces Chief Inspector Pignon Scorbion, who’s newly stationed in the small town of Haxford, where he renews his friendship with barber Calvin Brown. While getting his hair cut, Scorbion learns that a young man named Jonathan Bentine has appeared out of the blue to claim that retired linen merchant Mortimer Gromley fathered him out of wedlock. That shocking accusation naturally disrupts the Gromley household, and Scorbion chooses to resolve the question from his chair in Brown’s establishment, turning the barbershop into his temporary

office. Other mysteries follow, including the murder of a man who built stilts for a circus act. The barbershop’s customers and employees help investigate. A few false notes, such as Scorbion befriending Dr. Watson at “a meeting that paired those engaged in the art of detection with practitioners of witchcraft,” a gathering Sherlock Holmes’s colleague would be unlikely to attend, scarcely matter. Bleiweiss does a solid job of establishing his lead as a well-rounded character capable of sustaining a series. “Golden age fans appreciative of a light approach to traditional tropes will be eager for a sequel.”

Connolly, John. **Shadow Voices** (Hodder \$55). **Our copies are numbered and come with tote bags and a special postcard. Please call the store to order.**

The Irish author takes you through 300 years of Irish genre fiction, introducing you to a fabulous variety of authors with extracts of their work. This is a great literary discovery opportunity and it comes specially packaged from the UK. Those of you who read Connolly as well as Ken Bruen, Tana French, Adrian McKinty, Stuart Neville and such modern writers should revel in this journey through an Irish past.

Cantor, Jillian. [Beautiful Little Fools](#) (Harper \$26.99). Our John Charles reviews our **February Notable New Fiction Book of the Month**: First published in 1925, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* has been called the “great American novel.” Here 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 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.”

Cosimano, Elle. [Finlay Donovan Knocks ‘em Dead](#) (St Martins \$26.99). “Fresh from a debut in which she kept getting offered money to kill people who then fortuitously died, novelist Finlay Donovan goes another round with murder most absurd. “Somebody besides Finn must be unhappy with her ex, sod farmer Steven Donovan, because a message-board poster identifying herself only as FedUp broadly hints that she’d pay \$100,000 to anyone who’d dispose of him. As Finn looks on in virtual horror, another poster, EasyClean, accepts the proposition. Run ragged as she already is by the usual domestic problems—caring for her two small children, juggling hot law student Julian Baker and Nicholas Anthony, the Fairfax County detective who’s still interested in her despite what she put him through in [Finlay Donovan Is Killing It](#) (\$17.99)—read it first—struggling to get started on her next suspense novel. Finn tries to rescue Steven, who deserves execration but not execution, by hiring a teenage network expert named Cam to identify EasyClean. When Cam comes up empty, the only other thing Finn can think of is to volunteer to do the hit herself for half the price. Unfortunately, she makes her cut-rate offer

using a public Wi-Fi connection, exposing herself and her nanny/sidekick, endlessly resourceful accounting student Veronica Ruiz, to all manner of perils....”

Davis, Fiona. [The Magnolia Palace](#) (Dutton \$27). **Our February Historical Fiction Book of the Month** has earned loads of raves. “Fiona Davis has deployed an unmatched skill for unspooling compelling dramas amidst some of New York’s most glittering historical moments.... *The Magnolia Palace* tells the story of two different women whose lives are changed at the Frick mansion, giving readers the chance to soak in dual eras of history all while great love, epic loss, dazzling fortunes, and foul play are afoot.” —*Town & Country*. “Davis embellishes the real lives of the Frick family and Audrey Munson, a sculptors’ muse, in a tale that will thrill fans of Anna Pitoniak and Karen Harper. She also jumps skillfully between the Roaring Twenties and the Swinging Sixties as another model explores the Frick Collection decades later. Davis’ insider’s perspective on the esteemed Frick family gives equal weight to those who kept the family afloat.” —*Booklist*. “Davis builds upon the secrets of the Frick Collection in a delightful blend of emotion and adventure... Davis knows exactly how to structure a story and how to switch between timelines... A captivating story whose characters are richly drawn, *The Magnolia Palace* pays particular attention to those who might go unnoticed: the deaf private secretary, the museum intern, the organ player. We discover their private lives and public exposures, which reveal the daily messiness of human lives, the construction of the self and the truths we try so hard to hide.” —BookPage

Dugoni, Robert. [The Silent Sisters](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$24.95). After a harrowing escape from Russian agents on his last mission, Charles Jenkins thinks he’s finally done with the spy game. But then the final two of the Seven Sisters—American assets who have been deep undercover in Russia for decades—cut off all communication with their handlers. Are they in hiding after detecting surveillance? Or have they turned and become double agents? It’s Jenkins’s duty to find out, but he’s been added to a Russian kill list. It will require all of Jenkins’s knowledge of spycraft—and an array of disguises—to return to the country undetected. But plans go awry his first night in Moscow when Jenkins gets involved in an altercation that ends in the death of the son of one of Russia’s most powerful organized crime leaders. Pursued by mafia henchmen, Russian agents, and a particularly dogged Moscow police detective, Jenkins is determined to track down the final two Sisters and get them to America...or die trying. As various forces close in, Jenkins fears this time he might’ve pushed his luck too far. The *PW* Starred Review adds: “Bestseller Dugoni’s electrifying third espionage thriller featuring CIA agent Charles Jenkins opens with Jenkins hanging from a hook in a meat market in Irkutsk, Russia, where his interrogators are threatening to put him through a meat grinder. Many riveting, hairbreadth escapes follow as he remains intent on accomplishing his mission. This entry works as a standalone, but will send newcomers to read the earlier books,” both of which I highly recommend. [The Eighth Sister](#); [The Last Agent](#) (\$15.95 each). The first involves a horribly risky escape from Russia via Turkey executed by former CIA case officer Charles Jenkins, the second reversing it as Jenkins goes on a crazy rescue mission.

Fay, Kim. [Love & Saffron: A Novel of Friendship](#) (Viking \$25) is a love letter to friendships, trying new experiences, and the

comfort found in sharing food. I say “letter” literally since this is an epistolary novel, a form that works supremely well as in *84 Charing Cross Road*, or Austen’s *Lady Susan*. When Joan Bergstrom sends a fan letter, and a gift of saffron, to food writer Imogen Fortier, a life-changing friendship is formed. With each letter their relationship grows stronger, and they find comfort that will get them through life’s challenges together despite their age differences and locations, Joan in LA and Imogen on Camano Island, Washington. You can forecast some of what’s coming as their correspondence flourishes, but not all. The #1 Indie Next Pick for February says, “Kim Fay’s novel is as refreshing as a cold glass of Sauvignon Blanc on a hot summer’s day, you’ll want to devour every morsel.”

Fluke, Joanne. [Caramel Pecan Roll Murder](#) (Kensington \$27). Enthusiastic anglers are gathering in Lake Eden, Minnesota, for the Walleye Fishing Tournament in bestseller Fluke’s diverting 28th Hannah Swenson mystery. Sponsored by Wally Wallace, the legendary owner of a retail sporting goods empire, and featuring celebrity fishing expert Sonny Bowman, the star of Wally’s TV show devoted to fishing, the event promises to bring much-needed business to the Lake Eden Inn as well as to shops in town like Hannah’s bakery, the Cookie Jar. Sonny is secretly no expert, but surely that wasn’t a good enough reason for someone to murder the man in his boat, execution-style. Initially, there are no real leads, but that doesn’t stop Hannah, an experienced amateur sleuth, from investigating with the assistance of her sister, Andrea Todd, and the acceptance of Winnetka County Detective Mike Kingston. A good puzzle, lots of delicious recipes, and time spent with Hannah’s beloved fan-favorite cat, Moishe, more than make up for the mildly irritating cliffhanger ending. Fluke reinforces her place as the queen of culinary cozies.

Freeman, Brian. [The Ursulina](#) (Blackstone \$28.99). Brrr... here is the prequel to Edgar finalist [The Deep, Deep Snow](#) (\$16.95), a book that got much love here at The Pen. It’s the story of Deputy Rebecca Colder, mother of Shelby Lake, who as a baby was left in a basket for Sheriff Tom Gunn to raise and whose story is related in *The Deep, Deep Snow*. Now we learn Rebecca’s story as she wants to present it to Shelby. And her story involves a beast—call it Bigfoot? Sasquatch? Yeti? Or as it’s named in rural Black Wolf County, the Ursulina. But is the beast killing people really a mythical creature? Or is he a serial killer who’s masking himself as the monster, leaving with each kill a message written in blood? And what is Rebecca going to do about it?

Gran, Sara. [The Book of the Most Precious Substance](#) (Dreamland Books \$18.95 large paperback original). Former novelist Lily Albrecht, the narrator of this mesmerizing bibliomystery, now makes her living as a rare book dealer in the wake of a shattering personal tragedy. At a Manhattan book fair, she’s approached by Shyman, a fellow book dealer who has “a shadow in his face, a hollow echo in his laugh, that let you know he’d rather be around books than people.” Shyman asks her help in finding *The Book of the Most Precious Substances*, an extremely scarce 17th-century manual on sex magic, for a client. The handwritten volume promises sexual ecstasy and unlimited power to those who can complete its five steps, and some of the world’s wealthiest people are desperate to get their hands on it. Lily enlists the help of her friend Lucas Markson, a rare books archivist and librarian, and their quest takes them from New York to Los Angeles, New Orleans, Munich, and Paris. As they soon



discover, many of the people looking for the book seem to end up dead, and Lily herself begins to feel that the strange book is pulling her into its embrace. Gran perfectly captures the eccentric world of antiquarian bookselling while portraying a profound and magical reckoning with loss and the possibility of going on. She has outdone herself. Patrick agrees and can't wait to discuss this gorgeous book with Gran.

Greaney, Mark. [Sierra Six](#) (Berkley \$28). The *PW* Starred Review: "Bestseller Greaney's excellent 11th Gray Man novel delivers a double helping of honorable mercenary Courtland Gentry (aka the Gray Man), smoothly alternating between his first assignment with the "door kickers" of CIA paramilitary team Golf Sierra to interdict a terrorist group intent on detonating dirty radioactive bombs against American forces and his present-day quest for revenge on the planners of that enemy action. In the past, Gentry, though already a whispered figure in the halls at Langley, struggles to integrate his "singleton" lone-wolf strategies (and sometimes naive moral code) with unfamiliar military tactics, but team leader Zack Hightower is impressed with his almost-preternatural killing and tradecraft abilities, and Gentry is deployed with the squad to Pakistan. Twelve years after the devastating end of that mission, Gentry stumbles into his presumed-dead adversary, Murad Khan, on the cusp of staging an even deadlier evolution of his earlier plan. Greaney seamlessly adjusts focus between the timelines, jumping from one exhilarating roller-coaster ride to the other." Greaney has a killer movie coming for this series so expect interest in it to jump dramatically.

✦ Griffiths, Elly. [The Locked Room](#) (Quercus UK \$42). Ruth Galloway is in London clearing out her mother's belongings when she makes a surprising discovery: a photograph of her Norfolk cottage taken before Ruth lived there. Her mother always hated the cottage, so why did she keep a picture of the place? The only clue is written on the back of the photo: Dawn, 1963. Ruth returns to Norfolk determined to solve the mystery, but then Covid rears its ugly head. Ruth and her daughter are locked down in their cottage, attempting to continue with work and home-schooling. Happily, the house next door is rented by a nice woman called Zoe, who they become friendly with while standing on their doorsteps clapping for caregivers. Nelson, meanwhile, is investigating a series of deaths of women that may or may not be suicide. When he links the deaths to an archaeological discovery, he breaks curfew to visit the cottage where he finds Ruth chatting to her neighbor whom he remembers as a caregiver who was once tried for murdering her employer. Only then her name wasn't Zoe—it was Dawn!

Gudenkauf, Heather. [The Overnight Guest](#) (Harper \$28.99). Reclusive Oregon writer Wylie Lark rents an unoccupied, isolated farmhouse in Burden, Iowa, where two people were murdered and a little girl went missing in 2000. The murders and disappearance are the subject of her fourth true crime book she is there to complete, and as usual she wants to get a feel for the crime scene. During a raging blizzard, Wylie discovers a boy lying on the ground outside, glistening "like an ice sculpture." She can't contact the sheriff because her utilities are out due to the storm, so she brings the boy inside, tends to his injuries, and tries to get him to tell her what happened, but he's frightened and refuses to talk. Wylie goes outside to collect firewood, but on returning she finds she's locked out, and, through a window,

she sees..... Wylie's frantic efforts to save the boy alternate with flashbacks that reveal in suspenseful increments what happened in the farmhouse two decades earlier.... Iowan Gudenkauf explores the state's rural landscapes and here, scares with a shocking Midwestern murder.

✦ Hallett, Janice. [The Twyford Code](#) (Viper \$36). Hallett's second book publishes in the UK in January, should arrive in February, and steps into Richard Osman and Alex Pavesi territory. Here is the publisher's description: Forty years ago, Steven Smith found a copy of a famous children's book by disgraced author Edith Twyford, its margins full of strange markings and annotations. Wanting to know more, he took it to his English teacher Miss Iles, not realizing the chain of events that he was setting in motion. Miss Iles became convinced that the book was the key to solving a puzzle, and that a message in secret code ran through all Twyford's novels. Then Miss Iles disappeared on a class field trip, and Steven has no memory of what happened to her. Now, out of prison after a long stretch, Steven decides to investigate the mystery that has haunted him for decades. Was Miss Iles murdered? Was she deluded? Or was she right about the code? And is it still in use today? Desperate to recover his memories and find out what really happened to Miss Iles, Steven revisits the people and places of his childhood. But it soon becomes clear that Edith Twyford wasn't just a writer of forgotten children's stories.... I am told the story's structure may be that of voice mails but cannot confirm.

Hart, Rob. [The Paradox Hotel](#) (Ballantine \$28). A terrific concept powers this inventive new SciFi thriller by Hart. Time travel has been monetized. The U.S. government charges the 1% "hundreds of thousands of dollars to see the first-ever public showing of *Hamlet* or visit the Library of Alexandria," but it's still losing money on the hyper-expensive operation. That leads to a privatization initiative, and several trillionaires arrive at the Paradox Hotel to make their proposal to buy the Einstein Intercentury Timeport. Their presence is a headache for hotel security head January Cole, who's suffering deleterious health side effects from entering the time stream frequently and overwhelming grief from the accidental death of her lover, Mena, a waitress at the Paradox. When January sees a stabbed corpse in a guest room that no one else can see, including her smart-ass AI assistant, Ruby, she endeavors to determine whether there's a real murder to investigate or whether it's an apparition that's a symptom of her illness. "The twists keep coming without simplifying January's mental struggles in this impressive melding of creative plotting and three-dimensional characters." You may ask why so many of our Signed books get Starred Reviews... I hope the answer is self-evident.

Hurwitz, Gregg. [Dark Horse](#) (St Martins \$28.99). Aragón Urrea, a South Texas drug lord, approaches former black ops assassin Evan Smoak (aka the Nowhere Man), who assists people in seemingly hopeless situations as a way of paying penance for past sins. Urrea's 18-year-old daughter, Anjelina, has been kidnapped by a ruthless Mexican cartel. Despite doubts about helping a criminal like Urrea, Smoak agrees to try to rescue Anjelina. Along the way to the satisfying resolution, Smoak is forced to scrutinize his own life, in which he has remained distant from those most important to him—in particular, love interest Mia Hall, a district attorney and single mother who's faced with a life-threatening surgery, and Joey Morales, a 16-year-

old hacker extraordinaire who has become a surrogate daughter of sorts. Nonstop action and relentless pacing are matched by deeply philosophical and powerfully emotional undertones. Unlike comparable series that tend to lose steam after several installments, this series just gets better as it evolves. The Orphan X Series has become our go-to thriller series—the first one, *Orphan X*, that is—whenever someone hits the door and asks us for an “airplane book” or just a “thriller.” Once upon a time that book was Nelson DeMille’s *The Charm School*.

Ide, Joe. [The Goodbye Coast](#) (LittleBrown \$28). “The talented Joe Ide, author of the Isaiah “IQ” Quintabe detective series, manifests Marlowe in the form of a present-day private investigator. Mr. Ide’s Marlowe is a sharp dresser who drives a Mustang and keeps an office on the shabbier side of Hollywood Boulevard. His client du jour is Kendra James, a fading movie actress whose husband was recently shot to death and whose teenage daughter has gone walkabout. Marlowe doesn’t like this client—‘she looks like Grace Kelly without the grace’—but he does like his job: ‘Figuring out why people do self-destructive things and why they try to hurt each other.’ Marlowe has an unofficial partner in his father, a veteran LAPD homicide detective now on leave for drinking on the job. The elder Marlowe is old enough to remember Chandler’s era, and he still patronizes Musso & Frank, ‘the oldest restaurant in Hollywood.’ He also rails at the ignorance of Kendra’s daughter, who ends up hiding out at his house...The laugh-out-loud dialogue, the vivid similes, the complicated story and the set-piece subplots are all vintage Chandler. The gripping flashbacks, the adrenaline-pumping action and the heart-piercing poignancy show Mr. Ide at his best.”—Tom Nolan, *WSJ*

*Kirkus* adds, “Fans of the genre know that Philip Marlowe is the creation of the late Raymond Chandler, beginning with *The Big Sleep* in 1939. Chandler’s Marlowe has long been considered the quintessential private investigator, relentless and resolute in his work. There is tension, violence, humor, and a bit of sadness, with romance just out of the hero’s reach. This one’s witty, clever, and fun, and it’s worthy of the great Raymond Chandler.”

James, Marlon. [Moon Witch, Spider King](#) (Penguin \$30). **Tip ins.** [Black Leopard, Red Wolf](#) (\$18), Man Booker Prize-winning James’s first foray into fantasy, had the epic sweep, intensely layered structure, and raw if luscious language his readers have come to expect, and it was a National Book Award finalist and *New York Times* best seller. That book, the first in the Dark Star Trilogy, gave the backstory of the Tracker, engaged by a slaver to find a kidnapped child—reputedly the son of a North Kingdom elder—and the companions/adversaries the Tracker gathers in his search. One of them is the 177-year-old Moon Witch, Sogolon, who tells what happened to the child from her perspective. Paramount here in Book Two is Sogolon’s ancient feud with the king’s chancellor, who works so closely with the king that they are said to be like a spider—a single creature with eight limbs. For readers of fantasy and literary fiction alike, this should be another grand thrill.”—*LJ*

Jance, JA. [Nothing to Lose: A JP Beaumont Novel](#) (Harper \$28.99). Years ago, when he was a homicide detective with the Seattle PD, J. P. Beaumont’s partner, Sue Danielson, was murdered. Volatile and angry, Danielson’s ex-husband came after her in her home and, with nowhere else to turn, Jared, Sue’s

teenage son, frantically called Beau for help. As Beau rushed to the scene, he urged Jared to grab his younger brother and flee the house. In the end, Beaumont’s plea and Jared’s quick action saved the two boys from their father’s murderous rage. Now, almost twenty years later, Jared reappears in Beau’s life seeking his help once again—his younger brother Chris is missing. Still haunted by the events of that tragic night, Beau doesn’t hesitate to take on the case. Following a lead all the way to the wilds of wintertime Alaska, he encounters a tangled web of family secrets in which a killer with nothing to lose is waiting to take another life. Note that this new Beaumont marks 40 years since JP first appeared in print, and the 32<sup>nd</sup> year he has done so at The Pen.

Kanon, Joseph. [The Berlin Exchange](#) (Scribner \$28). American physicist Martin Keller was one of the scientists entrusted with the secrets of the Manhattan Project, but he later betrayed that trust by sharing top-secret plans and drawings he memorized with East German intelligence. Keller continued his spying at Harwell, England’s analogue to Los Alamos, until he was found out and imprisoned in 1953. Out of the blue in 1963, Keller’s freed in Berlin as part of a British–East German spy swap, but a gunman almost takes him out at Checkpoint Charlie. Once safe in East Berlin, he reunites with his ex-wife, Sabine, and their 11-year-old son, but he’s dismayed to learn Sabine has a terminal illness. Meanwhile, Keller wonders why he was set free and why an assassin tried to kill him. Kanon balances a convincing portrayal of spycraft with fleshed-out characters, while vividly depicting the impact of secret lives on the loved ones of those engaged in espionage. Fans of Len Deighton’s Bernard Samson series will be pleased.

Kellerman, Jonathan. [City of the Dead](#) (Ballantine \$28.99). The death of a naked man, hit early one morning by a van near the UCLA campus, kicks off a wickedly complex 37th Alex Delaware novel. Neighborhood gossip and a few blood droplets lead the police to the home of Cordelia Gannett, whom they find stabbed to death. The cops are there because a naked man has met up with a giant moving van on this quiet street, and it looks as if he was propelled into it. In short, no an accident. Delaware, a consulting psychologist for the LAPD, knows the dead woman from a child custody case two years earlier when she claimed to be a psychologist but was exposed as a charlatan. She recently had been selling herself on the web as a relationship expert. Delaware and his friend Lt. Milo Sturgis of the LAPD search for the identity of the nude victim and delve into Gannett’s past, uncovering in the process a series of other crimes, including murder. It’s impossible to guess where the threads of this plot will tangle and finally meet. “As always, Kellerman provides fascinating insight into the motivations of his damaged characters.” I have entered more and more into this series over the years, partly from discussing the books with Jon as they appear, and partly because the characters deepen and the plots as well. I also enjoyed psychologist Kellerman’s take on the several lawyers who populate the story, and the reverence he and Milo have for the coroner, an immigrant woman who is “genius.”

Kistler, Bonnie. [The Cage](#) (Harper \$26.99). Kistler, who did nicely with her recent debut, *House on Fire*, comes up with an intriguing premise for her next novel. On a late Sunday night, two women—a company lawyer and the human resources director—leave the offices of fashion conglomerate Claudine de Martineau International and board the elevator on the 30th floor. By the time

the elevator reaches the lobby, one of them is dead. But which one—and how? Echoes of Megan Goldin's *The Escape Room* here....

McCloskey, David. [Damascus Station](#) (Norton \$27.95). McCloskey, a former CIA analyst, brings his professional experience to write a debut thriller set in Syria, a theater less familiar to you than other conflict zones. CIA case officer Sam Joseph is the guy, dispatched to Paris to recruit Mariam Haddad, an official in Assad's Syrian Palace. These unlikely allies fall into a most unwise relationship which ups the danger quotient when they enter Damascus to hunt the man responsible for the disappearance of an American spy. The chase after a killer and the uncovering of a dark secret bring them to the attention of Assad's spy catcher Ali Hassan, and his brother Rustum, head of the Republican Guard. As we know the whole Syrian theater has been a disaster, one of the most difficult of CIA assignments along with a so far futile military one. This is a well wrought thriller that informs us about a landscape less familiar to me, anyway. We have a limited number of copies.

Mitchard, Jacqueline. [The Good Son](#) (Mira \$27.99). **Tip-ins.** "I was picking my son up at the prison gates when I spotted the mother of the girl he had murdered." Thea tells the story, past and present, of her son Stefan and how he killed his beloved girlfriend Belinda. Belinda's mother, Jill, had been a close friend of Thea's, until the murder shattered multiple lives. As Stefan and Thea try to move forward, they're hassled by violent protestors and viciously stalked. The novel takes on a tinge of mystery when Thea starts getting strange phone calls from a young woman who "knows everything" about the night of the murder and says to tell Stefan "I'm sorry." Who is this caller, and what does she know? And what happened that awful night?

Parker, Ann. [The Secret in the Wall](#) (Poisoned Pen \$15.99). **Signed bookplates.** Another dazzler featuring Inez Stannert who forsook the boom town of Leadville for Jack London's San Francisco where she is raising an adopted daughter, investing (micro) in small businesses, and sleuthing. See the Poisoned Pen Press Quartet of Mysteries below for more.

Preston, Douglas/Lincoln Child. [Diablo Mesa](#) (Grand Central \$29). Signed by both authors and includes a trading card set featuring archaeologist sleuth Nora Kelly and FBI Agent Corrie Swanson.

Lucas Tappan, a wealthy and eccentric billionaire and founder of Icarus Space Systems, approaches the Santa Fe Archaeological Institute with a proposal for an excavation—and a hefty donation. Hoping to bring welcome publicity to the privatized space travel industry, he wants to finance a careful, scientific archaeological excavation of the 1947 Roswell Incident site. The Institute agrees and Nora Kelly, much to her annoyance, is tasked with the job. Instead of the evidence of a crashed UFO, Nora's excavation immediately uncovers two unknown murder victims buried at the site. Because it's on federal land, the FBI is called in and Agent Corrie Swanson is assigned to the case. The discovery eventually opens up a Pandora's Box of mystery and atomic espionage, and a present-day menace that puts all their lives at grave risk.

Good news: we still have signed firsts of [The Scorpion's Tail](#) (\$18 special price), the second Kelly/Swanson which is a gem and a must-read for Tony Hillerman and Michael McGarrity

fans with its vivid New Mexico setting. We did sell out for the first, *Old Bones*, and we don't know if we can source any first prints of it.

Raybourn, Deanna. [An Impossible Impostor](#) (Berkley \$26). In 1883, Veronica Speedwell was visiting Sumatra with fellow lepidopterist Jonathan Hathaway when Krakatoa erupted. Jonathan was presumed killed and his younger brother, Charles, inherited the Hathaway estate. In 1889, an amnesiac man carrying Jonathan's passport arrives at Hathaway Hall. He says he wants nothing, but if he proves to be the original heir, Charles and his ambitious wife could lose their home and possessions, including the Eye of the Dawn, a priceless ruby acquired, perhaps illegally, from an Indian maharani. Veronica must confront a part of her past she has hidden even from her lover, natural historian Revelstoke "Stoker" Templeton-Vane, after she and Stoker come to the Hathaways' Dartmoor mansion to investigate the impossible impostor's claim. The man disappears just as the Eye of the Dawn vanishes and a ghostly orb is seen flickering on the moors. Raybourn does a fine job marrying acerbic wit, convincing emotional struggles, and fun glimpses of Victorian science. This sparkling tale will please fans of playful historicals and feisty heroines.

Slocumb, Brendan. [The Violin Conspiracy](#) (Doubleday \$28). For as long as he can remember, Ray McMillian has dreamed of becoming a professional violinist. But growing up Black in rural North Carolina has put every type of challenge in his path. Ray was refused entry to a wedding that he was hired to play at. When he was in college, fellow students muttered about him being there to fill a quota. At one point, a symphony's music director assumes he would want to play Gershwin instead of something by one of the "real" European composers." After years of working hard, and on the eve of the biggest musical competition in the world, his beloved Stradivarius is stolen from his hotel room in Manhattan. What follows is a riveting and desperate quest to find his most valuable possession. Our **February First Mystery Book of the Month** is a "high-velocity debut mystery" getting major recognition. Slocumb says, "Classical music is a very cutthroat profession, though it's especially tough for people of color. And for a Black man in classical music, you know, we are almost nonexistent." OK, so there is some agenda here, but I wouldn't select it if it didn't have a strong story and voice. And the story of how he came to own the Strad is well conceived too. Tess Gerritsen joins me on March 10 to zoom with Slocumb.

✱ Todd, Charles. [A Game of Fear](#) (Morrow \$28.99). Ian Rutledge, the psychologically damaged Scotland Yard inspector, who's haunted by the ghost of Hamish, a Scottish soldier whom he was forced to execute for disobeying futile orders during WWI—in reality, this is guilt and PTSD but Hamish allows some powerful interior monologues to color the narrative—has another specter to deal with in 1921. Lady Benton, an Essex widow intent upon preserving the estate of her dead husband and son, has reported seeing one man murder another in her private garden. But the killer appears to be an officer stationed at the air field on her land, a man who died in a car crash nearby. No corpse has been found despite her conviction what she saw was real. Skepticism in the village is rampant, treating her as mistaken at best. Rutledge, reluctantly on the scene, believes she did see something disturbing, and with his usual dogged determination, probes both past and present to get at the truth.



“Todd (the mother-son team of Caroline and Charles Todd) has rarely been better at creating a creepy atmosphere to enhance their nuanced exploration of human darkness. Rutledge remains one of today’s most fully rounded mystery leads.” Tragically we lost half of the mother-son writing team of Todd when Caroline died unexpectedly last summer. This novel was completed before her death as was one more in the Bess Crawford series. You can read *A Game of Fear* as a standalone with no problem.

Vidich, Paul [The Matchmaker: A Spy in Berlin](#) (Pegasus \$25.95). “Shades of Graham Greene, Eric Ambler and John le Carré hover over the pages of a Cold War thriller set in West and East Berlin in the eventful years of 1989 and ’90. While some of the book’s elements are familiar—the tense stakeout at the crossing bridge, the moral doubletalk—the innovative Mr. Vidich subverts expectations in ways that surprise.”—Tom Nolan, *WSJ*.

“Peril came early to the apartment on Bethaniendamm, overtaking the changes that were sweeping through the streets and alleys of a divided Cold War Berlin.” It’s 1989, and American Anne Simpson works as an interpreter at the Joint Allied Refugee Operations Center in West Berlin briefing refugees from Eastern Europe. She’s happily married to German piano tuner Stefan Koehler. Then a consular officer informs her Stefan is missing, his wallet found next to a canal. Simpson believed her husband had been in Vienna and Prague tuning orchestra pianos. Her alarm grows when she finds out West German intelligence suspects Stefan is working with the so-called Matchmaker, the head of East German counterintelligence, to provide confidential details about NATO deployments. As Anne tries to ascertain her spouse’s fate and the truth of the allegations against him, she learns secrets that change her view of the man she loves. Anne is an interesting woman, hard to like but you have to admire her tenacity as well as her guts as revelations sock her.

Vidich’s last spy story, [Mercenary](#) (Pegasus \$25.95), is still available

✚ Wingate, Marty. [The Librarian Always Rings Twice](#) (Berkley \$26). John reviews: The curator of Lady Georgiana Fowling’s collection of Golden Age of Mystery writers’ first editions, Hayley Burke must protect her late benefactor’s legacy when a strange man arrives, claiming to be her long-lost grandson. But John Aubrey’s appearance soon leads to murder and scandal, leaving Hayley no choice but to draw upon her extensive knowledge of classic mysteries to find the killer. *Kirkus* called this “fast-paced and quirky fare for literary sleuths and those who love them. I add that a bonus is spending time in the lovely old spa town of Bath.

Wrobel, Stephanie. [This Might Hurt](#) (Berkley \$26). This outstanding psychological thriller from Wrobel centers on two estranged sisters. Natalie Collins, an executive at a Boston branding agency, and Kit Collins, a receptionist at a Brooklyn accounting firm, are both wrestling with guilt, anger, fear, and the horrible “barnacle” of loneliness after their mother’s death. Each is keeping secrets from the other. Six months after Natalie last had any word from Kit, she suddenly receives an anonymous threatening email from the Wisewood Wellness & Therapy Center in Rockland, Maine. Kit has retreated there to “inward focus” through a self-improvement program to realize a “maximized self.” When Natalie races to the isolated island compound, she discovers a life-sucking cult guided by a guy his acolytes call

the Teacher. Atmospheric details include the January wind that “shrieks like a woman being stabbed,” an abandoned schoolhouse in a forest, and a haunting initiation sequence. “Some of Houdini’s mentalist feats play a significant role as the action builds to final bombshell revelations. Fans of Liane Moriarty’s *Nine Perfect Strangers* will want to check this out.”

## THESE SIGNED BOOKS ARE JUST TOO, TOO GOOD TO MISS

*Thriller writer Jon Land really nails some of our January Signed Books, writing reviews with which I completely agree!*

Benedict, Marie. [Her Hidden Genius](#) (Sourcebooks \$26.99). Marie Benedict once again illuminates a woman overlooked by history, as she did with the neglected brilliance of Hedy Lamarr in *The Only Woman in the Room* and Mileva Maric in *The Other Einstein*. Benedict’s sixth novel presents an accessible story of physical chemist Rosalind Franklin’s breakthrough DNA discoveries, as well as her bold presence in male-dominated mid-20th-century science. Despite her family’s pleas, Franklin leaves postwar London in 1947 for Paris—“a place where the Nazis... once governed,” her father laments—to work as a researcher with X-ray crystallography. Her lifelong mantra guides her: “Focus on the science.” Though her research is successful and Paris is “the only place” she ever “fit in,” an awkward romance with a colleague prompts her return to London. She thrives in the King’s College lab but endures misogyny and disrespect, addressed as “Miss Franklin” or the dismissive “Rosy” rather than “Doctor.” More disturbing are the obvious appropriations of her work, groundbreaking photographic evidence of her helix theory, by fellow scientists seeking to claim the discovery of the structure of DNA. In fact, three of her peers won the 1962 Nobel Prize for DNA research; she was not acknowledged. “I am a scientist, first and always,” Franklin declares, but she was also a good friend, a loyal daughter and an enthusiastic hiker. Benedict presents a complex woman, while foreshadowing her fatal illness—suggesting her strong work ethic led to dangerous X-ray exposure.

Gardner, Lisa. [One Step Too Far](#) (Dutton \$27). We met Frankie Fallon last winter in [Before She Disappeared](#) (\$17), a woman whose self-appointed mission is working missing-persons cold cases. Returning for a second go-round, Frankie is summoned to a Wyoming national forest on the trail of a young man named Tim O’Day who vanished without a trace while celebrating his upcoming wedding. Elkin, who sees her work as a kind of penance and accepts no fee for her efforts, immediately suspects something awry. And that’s before more disappearances mount, with Frankie squarely in the villain’s sights if she doesn’t find him (or her) first. *One Step Too Far* reads like a hybrid combination of C. J. Box and Nevada Barr at their level best but is distinguished by Frankie’s troubled, haunted character. More agoraphobic than Gardner’s purposefully-claustrophobic crime tales, this is thriller writing of the absolute highest order, as great a novel as it is a page-turner.

Parker, T. Jefferson. [A Thousand Steps](#) (Forge \$27.99). As great a writer as T. Jefferson Parker has been since he debuted three decades-plus ago with *Laguna Heat*, his writing and storytelling have never been better than in *A Thousand Steps*, a psychedelic mind-trip of a tale. In large part, that’s due to one of the most captivating and original heroes we will see this year in 16-year-old Matt Anthony. Make no mistake about it, though, this is no



young adult novel. Set in 1968 California, Vietnam is in full swing, hippies are everywhere, and Woodstock is on the horizon. Matt's parents are pretty much absent, his older sister is missing and his older brother is off fighting a war halfway around the world. That leaves Matt on his own as he tries to find his sister, redoubling his efforts when the body of another girl washes up on the beach. *A Thousand Steps* will go down as Parker's masterwork, showcasing his considerable talents as never before. Written in the present tense with a lyricism worthy of a poet's pen, *A Thousand Steps* is an exquisite coming-of-age journey that reads like *Catcher in the Rye* as channeled through *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. (Ok, but nothing for me can beat Parker's brilliance in Edgar winner *Silent Joe*.)

Taylor, Brad. [End of Days](#) (Morrow \$28.99). The amazing thing about Brad Taylor is how effortlessly his thrillers blend high and low stakes, the macro with the micro. That proclivity is more on display than ever here. This time out Pike Logan and his stalwart TaskForce are tracking an international assassin single-handedly capable of igniting a virtual World War III. What starts out as an investigation into the assassination of the former head of Israel's Mossad quickly morphs into a frantic and desperate race against time to prevent a cataclysm of epic proportions. Add a serial killer operating on the streets of Rome, and Logan and company have their work cut out for them like never before. As before, though, Taylor has fashioned a wondrously structured tale that's complex without being confounding.

Tracy, P.J. [Desolation Canyon](#) (St Martins \$27.99). It may be early in 2022, but it's hard to imagine a better crime thriller emerging than this. Fresh from the events portrayed in [Deep into the Dark](#) (\$9.99), Los Angeles police detective Margaret Nolan returns to take on a complex case, involving the murder of an upper-crust lawyer, that seemingly no one wants her to solve. It's a great set-up on its own before you even consider Nolan's personal life rife with problems and obstacles she'll have to overcome if she's going to triumph over the powerful forces committed to bringing her down. With *Desolation Canyon*, Tracy rises onto the rarified ground of Michael Connelly and David Baldacci. At its best, which is pretty much all the time, the book packs in political shenanigans and power-grabs on a level rivaling the classic film Chinatown. And Tracy draws each scene with the skill of a brilliant artist and hits every note like a master maestro. Margaret and her fellow detectives investigate a body found at the Hotel Bel-Air, the murder of a divorced couple, the decades-old kidnapping of a child and the machinations of a former KGB boss. *Desolation Canyon*'s riveting, complex plot illustrates the wide-ranging talents of Tracy, who with her late mother, P.J. Lambrecht, wrote ten lighter, award-winning novels in the Monkeewrench series.

Willingham, Stacy. [A Flicker in the Dark](#) (St Martins \$27.99). Stacy Willingham's haunting debut is one of those thrillers that stays with you long after the final page is turned. The book's cinematic structure opens with 12-year-old Chloe Davis dealing with her father being imprisoned for murdering six girls not much other than she. Nearly a generation later, Chloe has managed to put the past behind her as a soon-to-be-wed psychologist with a thriving practice. That is, until local teenage girls start to go missing, dredging up the past and making her wonder if maybe her father wasn't guilty, after all. Or maybe he had an accomplice. Or maybe... *A Flicker in the Dark* is a tension-soaked stunner of a

tale that never lets up or lets us down, as flawlessly structured as it is magnificently realized. (Which, I add, is why it was our January First Mystery Book of the Month.)

## UNSIGNED EVENT BOOKS

Blake, Sarah. [Clean Air](#) (Algonquin \$26.95). Blake's fascinating, idiosyncratic novel constructs a haunting postapocalyptic world with which a withdrawn woman must finally come to terms when someone starts killing local families. In 2032, trees began producing more pollen than human bodies could handle, killing billions of people. Ten years later, the survivors of what's called the Turning carefully navigate a world where it's not safe to be outside for more than seconds at a time. Among them is Izabel, who meanders through her days feeling vaguely dissatisfied with life with her husband, Kaito, and four-year-old daughter, Cami. When Cami develops inexplicable sleep issues around the same time a serial killer starts slashing the plastic sheeting enclosing nearby homes and letting in the toxic air, Izabel ends up in the best position to solve the mystery, following clues in the phrases Cami mutters in her sleep. "The novel's tone is restrained, sometimes verging on mannered, which belies the gradual but effective accumulation of emotions and images. The skillful blend of postapocalyptic science fiction, supernatural murder mystery, and domestic drama is unexpected and entirely engrossing."

Reid, Eliza. [Secrets of the Sprakkar](#) (Sourcebooks \$26.99). "Reid, a Canadian raised on a "hobby farm" and who is married to the president of Iceland and mother of "four children conceived in six years," combines memoir, feminist history, and travelogue in this immersive look at what makes her adopted home 'the planet's finest country for women.' Reid is a fascinating character and writer as became clear as I read my way through this fascinating volume. "*Sprakkar*, in the title, refers to an ancient Icelandic term for 'extraordinary or outstanding women,' among them former president Vigdis Finnbogadóttir, the 'world's first democratically elected female head of state' in 1980, and Jamaican immigrant Claudia Ashanie Wilson, who in 2016 became the first foreign-born woman to pass the bar exam and qualify as a practicing attorney in Iceland. Reid also recalls meeting her future husband, historian Gudni Jóhannesson, while studying at Oxford in 1998, and recounts his meteoric rise to the presidency after the 2016 'Panama Papers' scandal implicated the country's prime minister and cabinet members. Throughout, Reid reflects on Iceland's history, generous parental leave policy, and strengths as a nation of less than 370,000 people while offering an intimate look at her career and life as a mother. Laced with frank discussions of domestic abuse, intersectionality, and other complex issues, this is a winning portrait of a country at the forefront of the fight for gender equality."—*PW*. I add that she has learned Icelandic as part of her role as an immigrant.

## OUR 2022 VALENTINE BOOKS IN A BAG

[2022 Valentine Books in a Bag](#) (\$50)

### Three books, chocolate, a valentine, free shipping,

This program was a hit last year so we are assembling a trio of titles to include in one Valentine package. Naturally there will be chocolate too. John has selected one dazzling Victorian high society romp, and I Nita Prose's *The Maid*, an extraordinary debut—and, it has a flaming red dust jacket, perfect for a Valentine treat.

My other selection is a contemporary romantic suspense set in the Aleutian Islands with an archaeologist, a *Nat Geo* photographer on a secret mission, and more.... If you've read *Dangerous Ground* we will substitute the sequel.

## VALENTINE READING

Asher, April. [Not the Witch You Wed](#) (St. Martin's Griffin \$16.99). "Violet is perfectly happy being the triplet without magical powers. However, since reconnecting with high school heartbreaker and wolf shifter Lincoln Thorne, she suddenly has magic and is afraid she'll be forced into an arranged marriage. What's a witch to do but to fake-date a werewolf?" A fun and light read for fans of [The Ex Hex](#) (\$15.99), a popular romcom here at The Pen.

Bass, Elizabeth. [A Letter to Three Witches](#) (Kensington \$15.95). Forbidden to perform magic after their grandfather's spell causes a catastrophe (better known in the United States of America as the Dust Bowl), Gwen Engel must act fast when her cousin Trudy accidentally enchants some cupcakes, wreaking havoc on unsuspecting customers in her upstate New York bakery. At the same time, Gwen's distant cousin Tannith – the troublemaker of the "cousin coven" – leaves a letter addressed to Gwen, Trudy, and their other cousin Milo announcing that she has put a spell on one of their significant others, whom Tannith will be taking with her to New York City. Classic film fans will immediately recognize Bass's source of inspiration for this charmingly comic, paranormal flavored rom-com.

Cordova, Zoraida. [Reclaim the Stars](#) (SimonSchuster \$19.99) is an anthology that collects 17 speculative fiction tales "of empowerment and growth, of letting go, punching up, and celebrating love in all its incarnations and colors of the rainbow."

Donnelly, Lara Elena. [Base Notes](#) (Thomas and Mercer \$15.95). In New York City everybody needs a side hustle, and perfumer Vic Fowler has developed a delicate art that has proved to be very lucrative: creating bespoke scents that evoke immersive memories – memories that for Vic's clients are worth killing for. When one of Vic's clients with deep pockets offers him the opportunity to grow his business, the money is too good to turn down. Manipulating fellow struggling artists into acting as accomplices is easy, but as relationships become more complicated, Vic's carefully plotted scheme starts to unravel. Each chapter in this inventive suspense novel opens with perfume notes that hint at what is to come.

Greenburg, Alison Rose. [Bad Luck Bridesmaid](#) (St. Martins \$16.99). Determined to turn her luck around, Zoey Marks, a cursed bridesmaid, agrees again to stand up for her best friend, Hannah, who is marrying a man she just met at a castle in Ireland. *PW* summed up with "This multilayered, skillfully plotted novel won't be for all romance fans, but it's still a celebration of love in all its forms," while *Kirkus* ended their starred review with "an unconventional love story for independent women."

Fay, Kim. [Love and Saffron](#) (\$24 Signed). The #1 Indie Next Pick, in the vein of the classic *84, Charing Cross Road* and *Meet Me at the Museum*, this witty and tender novel follows two women in 1960s America as they discover that food really does connect us all, and that friendship and laughter are the best medicine. See Signed Books for more.

Harris, Joanne. [Chocolat](#) (\$17). A perennial Valentine favorite here at The Pen. One of my best memories is being Joanne's

date at the NY premiere for the movie starring Juliette Binoche, Johnny Depp, Alfredo Molina, etc. And moving on to the all chocolate after-party at the Plaza. Rent the movie for a February 14 evening, but read this enchanting book set in a French village where an unconventional woman opens an exquisite chocolate shop...and so much more.

✠ Liardet, Frances. [Think of Me](#) (Putnam \$27). James Acton, an RAF pilot in WWII, flies dangerous missions in Tunisia and marries Yvette Haddad, whom he met in Egypt during the war. After their return to England, James assumes his duties as an Anglican priest on the Hampshire coast. Yvette dies in 1964 after a battle with leukemia, and 10 years later, with their son attending university, James takes a new job as vicar in the village of Upton, near where he and his wife first moved upon returning to England. James becomes better acquainted with residents such as the attractive widow Ellen Parr, and finds a scarf in the church resembling one of Yvette's. As James meets people who once knew his wife, he discovers some of Yvette's secrets, which, though painful, lead him to find hope for a chance at a new beginning with Ellen. "Liardet's complex narrative entices with its focus on how the characters are forever altered by the war and the tragic events of everyday life. Liardet's vivid descriptions of WWII combat and the idyll of the English countryside will draw readers from the very first page," says *PW*.

✠ Matthews, Mimi. [The Siren of Sussex](#) (Berkley \$16). John reviews: Fashion and horseback riding are Evelyn Maltravers two passions in life. Dressed in a stylish riding ensemble, Evelyn plans on demonstrating her riding prowess along London's Rotten Row thus attracting the attention of society and hopefully in the process securing a suitable marriage proposal for herself. All Evelyn needs is the right riding habit, and Evelyn believes half-Indian tailor Ahmad Malik can create exactly the type of outfit she needs. Matthews deftly draws upon her extensive knowledge of the Victorian era (she has written nonfiction books on both Victorian fashion and the role of pets in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century) in creating the vividly evoked setting for her latest impeccably written historical romance.

Prose, Nita. [The Maid](#) (Ballantine \$27). John reviews: When she discovers the dead body of the infamous and wealthy Charles Black in his suite, hotel maid Molly Gray finds her orderly life upended as she becomes the prime suspect in the case and is caught in a web of deception that she has no idea how to unravel. Written by a longtime editor in the publishing industry, this superb debut offers cozy fans hours of enjoyment with its uniquely endearing protagonist and intriguing setting. Adding to the book's charm is Molly's loving relationship with her late, beloved Gran, whose wise words still provide invaluable guidance to Molly as she tries to navigate a world that can be cold and confusing to someone who doesn't always fit neatly in. Fans of Nancy Atherton's Aunt Dimity series will not want to miss this marvelous mystery.

Sutanto, Jesse Q. [Dial A for Aunties](#) (Berkley \$16). A hilariously quirky novel that is equal parts murder mystery, rom-com, and a celebration of mothers and daughters as well as a deep dive into Chinese-Indonesian culture, by a debut author. "Sutanto brilliantly infuses comedy and culture into the unpredictable rom-com/murder mystery mashup as Meddy navigates familial duty, possible arrest and a groomzilla. I laughed out loud and you will too."—*USA Today* (four-star review).

Trigiani, Adriana. [The House of Love](#) (Penguin Young Readers \$17.99). Now that Christmas 2021 is done, turn to Valentine's Day 2022 and consider an autographed copy of this charmer, illustrated by Amy June Bates, for kids ages 3-7. Mia Valentina Amore wakes up in the patchy old family home in the Blue Ridge Mountains. It's Valentine's Day. And with her mama Mia transforms it into a House of Love festooned with a gumdrop tree, cupcakes, and valentines for all six of her sibs. But wait... there's no valentine for Mia. Did mama forget her in preparing the family's celebration?

## CLASSICS

✚ Belloc Lowndes, Marie. [The Chianti Flask](#) (British Library Crime Classics \$14.99). Eighty-six years on, Lowndes still presents a remarkably modern take on notoriety, guilt, and love. Standing trial for murder is only the beginning of a new widow's tribulations in this breathless, mournful tale the author of *The Lodger* originally published in 1934. Laura Dousland is accused of poisoning her elderly husband, Fordish. It seems clear that the poison was delivered in a flask of Chianti with supper, but according to the couple's servant in the witness-box, the flask disappeared the night Fordish died, and all attempts to trace it have come to nothing. The jury delivers its verdict, but this is just the end of the beginning for Laura....

Latimer, Jonathan. [Headed for a Hearse](#) (American Mystery Classics \$15.95). In this 1935 macabre tale, a convicted murderer hires Chicago's most hard-boiled PI to save his neck—before the executioner can claim it. Robert Westland's date with death is just around the corner when he finally decides to fight the murder rap sending him to the electric chair. Framed for his wife's grisly demise, Westland is in a bind, and his last hope is Bill Crane, a booze-soaked detective who's as ruthless with a quip as he is when trawling the streets for Chicago's most brutal criminal element. Crane's got just six days to suss out the real killer—he sets his sights on a cast of oddball characters, aided by a lime squeezer, a quart of whiskey, a monkey wrench, a taxicab, a stopwatch, and a deep sea diver... but in 1930s Chicago, everyone's got a secret.... Chicago crime beat journalist-turned-novelist Latimer blends hardboiled detective fiction with a shot of screwball comedy....

Traubel, Helen. [The Metropolitan Opera Murders](#) (Library of Congress Crime Classics \$14.99). I'm a lifelong opera devotee so I recommended this one mystery by the great Wagnerian soprano Traubel (1899-1972) to the PP Press crime classics project with the Library after rereading it. First published in 1951, the mystery opens at New York's Metropolitan Opera during a performance of *Die Walküre*. Elsa Vaughn, a celebrated Wagnerian soprano who's performing the role of Brünnhilde, watches in horror as Rudolf Salz, who's filling in as prompter, convulses and dies. It soon becomes apparent that Salz was poisoned, and Elsa may have been the intended victim. Elsa teams up with Lt. Sam Quentin, a police detective, to discover the murderer among a colorful cast that includes an opera manager named Aaron Van Cleff (as in the musical notation) and members of a prominent family named DeBrett (as in the guide to the English peerage). Meanwhile, enormous egos collide over Wagnerian interpretation amid bawdy backstage doings. Series editor Leslie S. Klinger provides his usual enlightening annotations. I add that many an opera fan will finger the villain before the final act, but no matter.

## COZY CRIMES

Danvers, Holly. [Long Overdue at the Lakeside Library](#) (Crooked Lane \$26.99). Back in the Wisconsin lakeside town of Lofty Pines to run her family's library after her misadventures in love and life, Rain Wilmot is starting to feel at home again. She's glad to spend time with her close friend Julia and Julia's brother, Jace (a potential romantic partner), and she loves helping locals with library finds—for example, getting Wallace Benson the perfect cookbook when he shows up looking for something for the annual Ice Fishing Jamboree's chili dump. Rain is no ice fisher, and she's never met Wallace before, but his enthusiasm is contagious, and she feels a connection with him. Even so, she senses that something's off... and a murder says that yes, something is....in this sequel to [Murder at the Lakeside Library](#) (\$26.99).

Klump, Michelle Hillen. [A Dash of Death](#) (Crooked Lane \$26.99). This is fun, a sharply written story that kicks off "A Cocktails and Catering Mystery" series wherein a Houston reporter-turned-mixologist mixes it up with murder. Samantha Warren lost her job and her fiancé Greg, a lawyer who skipped to NYC and a high-wire life, in rapid succession. But Sam has a way of making lemonade out of the bitterest of lemons. At a meeting of the local historical-homes council, she serves up the homemade bitters that she made as gifts for her wedding party. She intends to use that as her "in" to become an in-demand party mixologist. But the party's over for one of the council members, who keels over dead soon after he sips the bereft bride's bitter brew. It turns out that the victim, Mark, was poisoned—his drink spiked with oleander. And Sam mixed the drink that Mark imbibed right before his demise, which brings the police to question her. Also one of Greg's Houston law partners. The media. And a rally of friends as well as a chorus of critics. A sense of humor and lively characterizations lift the story. And there are cocktail recipes included.

Knight, Nikki. [Live, Local, And Dead](#) (Crooked Lane \$26.99). Kicking off a series, DJ Jaye Jordan has bought a radio station in a rural Vermont town near the home of her ex-husband, David, the father of her daughter, Ryan. She's dumped the divisive talk show hosted by ranting right-winger Edwin Anger. Hoping for a peaceful life with her daughter, she's not sorry she gave up her life as a DJ in the Big Apple. Running WSV, a small local radio station, seems a perfect choice. She never expected murder, bombs, or political death plots. But finding love and romance with someone from the past who sweeps her off her feet more than makes up for the trials she faces on all fronts. This isn't a political book but Knight definitely calls out hate mongers alongside walking readers through the pleasures of older radio and musical hits.

Manansala, Mia P. [Homicide and HaloHalo](#) (Berkley \$16). Our blogger Lesa reviews: Lila Macapagal can't bring herself to tell her partners that she's not ready for the soft opening of her dream, the Brew-ha Café. She's still traumatized by a murder and being held by a killer several months ago. She ignores a police detective's suggestion to go into therapy; instead, she agrees to be a judge for the biggest local event of the year, the Miss Teen Shady Palms Pageant (Lila was a former winner). When she finds the body of the pageant sponsor, who's a fellow judge, Lila's cousin Bernadette is the primary suspect. Bernadette had



just argued with the man over his predatory behavior toward a teen. Lila and Bernadette have always been rivals, but Lila is willing to look for the real killer, until, once again, she becomes a target. While the follow-up to [Arsenic and Adobo](#) (\$16) is a cozy mystery, it's darker, dealing with PTSD, predatory behavior, dismissive attitudes toward mental health, and other issues. Filipino American food and culture, as well as family and community, remain essential elements in this 2<sup>nd</sup> Tita Rosie's Kitchen Mystery." John will be doing a recorded book chat with the author which we will post on our video channels FB and YT.

Osler, Rob. [Devil's Chew Toy](#) (Crooked Lane \$26.99). Gay Seattle school teacher and blogger Hayden McCall, the self-described "quiet and reserved" narrator of Osler's appealing cozy debut, is startled when, after spending a chaste night with super-hot (and nice) Camilo Rodriguez, he learns that his new acquaintance, whom he met at a dance club, has gone missing. Since Hayden's afraid that the police won't be very diligent in looking for a gay Venezuelan go-go boy, he begins a search on his own, encumbered with Camilo's bull terrier, Commander. "Take a disarming protagonist, a delightful supporting cast, and a pacy romp of a plot, add boundless warmth, humor, baked goods, and puppy love and you've got *Devil's Chew Toy*. Rob Osler's debut cozy—or "quozy"—brings a rainbow of characters into the cozy universe with a lot of snap and even more style. I loved it!" —Catriona McPherson

Rothschild, Peggy. [A Deadly Bone to Pick](#) (Berkley \$26). Ex-police officer and former P.I. Molly Madison is starting over. After the death of her husband, she and her golden retriever, Harlow, move cross-country to California. But as charming and peaceful as the beachside town seems, she soon learns its tranquil tides hold dark secrets. On her first day in the new house, a large, slobbering Saint Berdoodle wanders in. Molly winds up taking on the responsibility of training Noodle since his owner is too busy to do the job. On one of their daily beachside walks, Noodle digs up a severed hand. Once Molly alerts the police and they run a background check on her, an incident from her past makes her an immediate suspect—after all, Noodle's testimony to clear her name won't hold much water in court. To prove her innocence, Molly must rely on instincts, hers and the dog's.... Read this while waiting for new mysteries from Paula Munier, Spencer Quinn, David Rosenfelt... and Jeff Burton. And more....

Watkins, Eileen. [Night of the WereCat](#) (Kensington \$15.95). Switch from canine to feline... Cassie McGlone's Comfy Cats grooming service can turn a scruffy stray into a glamorous Cat-dashian. But with a drug-peddling killer at loose in her picturesque hometown of Chadwick, New Jersey, she'll need to comb through some dangerous suspects to avert a catastrophe...

#### A POISONED PEN PRESS QUARTET

Johnson, Sara E. [The Bone Track](#) (\$15.99). **Signed bookplates.** I had a lot of fun editing this 3<sup>rd</sup> New Zealand-based investigation by American forensic investigator Alex Glock for it takes me back to, and you to, the Milford Track leading to the South Island's Milford Sound. Alexa is actually doing a vacation hike with her visiting brother Charlie, a geotech engineer. Their bare bones trek earns scorn from Luxe Tours travelers enjoying upscale lodges and fabulous food (hard not to find in NZ). But then a series of events including discovering a skeleton and a helicopter attack push the Glocks into Pompolona Lodge with

the Luxe party which shortly includes a murder victim: Dr. Diana Clark, an Auckland orthopedist. This leads to a fly-in by police and it goes from there.... Start this colorful series with [Molten Mud Murder and The Bones Remember](#) (\$15.99 each). **Zoom event with Sara is March 3 at 6:00 PM.**

Parker, Ann. [The Secret in the Wall](#) (\$15.99). **Signed bookplates.** "The year 1882 launches Inez Stannert—sleuth, card shark, musician, saloon owner, and helper of ambitious women—on another adventure...a mystery based on true events and replete with rich period detail, that's a delight to read." —*Kirkus Reviews*. And yes, "Agatha finalist Parker's intricate eighth Silver Rush mystery finds onetime Colorado saloon owner Inez Stannert and her 12-year-old ward, Antonia Gizzi, settled comfortably in 1882 San Francisco. A shrewd investor dedicated to helping other businesswomen, Stannert agrees to co-purchase a long unoccupied building with a lodging house owner who hopes to expand. When they break through the wall between the boardinghouse and the new property, a skeleton tumbles out. Neither the building's former owner nor its surly caretaker, Joe Harris, admits to knowing the dead man's identity, so Inez puts her investigatory talents to work. The corpse wears the remains of a Confederate Navy uniform, has scraps of a letter from Jefferson Davis hidden in its shoe, and carries a fortune in gold coins minted in 1863. Though the clues all point to the past, Harris's subsequent murder proves that danger remains. Surreptitious sleuthing by the headstrong, clever Antonia helps untangle the mystery. Appealing characters match satisfying puzzles. Historical fans will be delighted." It's a treat to order and read all the multi-award-winning [Silver Rush Mysteries](#) by Parker. **Zoom event with Ann is February 28 at 5:30 PM.**

Weisel, Frederick. [The Day He Left](#) (\$16.99). **Signed bookplates.** Here's a Starred Review from *PW*: "At the start of Weisel's excellent sequel to 2021's [The Silenced Women](#) (\$16.99), Annie Behrens, an alcoholic nurse, is awakened by a call one morning from the Santa Rosa, Calif., middle school where her husband, Paul, teaches English to say he hasn't shown up. When Annie tries to phone Paul, she notices Paul left his cell phone at home, along with his lesson plans. That afternoon, Annie reports Paul missing to the police. Lt. Eddie Mahler, a member of the Santa Rosa PD Violent Crimes Investigation team, interviews Annie, who has no idea why her husband has disappeared. Mahler notices Annie has been drinking and wonders whether Paul was fleeing a dysfunctional marriage, and evidence surfaces suggesting Paul may have had inappropriate relationships with female students. The search for the truth leads to some surprising answers. The VCI team members aren't cynical, wise-cracking super cops; on the contrary, they're troubled individuals who accept that "people are complex" and capable of all kinds of foolish, noble, and destructive actions. Weisel does a terrific job blending police procedural with character study."

Wortham, Reavis Z. [Texas Job](#) (\$15.99). Set in 1931, this well-crafted crime novel features Texas Ranger Tom Bell, a supporting character in *The Right Side of Wrong*, Wortham's third Red River mystery. Bell becomes a target when he discovers a dead body on the outskirts of Pine Top, a bustling oil boomtown in East Texas. Caught in an ambush, he narrowly escapes getting shot before he can report the killing to local lawman Sheriff Dobbs, who has his hands full policing the deluge of roughnecks who have poured into Pine Top in search of work and riches. Unfortunately, the

beleaguered Dobbs is disinclined to assist in the ongoing pursuit of a fugitive killer Bell believes is hiding in the town. In addition to evading murderers, Bell winds up battling cutthroat swindlers and greedy predators who are executing landowners in a race to seize land that may yield oil. Authentic settings and richly drawn characters complement Wortham's striking depiction of the Texas oil boom and the unavoidable corruption, greed, and anarchy that accompany it. Buy all the [Texas Red River Mysteries](#) for a rip-roaring reading experience.

### SOME NEW IN HARDCOVER

*There are so many releasing in February I could not get to all of them so I will incorporate some into the March Booknews.*

Armstrong, Kelley. [The Deepest of Secrets](#) (St Martins \$27.99). I really devour this Casey Duncan series, partly because it's a chance to visit the Yukon! Can't wait to read this. Meanwhile *PW* reviews: "In bestseller Armstrong's explosive follow-up to 2021's [A Stranger in Town](#) (\$17.99)—her seventh novel set in Rockton, an off-grid Canadian Yukon refuge for people looking to disappear—Detective Casey Duncan and Sheriff Eric Dalton, her common-law husband, see their evening disrupted when someone posts a sign accusing Deputy Will Anders of committing homicide before coming to Rockton. Though it's true Anders shot his army unit's commanding officer while in a fugue state, Rockton runs on secrecy: nobody knows anyone's real identity or personal history, and revealing such information is forbidden. After a group demands Anders's exile and implies everyone who disagrees is hiding something equally heinous that warrants exposure, Casey and Dalton realize they must work quickly to find and punish the culprit before they lose control—particularly since the council that remotely governs Rockton wants an excuse to shutter it. Avalanching complications ensue. Armstrong shrewdly weaponizes her series' conceit against her characters, pairing demagoguery with paranoia to amplify tension and maximize stakes. Why not order earlier [Casey Duncan Novels](#)?

✦ Beaton MC./RW Green. [Death of a Green Eyed Monster](#) (Grand Central \$27). Green carries on the Hamish Macbeth Mysteries after the death of Beaton. Can the Highlands police sergeant finally have met the woman of his dreams? Hamish is engaged to the lovely Dorothy McIverir, his new constable, and all eyes are on the impending nuptials. The celebratory mood vanishes when a man is found shot, execution style, in Hamish's bucolic village of Lochdubh. It quickly emerges that the victim had ties to the notorious Macgregor crime family in Glasgow. Just as Hamish and Dorothy begin their investigation, Hamish's bent and odious nemesis, Detective Chief Inspector Blair, returns to the village wreaking havoc. The tension escalates when Hamish realizes that Dorothy's vagaries about her past may well be connected to the murder inquiry causing him to question who exactly the future Mrs. Macbeth is. Beaton, the *grande dame* of the cozy mystery genre, passed away in late 2019. But chose her friend and fellow writer Green to continue her Hamish Macbeth and Agatha Raisin mystery series.

Green also releases a digital story, [Death of a Laird](#), for those of you eager for more.

Bradbury, Neil. [A Taste for Poison](#) (St Martins \$27.99). Eleven deadly poisons and the killers who used them is the tag line for this. Physiology and biophysics professor Bradbury debuts with an accessible and fascinating study of poisons, using real murder

cases to explain how the chemicals affect the human body. In the past, poisoning murders were relatively easy to get away with, but today Bradbury considers the prospect of a poisoner getting away with their crime as "almost nonexistent." In chapters with titles reminiscent of mystery fiction ("Aconite and Mrs. Singh's Curry," "Arsenic and Monsieur L'Angelier's Cocoa"), Bradbury examines well-known cases—such as the 1978 ricin poisoning of Bulgarian dissident Georgi Markov by means of a jab from a specially treated umbrella tip—as well as more obscure ones, such as John Hendrickson's 1853 murder of his wife with aconite. He also details exactly how his 11 potentially fatal molecules work; for example, arsenic, in its gaseous state, disintegrates red blood cells, thus causing asphyxiation by reducing the oxygen carried through the body. Bradbury offers the occasional light touch, as in an appendix with a caveat that the "following information is purely for educational purposes only, and is not intended to give the advantages or disadvantages for the use of any particular poison in the commission of murder."

Chang, Lan Samantha. [The Family Chao](#) (Norton \$28). The residents of Haven, Wisconsin, have dined on the Fine Chao restaurant's delicious Americanized Chinese food for thirty-five years, content to ignore any unsavory whispers about the family owners. Whether or not Big Leo Chao is honest, or his wife, Winnie, is happy, their food tastes good and their three sons earned scholarships to respectable colleges. But when the brothers reunite in Haven, the Chao family's secrets and simmering resentments erupt at last. Before long, brash, charismatic, and tyrannical patriarch Leo is found dead—presumed murdered—and his sons find they've drawn the exacting gaze of the entire town. The ensuing trial brings to light potential motives for all three brothers: Dagou, the restaurant's reckless head chef; Ming, financially successful but personally tortured; and the youngest, gentle but lost college student James. As the spotlight on the brothers tightens—and the family dog meets an unexpected fate—Dagou, Ming, and James must reckon with the legacy of their father's outsized appetites and their own future survival. "Brimming with heartbreak, comedy, and suspense, *The Family Chao* offers a kaleidoscopic, highly entertaining portrait of a Chinese American family grappling with the dark undercurrents of a seemingly pleasant small town."

Cordova, Zoraida. [Reclaim the Stars](#) (SimonSchuster \$19.99) is an anthology that collects 17 speculative fiction tales written by both new and well-established authors representing the Latin American diaspora. Editor Córdova presents a hearty collection—including a story of her own that closes the book—that celebrates different perspectives and voices from a diverse, wide-ranging community. The anthology follows a recipe for resounding success: The stories feature Latinx characters and include fantasy and science fiction peppered with plenty of romance, a dash of horror, and a pinch of magical realism—but, above all, a copious amount of warmth... "here is a lot more here about finding oneself in tales of empowerment and growth, of letting go, punching up, and celebrating love in all its incarnations and colors of the rainbow." For adults and readers of say ages 13 and up.

✦ Coulter, Catherine. [The Grayson Sherbrooke Otherwordly Adventures Books #1-5](#) (Blackstone \$31.99/\$19.99). Much like the hero of his frightening gothic adventure stories, well-known English author Grayson Sherbrooke has his own share of run-ins with peculiar supernatural beings, both good and evil. From his

home on the northern coast of England, Sherbrooke leaps into these otherworldly mysteries to find the truth with the help of his son, Pip; his beautiful neighbor, Miranda, and her daughter, P. C.; and an orphan named Barnaby. Set in the mid-nineteenth century and featuring a delightfully quirky cast of characters, this collection includes five books in Coulter's supernatural series: *The Strange Visitation at Wolffe Hall*, *The Resident Evil at Blackthorn Manor*, *The Ancient Spirits of Sedgwick House*, *The Virgin Bride of Northcliffe Hall*, and *The Red Witch of Ravenstone Folly*.

✂ Gramont, Nina de. [The Christie Affair](#) (St Martins \$27.99). First, this is fiction, de Gramont creating a story—which authors and critics liken to a plot worth of Agatha. London, 1925: In a world of townhomes and tennis matches, socialites and shooting parties, Miss Nan O'Dea became Archie Christie's mistress, luring him away from his devoted and well-known wife, Agatha Christie. The question is, why? [I recently reread Christie's second husband Max Mallowan's memoirs and he says Archie took up with Nancy, whom he eventually married, because he'd become addicted to the golfing set.]

LJ reviews: "de Gramont tells the story of Agatha Christie's famous 11-day disappearance, from the point of view of her husband Colonel Christie's mistress, Nan O'Dea. In 1926, Agatha Christie went missing after her husband told her he wanted a divorce. As this story unfolds, the search for Agatha and the description of her time away are intertwined with Nan's life story, including her stay in an Irish home for single pregnant women run by nuns. In the fashionable spa town of Harrogate, Nan and Agatha meet up, and romances, secrets on all sides, long-held grudges, and a house dubbed the 'Timeless Manor' result in a fascinating, if unlikely, explanation of what happened during those 11 days. De Gramont has done her research, resulting in a story that transports readers to early 20th-century Ireland and the English countryside. True to the spirit of Christie, a surprising murder rounds out this tale; recommended for Christie fans and those who enjoyed Taylor Jenkins Reid's *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*."

Kirkus Reviews delightfully adds: "De Gramont's Agatha—who walks away from her disabled vehicle forgetting her suitcase but not her typewriter—is also easy to love. The story unfolds in a series of carefully placed vignettes you may find yourself reading and rereading, partly to get the details straight, partly to fully savor the well-turned phrases and the dry humor, partly so the book won't have to end, damn it."

Engberg, Katrine. [The Harbor](#) (Gallery \$28). I was much struck by Danish Engberg's mystery [The Butterfly House](#) (\$16.99). And now, yay!, Detectives Jeppe Kørner and Anette Werner return in another fast-paced and rich Scandinavian noir in late February to make our **March International Crime Book of the Month**. When Oscar's affluent parents, who own an auction house, find a cryptic, threatening note addressed to them in their kitchen, they're convinced their 15-year-old son Oscar Dreyer-Hoff is being held ransom. Soon, Oscar's Danish teacher, Malthe Saether, is found strangled. Convinced that Oscar's apparent kidnapping and Malthe's death are tied together, Jeppe and Anette begin their investigation, aided by a large cast of supporting characters, all of whom, like retired academic Esther de Laurenti (who had a lead role in 2019's *The Tenant*), are delightfully fleshed out. Meanwhile, Jeppe struggles to maintain an amicable relationship

with his girlfriend's daughters, and Anette becomes attracted to one of the witnesses. "The plot takes some unexpected turns as the detectives unearth some shocking secrets involving fraud and pornography en route to the satisfying conclusion."

Engler, Elise. [A Diary of the Plague Year](#) (\$34). "Engler combines the sharp eye of an editorial caricaturist with the vibrant color of a portraitist, and the energy of the artwork underscores the sense of urgency in the day's news. The text accompanying the drawings has a matter-of-fact tone that belies the powerful underlying sense that so much has gone seriously awry. A dynamic artistic rendering of chaos survived—at least so far."—*Kirkus* Starred Review

Foley, Lucy. [The Paris Apartment](#) (Harper \$28.99). Jess needs a fresh start. She's broke and alone, and she's just left her job under less than ideal circumstances. Her half-brother Ben didn't sound thrilled when she asked if she could crash with him for a bit, but he didn't say no, and surely everything will look better from Paris. Only when she shows up – to find a very nice apartment, could Ben really have afforded this? – he's not there. The longer Ben stays missing, the more Jess starts to dig into her brother's situation, and the more questions she has. Ben's neighbors are an eclectic bunch, and not particularly friendly. Jess may have come to Paris to escape her past, but it's starting to look like it's Ben's future that's in question. The socialite – The nice guy – The alcoholic – The girl on the verge – The concierge... Everyone's a neighbor. Everyone's a suspect. And everyone knows something they're not telling.

The Library Reads Pick: "Foley hits it out of the ballpark with this solid thriller set in a Paris apartment building. Jess goes looking for her brother, but finds only the smell of bleach and a broken St. Christopher medal lodged in the floorboards. Written in short chapters with multiple points of view and delicious secrets dropped along the way, this gripping, wild ride is impossible to put down. If you like Liane Moriarty or Ruth Ware, pick this one up. And here is our **February International Crime Book of the Month**

Hamilton, Hugo. [The Pages](#) (Knopf \$28). Soon after Hitler rose to power, Joseph Roth's books were burned in the streets of Berlin. But what if a copy of *Rebellion*, Roth's third novel, were secreted away and handed down through the generations? Here, Hamilton (Dublin Palms; Every Single Minute) muses on that possibility and positions *Rebellion* itself as the narrator. The story unfolds around Lena, who inherits the book and discovers a hand-drawn map inside. While she is en route to Germany to follow the map's trail, the book is stolen, and her chance encounter with survivors of the Second Chechen War leads to the denouement of the story. The copy of *Rebellion* narrates this journey while also regaling readers with the story written on its own pages, interspersed with details of Joseph Roth's life. Hamilton parallels and interweaves the lives of these characters to flatten and preserve the conversation between the past and the present. "Much like Ian McEwan's *Nutshell*, narrated by a fetus, Hamilton's latest novel conceals a clever literary element with beautiful prose and a deeper meditation on time itself."—LJ

✂ Harrison, Cora. [Spring of Hope](#) (Severn \$28.99). The prologue of Harrison's superior fourth Gaslight mystery teaming novelists Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens, a melancholy letter written by Collins on his deathbed in 1889, sets the stage for flashbacks



to 1859. In the wake of the Great Stink of 1858, during which an overwhelmed London sewer system combined with a heat wave to create a persistent foul odor in the metropolis, civil engineer Joseph Bazalgette, a friend of Dickens, is tasked with addressing the problem. But murder interferes, as Collins relates in his letter. During an exhibition of Bazalgette's proposed solution at a gathering attended by notables who include MP Benjamin Disraeli, a man, unidentified in the prologue, is killed in an explosion that sends metal fragments flying. Collins and Dickens, present at the gathering, come to believe the death was no accident and partner up to seek a murderer. Amid clever plot twists, Harrison maintains suspense as the action builds up to the fatal explosion, leaving readers in suspense as to who is killed and why. Collins and Dickens subsequently investigate. Victorian whodunits don't get much better than this."—*PW* Starred Review. Ordered Upon Request.

✎ Judd, Alan. [A Fine Madness](#) (Pegasus \$25.95). Why was Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe fatally stabbed in an English inn in 1593? That enduring puzzle gets new answers in this taut thriller framed as an account by Thomas Phelippes, a friend of Marlowe's and a fellow intelligencer, in response to questions from an unidentified interrogator while Phelippes is incarcerated in the Tower of London in 1623. Phelippes, whose reliability is uncertain given his desire to get himself freed, traces his history as an agent for Queen Elizabeth's legendary spymaster, Sir Francis Walsingham, specializing in breaking codes and forging documents. He recruits Marlowe at Cambridge University to join Walsingham's efforts to protect the queen from a variety of murderous conspirators. Superior prose is a plus.... "This clever recreation of a complex life stands above the many other fictional explanations for Marlowe's death. Fans of Iain Pears will be engrossed."

Katz, Erica. [Fake](#) (Harper \$26.99). Russian oligarch Leonard Sobetsky makes aspiring artist Emma Caan, the narrator of this propulsive thriller, the kind of offer typically associated with a whiff of sulfur: leave Manhattan's Gemini Reproductions, where she's one of a stable cranking out (strictly legal) brushstroke-perfect replicas of masterpieces for their owners, to copy exclusively for him and he'll not only pay handsomely but also give her entrée to the art world's stratosphere. In a flash, the 26-year-old segues from subways and ramen to Instafamous assistant director at a prestigious gallery, winging on her benefactor's private jet to a Hong Kong art fair to broker megabucks sales and party epically. All the while, however, she's anxiously waiting for the other Louboutin to drop—which readers know will happen since this twisty tale, which unspools largely in flashbacks, opens with Emma being grilled by FBI agents concerning her dealings with Sobetsky. "... the author's exposing of some of the art business's more egregious manipulations and frauds makes for genuinely captivating entertainment." My only cavil with this intrigue is that Emma doesn't strive to take control of her life, asking how its recent careful curation might be as fake as her forgeries, unlike the lawyer in Bonnie Kistler's [The Cage](#)—which I recommend highly despite the Epilogue....

For a deep dive into art theft, Stefan Koldehoff and Tobias Timm present [Art & Crime](#) (Seven Stories \$35), *The Fight Against Looters, Forgers, and Fraudsters in the High-Stakes Art World*. Today, with prices in the hundreds of millions for individual artworks, and billionaires' collections among

the most conspicuous and liquid of their assets, crime is more rampant than ever in this largely unregulated universe. Increased prices and globalization have introduced new levels of fraud and malfeasance into the art world—everything from "artnapping," in which an artwork is held hostage and only returned for a ransom, to forgery and tax fraud. However, the extent of the economic and cultural damage that results from criminality in the global art scene rarely comes to light. Their account of criminality covers the 1911 theft of the *Mona Lisa*, art stolen by Nazis, and the still unsolved 1990 heist of six priceless paintings at Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

✎ Lovesey, Peter. [Reader, I Buried Them & Other Stories](#) (Soho \$27.95). The 16 dazzling selections in this inviting collection from MWA Grand Master and CWA Diamond Dagger winner Lovesey range from his first published story, "The Bathroom" (1973), to three new ones. In one of these three, "And the Band Played On," a boy learns the surprising truth about the hidden past of his mentally impaired grandfather, who likes to sing an old-fashioned tune about dancing with a beautiful blonde. More than one twist graces this affecting tale. The sly title story, narrated by a monk who tends a monastery garden in London, puts a nice spin on a classic Agatha Christie trope. Other notable entries are "The Deadliest Tale of All," in which an obituary writer attempts to repair Edgar Allan Poe's reputation, and "A Three Pie Problem," in which police detective Peter Diamond exposes the dalliances of an aged attorney at a toxic corporate Christmas gathering. Throughout, Lovesey delivers crisp dialogue, effortless narration, appealing characters, ingenious plots, and effervescent whimsy. A concluding essay, "The Tale of Three Tubs," details the true story of the inspiration behind "The Bathroom." This is a thoroughly entertaining compendium of the best of the best by one of the best

Lunde, Maja. [The Last Wild Horses](#) (Harper \$27.99). Like Lunde's *The History of Bees*, her stellar latest hinges on a threatened species, this time the takhi, a rare ancient breed of horses. In 1880 St. Petersburg, a colleague brings zoologist Mikhail Kovrov the skull and hide of what looks like a takhi, which is believed to be extinct. Kovrov leaves his comfortable urban life to travel with animal-capture expert Wilhelm Wolff to Mongolia, where the remains were found, with a plan to bring living takhis to Europe to preserve their bloodline. Though they succeed in capturing the horses, Kovrov's time with the passionate, fearless Wolff throws his beliefs about his identity and future into crisis. A century later, German veterinarian Karin realizes her longtime dream of flying a group of European-born takhis back to Mongolia to reestablish them in the wild. Joining her on the expedition is her son, Mathias, a heroin addict in unsteady recovery who hopes to win the love his mother has never seemed able to express. In 2064 Norway, Eve and her teenage daughter, Isa, inhabit the dystopia caused by climate change. Isa wants to join migrants seeking a more sustainable habitat, while Eve is determined to stay at the family's defunct wild animal park to take care of its takhi, one of the world's last, and her foal. Each of the segments is brilliantly complex, and they conclude with satisfying revelations. Throughout, Lunde delivers a perfect blend of gripping human stories, historical and scientific fact, and speculative elements. This standout should win her wider attention in the U.S.

Mezrich, Ben. [The Midnight Ride](#) (Grand Central \$29). Hailey Gordon is looking to make some fast cash to help pay her tuition when she's caught counting cards at the Encore casino in Boston. She grabs her winnings and makes her escape. With guards closing in, she dives into an unlocked room to hide...only to find a dead body. Recently released from prison, Nick Patterson hasn't felt hope in a long time, but the job he "inherited" in prison promises to change that. He enters hotel room 633 to find that the person he was supposed to meet has been murdered. Next to the corpse stands a terrified young woman—Hailey Gordon. American history professor Adrian Jensen learns of the death of his professional nemesis, Charles Walker, the night after he received Walker's latest research. Skeptical at first, Adrian nearly deletes the file. But when one small, new detail catches his eye, he makes it his mission to uncover what could be one of the biggest secrets of the Revolutionary War. All three strangers find themselves on the cusp of an incredible discovery—one that someone is willing to kill to keep buried.

Naymark, Emily. [Behind the Lie](#) (Crooked Lane \$26.99). The *PW* Starred Review: "A block party turns violent in upstate Sylvan, N.Y., where PI Laney Bird, a former NYPD detective, and Alfie, her troubled 15-year-old son, resettled four years earlier. Toward the end of the festivities, Oliver Dubois, the husband of Laney's friend Holly, uses a neighbor's pickup truck to smash through the front door of his own home. When Laney hears fire engines, she rushes to a nearby burning house, where the truck's owner, Step Volkin, is inside bleeding from a gunshot wound. Both Step's wife, Vera, and Holly go missing, along with Laney's firearm. When Alfie, who has committed arson in the past, is evasive about his whereabouts at the time of the fire, Laney fears her son has crossed a line." Yes, she sets out to find the truth, uncertain whether to conceal or expose it as we alternate between her story and that of Holly whose past and present actions precipitate a surprising drama.

Our friend author and critic Hank Phillippi Ryan adds: "Devastating. Immersive. And somehow, still redemptive. In Emily Naymark's deceptively charming neighborhood—a dark and ugly secret lurks behind every door. And when two women go missing, the clash between the duties of a private investigator and the responsibilities of a parent explode into a series of impossible decisions. A brilliant and tense mystery with heartbreaking characters—and a gasp-worthy solution."

Neiderman, Andrew. [The Woman Beyond the Attic](#) (Gallery \$26). Best known for her internationally, multi-million-copy bestselling novel *Flowers in the Attic*, Cleo Virginia Andrews lived a fascinating life. Born to modest means, she came of age in the American South during the Great Depression and faced a series of increasingly challenging health issues. Yet, once she rose to international literary fame, she prided herself on her intense privacy. Biographer Neiderman aims to connect her personal life with the public novels for which she was famous. Based on Virginia's own letters, and interviews with her dearest family members, her long-term ghostwriter Andrew Neiderman tells Virginia's full story for the first time and includes family photos, personal letters, a partial manuscript for an unpublished novel, and more.

✦ Nickson, Chris. [The Blood Covenant](#) (Severn \$28.99). Set in Leeds, England, 1823, Nickson's "stellar fourth mystery finds thief-taker Simon Westlow recuperating from a devastating

illness, not in the best shape to embark on a crusade. But he does so after 10-year-old Peter Hardy and eight-year-old Jacob Easby are killed by the brutal overseer at the mill where they worked, a tragedy that revives Simon's memories of his own oppressive experiences in a workhouse. When Simon's testimony to an investigating commission about the torture he endured as a child laborer doesn't yield results, he resolves to bring those responsible for the boys' deaths to justice, despite the risk of taking on the powerful status quo. Meanwhile, during a walk, Simon comes across the body of a clerk found in the river with his throat slit and right hand severed. The tension rises as the subsequent inquiry pits Simon against a dangerous adversary. Nickson does a superb job using the grim living and working conditions for the city's poor as a backdrop for a memorable and affecting plot. James Ellroy fans will be enthralled." Ordered Upon Request.

O'Connell, J.P. [Hotel Portofino](#) (Blackstone \$28.99/\$17.99). Leaving London behind for sunny Italy, Bella Ainsworth has finally realized her dream of opening an elegant hotel in Portofino. With her marriage to Cecil strained, her daughter Alice a war widow, and her son Lucian literally bearing the scars of the Great War, Bella hopes this move will be good for all of them. Once they've opened their doors, though, Bella finds that running the hotel and caring for demanding guests is far more challenging and expensive than she expected. On top of that she is being blackmailed by the local fascist bureaucrat, her husband is trying to arrange a marriage between his old paramour's daughter and Lucian, and her daughter remains as grim as ever. As Cecil schemes to alleviate his own money troubles, a valuable painting goes missing, and all of the guests are suspects. *LJ* adds. "Already slated to air as a TV series on PBS, O'Connell's historical novel, brimming with drama, romance, and intrigue set on the beautiful Italian Riviera during the 1920s, is perfect for fans of *Downton Abbey*. It also includes a diverse cast of characters and deftly addresses the prejudices of the era." If the author did not live in London this would be our February Historical Fiction Book of the Month. Alas....Note the simultaneous paperback edition.

O'Neil, Heather. [When We Lost Our Heads](#) (Riverhead \$26). O'Neill's Victorian novel is set in motion when Montreal sugar factory heiress Marie Antoine and her friend Sadie Arnett accidentally kill Marie's maid while acting out a duel. The divergent and convergent paths of the friends over the ensuing years—Sadie spends time in a repressive school abroad and a brothel where she writes pornographic stories, while Marie takes the reins of her father's business. Eventually the two embark upon a sexual relationship but their lavish lifestyle and abuses of power eventually results in a stinging revolt....

Pyne, Daniel. [Vital Lies](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$25.99/\$15.95). In Pyne's outstanding sequel to 2021's [Water Memory](#) (\$15.95), 50-year-old Aubrey Sentro, a former CIA agent, joins the hunt for Günter Witt, a former Stasi agent who has resurfaced. In 1989, Sentro, then 18, was posted to Berlin, where she was tasked with infiltrating the East German secret service. After blowing her cover to protect other American agents, she was arrested, taken to jail, drugged, and tortured. Witt was her chief tormentor. She subsequently lost much of her memory of her 11 months as a captive. Meanwhile, in the present, ex-Basque separatist Xavi Beya and his wife and children are captured by two terrorists,

Yusupov, a Chechen, and Mercedes Izquierdo, a Cuban. To protect his family, Beya is forced to commit terrorist acts. Yusupov and Izquierdo's subsequent attack on Sentro's home in the New Mexico desert, in which Sentro's hired hand and lover is killed, causes her daughter, Jenny Troon, to become involved in Sentro's return to the spy world. Sentro has serious skills, but her fragile mental state leaves her always on the edge of disaster. Pyne keeps the pages racing by. This gripping cinematic thriller will leave readers transfixed. It is also a very fine companion to the Paul Vidich spy story found above in Signed Books.

Robb, JD. [Abandoned in Death](#) (St Martins \$28.99). June 2061 is a perilous time for women in a downtown Manhattan neighborhood who happen to resemble a violent kidnapper's mother. The killer doesn't seem to be trying to hide anything except his own identity. Ten days after snatching bartender Lauren Elder from the street as she walked home, he leaves her body, carefully dressed and made up, with even the gash in her throat meticulously stitched up and beribboned, where it's sure to be found quickly, along with the chilling label "bad mommy." When Lt. Eve Dallas and Detective Delia Peabody realize that Anna Hobe, a server at a nearby karaoke bar who disappeared a week ago under similar circumstances, was probably another victim of the same perp, the clock begins ticking down even before they learn that assistant marketing manager Mary Kate Covino has gone missing as well. This futuristic crime series is in its 54th outing with this new chapter.

Thompson, Laura. [The Heiresses](#) (St Martins \$29.99). Heiresses: surely they are among the luckiest women on earth. Are they not to be envied, with their private jets and Chanel wardrobes and endless funds? Yet all too often those gilded lives have been beset with trauma and despair. Before the 20th century a wife's inheritance was the property of her husband, making her vulnerable to kidnap, forced marriages, even confinement in an asylum. And in modern times, heiresses fell victim to fortune-hunters who squandered their millions. *Heiresses* tells the stories of some notable million dollar babies including Nancy Cunard, Consuelo Vanderbilt, Barbara Hutton, and Patty Hearst. With *Downton Abbey* still vibrant and Julian Fellowes' new series *The Gilded Age* airing on PBS, here are real women in real roles.

Truman, Margaret/Jon Land. [Margaret Truman's Murder at the CDC](#) (Forge \$27.99). Thriller writer Land has taken over the Capital Crimes franchise that has born Truman's name throughout even though she didn't write them and Land has upped the stakes involved in each chapter. 2017: A military transport on a secret run to dispose of its deadly contents vanishes without a trace. The present: A mass shooting on the steps of the Capitol nearly claims the life of Robert Brixton's grandson. No stranger to high-stakes investigations, Brixton embarks on a trail to uncover the motive behind the shooting. On the way he finds himself probing the attempted murder of the daughter his best friend, who works at the Washington offices of the CDC. The connection between the mass shooting and Alexandra's poisoning lies in that long-lost military transport that has been recovered by forces determined to change America forever. Those forces are led by radical separatist leader Deacon Frank Wilhyte, whose goal is nothing short of bringing on a second Civil War. Brixton joins forces with Kelly Lofton, a former Baltimore homicide detective. She has her own reasons for wanting to find the truth behind the shooting on the Capitol steps, and is the only person with the direct knowledge Brixton needs.

Veronesi, Sandro. [The Hummingbird](#) (Harper Via \$27.99). When readers meet Marco Carrera, the year is 1999 and he is a 40-year-old ophthalmologist in Rome, about to meet destiny in the form of a psychoanalyst breaking his confidentiality oath. From here, chapters jump back and forth in time from 1960 to 2030. Readers meet the great love of Marco's life, visit his childhood, witness his marriage and divorce. When he is just a boy, Marco stops growing, remaining small and childlike well into his teenage years: his mother nicknames him "the hummingbird" for his stature, a moniker that will echo into his adulthood. He becomes a father and eventually a grandfather, so that four generations of his family flash kaleidoscopically across these pages; Marco is ever at the novel's center, however, even as he is accused of holding still through life's storms. "You can keep still as time flows around you, you can stop it flowing, sometimes you can turn back time, even—just like a hummingbird, you can fly backwards and retrieve lost time." The novel mimics this movement with its nearly stop-action chronology. "*The Hummingbird* is clearly an intellectual exercise, but can also be read more simply as a story about a single, deceptively ordinary life."

✦ Willberg, TA. [Marion Lane and the Deadly Rose](#) (Park Row \$27.99). Marion Lane returns to solve a new case when a serial killer with an unusual calling card is on the loose. It's 1959 and a new killer haunts the streets of London, having baffled Scotland Yard. The newspapers call him The Florist because of the rose he brands on his victims. The police have turned yet again to the Inquirers at Miss Brickett's for assistance, and second-year Marion Lane is assigned the case. But she's already dealing with a mystery of her own, having received an unsigned letter warning her that one of the three new recruits should not be trusted. She dismisses the letter at first, focusing on The Florist case, but her informer seems to be one step ahead, predicting what will happen before it does. But when a fellow second-year Inquirer is murdered, Marion takes matters into her own hands and must come face-to-face with her informer—who predicted the murder—to find out everything they know. Until then, no one at Miss Brickett's is safe and everyone is a suspect. Start with [Marion Lane and the Midnight Murder](#) (\$16.99), a delightful spoof.

Youers, Rio. [No Second Chances](#) (Harper \$27.99). The author of *Lola on Fire* pens a new adventure set in the Hollywood drug trade. Luke Kingsley (a washed-up actor who's been accused of murdering his wife) and Kitty Rae (an aspiring actress—turned—drug runner) are neighbors. Kitty helps Luke during one of his lowest moments, and he vows to return the favor when she shows up on his doorstep battered from a confrontation with a drug dealer. Luke and Kitty are more closely linked than they realize: her drug connection may be related to the death of Luke's wife. Youers details the landscapes of Hollywood and Los Angeles as Kitty skateboards as a courier through the city; when the situations become darker, so does the scenery, culminating in a desert showdown, compete with rattlesnakes.

## OUR FEBRUARY LARGE PAPERBACK PICKS

*If no publisher is given then the paperback is a reprint of an earlier hardcover book*

Abbott, Jeff. [An Ambush of Widows](#) (\$16.99). Kirsten North, a New Orleans freelance researcher, believes her husband, Henry, a software consultant specializing in computer security, is in



New York City on a business trip. Then she gets a call from Henry's phone that's not from him. The indistinct voice, whose gender is unclear, informs Kirsten that Henry has been fatally shot in Austin, Texas, then hangs up. An online search yields a press report that two men were found shot to death in an Austin warehouse two days earlier. Only one victim has been identified: entrepreneur Adam Zhang. Fearing that Henry's killer may have been the anonymous caller, the distraught Kirsten hops the first flight to Austin, unaware that her seatmate is shadowing her. After identifying her husband's corpse in the county morgue, Kirsten begins digging on her own into the baffling tragedy. She later joins forces with Adam's widow, Flora, even though she suspects Flora of being behind the murders. Abbott adroitly shifts perspectives to raise the suspense. Excellent if you are a fan of Lisa Unger and not, in fact, unlike the Laura Dave huge hit [The Last Thing He Told Me](#) (\$27).

Berenson, Alex. [The Power Couple](#) (\$18.99). Rebecca and Brian Unsworth appear to have it all. A nice house in the suburbs of Washington, DC. Two well-behaved, healthy teenage children. Important government jobs—Rebecca working in counterterrorism for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Brian serving as a coder for the National Security Agency. Their lives stand to improve even more as Brian, in his off-hours, has just developed and sold a highly profitable app. However, the Unsworths' marriage isn't as perfect as it seems. After two decades together, they've drifted apart, talking little and having sex even less. Seeking to revive their strained relationship, they decide for their twentieth wedding anniversary to take their two kids, Kira and Tony, on a European getaway. They have a blast... until one night in Barcelona.... Our 2021 February Crime Book of the Month was (and now is) both a welcome return to fiction for the Edgar winner and *NY Times* reporter and presents a plot that truly surprised me.

✚ Brooks. [The Good Wife of Bath](#) (Morrow \$16.99). In 1364 England, one of literature's most unforgettable characters—Chaucer's Wife of Bath—tells her story in her own words as she rises through society from a cast-off farm girl to five marriages to, finally, a woman of fortune fighting to control her own life. And to learn her role in Chaucer's life. Readers of Anya Seton's *Katherine* will recognize much of the cast and the history. "A provocative, immersive medieval novel starring one of literature's most unforgettable characters in her own words—Chaucer's bold and libidinous Wife of Bath. The famous poet, brother-in-law to John of Gaunt, told a story that mocked a strong woman. It became a literary classic. But what if the woman in question had a chance to tell her own version?" The Afterword is well worth reading, as is the Glossary (how many words did you already know?) and the full cast of characters. What a great effort by Australian Brooks.

Carr, Jack. [Savage Son](#) (\$17). Deep in the wilds of Siberia, a woman is on the run, pursued by a man harboring secrets—a man intent on killing her. A traitorous CIA officer has found refuge with the Russian mafia with designs on ensuring a certain former Navy SEAL sniper is put in the ground. Half a world away, James Reece is recovering from brain surgery in the Montana wilderness, slowly putting his life back together with the help of investigative journalist Katie Buranek and his longtime friend and SEAL teammate Raife Hastings. Unbeknownst to them, the Russian mafia has set their sights on Reece in a deadly game of

cat and mouse. Will he survive his 3<sup>rd</sup> high-octane confrontation with a determined enemy?

The next James Reece, [In the Blood](#) (Atria \$28) will publish for summer reading and debut here at The Pen May 30 or 31.

Cobb, May. [The Hunting Wives](#) (\$17). Lifestyle journalist Sophie O'Neill leaves a successful job in bustling Evanston, Illinois, wishing to "slow down" with her architect husband and preschooler son in small town Mapleton, Texas. Soon, a bored Sophie seeks the company of oil-rich Margot Banks, the force behind an exclusive conspiratorial clique of four wives, a group of dysfunctional friends heavily lubricated with a steady diet of martinis and mojitos. Friday nights light up with their private skeet shooting club, followed by barhopping. The flirting women have only two rules: first names only, and don't go all the way. But rules are meant to be broken. Fueled by alcohol, rage, jealousy, unhappy marriages, and blind lust, the women indulge in adultery and raunchy sex. It's Texas, so keep an eye out for hunky football players, and when a teenage cheerleader ends up dead, Sophie becomes the prime suspect. Wild plot twists keep the pages turning in this Cobb's second thriller.

Dalton, Julie Carrick. [Waiting for the Night Song](#) (\$15.99). A 2021 First Mystery Book of the Month now in paperback. Forestry researcher and all-around environmentalist Cadie Kessler has one of those secrets you just know is going to catch up with her someday, which it does when an old friend resurfaces in her life. Not that Cadie needs any more problems, what with wildfires and local foreclosures battling for which can spread faster. Those wildfires become a metaphor for her own tortured psyche as past and present converge in shattering fashion. *Waiting for the Night Song* hums with the lyrical echoes of John Hart and masterful characters reminiscent of Pat Conroy. And an environment conjured to life as did Delia Owens in *Crawdads*.... Julie tells me the sequel publishes in 2023.

Pek, Jane. [The Verifiers](#) (\$17). Set in New York "circa early twenty-first century," Pek's debut introduces irrepressible Claudia Lin, who has recently been hired by Veracity, a low-profile, referrals-only company that checks information for mistrustful clients who want to know whether the people they meet on online dating sites are telling the truth. One client, Iris Lettriste, is different. She "sits down and tells us about the guy she wants us to verify like she's ordering her first coffee of an arduous morning and it's vital that the barista gets it right." Ten days later, Iris is found dead, apparently having killed herself. Claudia, who's an avid mystery reader, decides to investigate and is pulled into a conspiracy, all the while dealing with her complicated, dysfunctional family. Claudia's entertaining references to Inspector Yuan, the hero of her "comfort-read murder mystery series," cleverly elucidate her views on literary structure as well as provide investigative tips.

The Indie Next Pick adds: «Claudia Lin, a lifelong reader of mystery novels, may be getting in over her head when she decides to investigate a mysterious death connected to the online dating detective agency where she works. Well-developed characters and an engaging locked room plot make this a great pick for those who loved [Arsenic and Adobo](#) and [Dial A For Aunties](#) (\$16 each), two titles highly recommended by John Charles and me.

✂ Penner, Sarah. [The Lost Apothecary](#) (\$17.99). Modern Caroline travels alone to London. Looking for a distraction, she finds one while mudlarking along the Thames: a small glass vial. Inspired to research its origins, Caroline uncovers a dark tale of poison and murder in the 1700s, where an apothecary owner with a unique talent, a dark past, and a keen sense of revenge meets a young girl with a curiosity that might lead her astray. The narrative flips between 17<sup>th</sup> Century Nella's story of helping to liberate women by secretly supplying them with poison to murder men who have wronged them and Caroline's quest to solve the centuries-old apothecary murders while going solo on her 10-year anniversary trip to London after discovering her husband's infidelity. Here's a debut that's a good choice for readers of *The Clockmaker's Daughter*, *Once Upon a River*, and *The Essex Serpent*.

Pobi, Robert. [Under Pressure](#) (\$18.99). Canadian Pobi is one of our staff's favorite thriller masters. Here is a Starred Review for his nail-biting second Lucas Page zinger: "In Pobi's stellar sequel to 2019's [City of Windows](#) (\$17.99), astrophysicist, bestselling author, and former FBI agent Lucas Page, who was severely injured in an accident years earlier and now has a prosthetic arm and leg, reluctantly returns to duty after a thermobaric bomb explodes in Manhattan's Guggenheim Museum during a private gala, killing more than 700 people with little damage to the building. The alleged bomber sends a manifesto of sorts to news outlets calling for immediate revolution and a rejection of technology. As the bombings continue—and the body count rises—Page uses his unique way of looking at the world in geometric terms to find connections among the targeted sites and victims. Page stands out as a highly unusual lead in a crowded genre, and Pobi combines a razor sharp sense of humor with surgical use of political and social commentary throughout. This is a must for fans of sophisticated crime fiction."

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Lucas Page, [Do No Harm](#) (St Martins \$27.99), has been postponed to August 9.

Sandford, John. [Ocean Prey](#) (\$17). Lucas Davenport (last seen in 2020's *Masked Prey*) and Virgil Flowers (last seen in 2019's *Bloody Genius*), team up in this entertaining high-stakes adventure on the high seas. Three Coast Guard officers, alerted to a suspiciously high-powered boat picking up a diver south of Pompano Bay, Fla., head out to investigate. They're shot and killed before they reach the boat. Since they're federal agents, their murder should be a case for the FBI. When the Feds seem to be dragging their feet, frustrated Coast Guard officials asks U.S. Marshal Davenport to pursue the killer or killers. Davenport in turn calls on his friend Flowers, an investigator for the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, for help. Flowers goes undercover in a vast criminal organization headed by a major bad guy that reaches far beyond the confines of Florida. The suspense rises as Davenport and Flowers take a number of foolhardy chances in their pursuit of justice. You will enjoy seeing the two old buddies and their cohorts wading into dangerous wasters.

Look for LETTY Davenport, Lucas' adopted daughter, to debut here in a new thriller on April 12: [The Investigator](#) (Putnam \$29).

Silva, Daniel. [The Cellist](#) (\$17.99). Viktor Orlov had a long-standing appointment with death. Once Russia's richest man, he now resides in splendid exile in London, where he has waged a tireless crusade against the authoritarian kleptocrats who have

seized control of the Kremlin. His mansion in Chelsea's exclusive Cheyne Walk is one of the most heavily protected private dwellings in London. Yet somehow, on a rainy summer evening, in the midst of a global pandemic, Russia's vengeful president finally manages to cross Orlov's name off his kill list. That's the set-up for the entry of Israeli ace spy Gabriel Allon who disagrees with MI6's analysis of who and what next.

St. John, Katherine. [The Siren](#) (\$16.99). St. John delivers on the promise of her 2020 debut [The Lion's Den](#) (\$15.99), with this superb tale of revenge and unbridled ego. Actor Cole Power, who at 49 is still considered by many to be one of the sexiest men in Hollywood, is financing a film titled *The Siren* that was written by his son, a recent film school graduate, who will also direct. Cole's ex-wife, Stella Rivers, who's counting on the movie to revive her flagging career, will star opposite Cole. Taylor Wasserman, the producer, is also desperate for a hit after being fired from her previous job amid rumors of embezzlement. Also involved are Felicity Fox, Stella's beautiful new assistant who seems too good to be true, and social media influencer Madison Kasabian, whose vanity knows no bounds. The troupe assembles on the Caribbean island of Saint Genesius, and the scene is set for action, intrigue, murder, and heart-stopping adventure. St. John keeps readers deliciously off-balance with each new revelation about the characters and their motives, as revealed through the alternating viewpoints of Stella, Felicity, and Taylor. This is pure, riveting entertainment, excellent escape from winter.

Swanson, Peter. [Every Vow You Break](#) (\$16.99). What are the consequences of entering a marriage with a guilty secret? As Abigail Baskin faces her approaching wedding to wealthy Bruce Lamb, she's wracked with guilt over sleeping with someone else during her bachelorette party weekend. Her situation becomes even more fraught when that one-night stand guy, whom she only knows as Scottie, starts stalking her. After Scottie sends Abigail an email suggesting they share a deep connection and she should cancel the nuptials, she goes ahead with the wedding, but fears Scottie's continuing obsession with her. She hopes for a respite when Bruce spirits her away for their honeymoon on a Maine island, but that's dashed when Scottie appears there as well, setting in motion a deadly series of events that imperils her life. Events that make you realize Abigail was too smitten with the prospect of marriage to a swanky guy to take a closer look behind the scene. Swanson scored an earlier huge hit with [Eight Perfect Murders](#) (\$16.99).

And he signs his next novel, [Nine Lives](#) (Morrow \$27.99), for his virtual event with The Pen on March 17.

✂ Winspear, Jacqueline. [The Consequences of Fear](#) (\$16.99). In late 1941 London, Freddie Hackett, a young message runner for the government, hides in a bombed-out house as he witnesses a murder and is then shocked to encounter the killer when he does his next delivery. The police don't believe him—a cursory inspection shows no sign of a body—so he seeks out a woman to whom he once delivered a message: Maisie Dobbs. While Maisie believes the boy and wants to help, she must maintain extreme caution: she's working secretly for the Special Operations Executive, assessing candidates for crucial work with the French resistance. Work that inevitably results in death to some of the operatives. Her two worlds—British Intelligence operations in France and the work of French Free agents—collide when she spots the killer in a place she least expects.... and meanwhile she

is enjoying her romance with an American diplomat assigned to the British embassy. While momentous events are the larger canvas for Winspear's Maisie Dobbs mysteries, it's the ordinary lives and details playing out against the extraordinary that capture readers. Winspear reveals that Freddie Hackett was inspired by her own father's work as a runner during the war.

Jackie launches a new Maisie Dobbs, [A Sunlit Weapon](#) (Harper \$27.99), with The Pen on March 21. It's never too early to order your signed copy!

### NEW IN LARGE PAPERBACK

*If no publisher is given then the paperback is a reprint of an earlier hardcover book*

Bennett, Brit. [The Vanishing Half](#) (\$18). After achieving Hopwood and Hurston/Wright honors and debuting big with *The Mothers*, Bennett here features identical twin sisters, who at age 16 run away from their small, black, 1950s Southern town and take different paths, one passing for white. What's key is the relationship between their daughters. "Bennett's gorgeously written second novel, an ambitious meditation on race and identity, considers the divergent fates of twin sisters, born in the Jim Crow South, after one decides to pass for white. Bennett balances the literary demands of dynamic characterization with the historical and social realities of her subject matter."—*The New York Times*

✦ Bennett, SJ. [The Windsor Knot](#) (\$16.99). In this first in a new series, Queen Elizabeth II is appalled by the murder of a young Russian pianist at Windsor Castle and discreetly takes matters into her own hands when she decides that MI5's investigation is heading in the wrong direction. She's helped by her assistant private secretary, Rozie Oshodi, a British Nigerian who recently served in the Royal Horse Artillery.

✦ Buckley, Fiona. [Forest of Secrets](#) (\$17.95). Ursula Blanchard, a prosperous widow and half-sister to Elizabeth I, receives a strange visitor at her Surrey home. Etheldreda Hope has come from the village of Chenston, where her mule giving birth to a foal is arousing her neighbors' fears that she's a witch. Even more worrying, Etheldreda reports that secret rites are being committed in the forest outside Chenston, and the group's unknown leader says they must "bring about the death of an evil queen, to save an honest queen." Since Ursula works for Elizabeth's spymaster Sir Francis Walsingham, off to Chenston she must go. There she finds the villagers in thrall to odd beliefs and pagan practices, but do these have anything to do with a conspiracy to put Mary, Queen of Scots, the queen's rival, on the throne? Despite the dangers, Ursula must continue to seek out any possible danger to the queen while Walsingham plots Mary Stuart's downfall. Pagan rituals combine with a thorny mystery in this 19th chapter in the Ursula Blanchard series.

Collins, Max Allan. [Quarry's Blood](#) (Titan \$12.95). The professional hitman known as Quarry — star of the Cinemax TV miniseries of the same name — has put killing behind him. But after a beautiful writer of true-crime bestsellers drops by to announce he's the subject of her next book, killers descend to give him some of his own deadly medicine, forcing Quarry to journey into his bloody past to find the answers — and settle old scores. This chapter brings the hit man's decades-long saga right up to the present day as MWA Grand Master Max Allan Collins explores the startling final act of Quarry's professional career. Caution: delivery on this book may run late.

Cummins, Jeanine. [American Dirt](#) (\$17.99). Lydia and Luca are a mother and son forced to leave their Mexican home, fleeing violence and near-certain death. This novel has drawn raves from Grisham, King, Oprah, countless others and yet became doxxed by a group who protested that Cummins is not herself a migrant. My reply is... this is fiction, she isn't writing a memoir, so the protest is ridiculous. I had selected this 2019 title for one of our Fresh Fiction Book of the Month but the SM harassment was so terrible all appearances and signings were canceled to protect Cummins.

✦ Dean, Abigail. [Girl A](#) (\$17). Lex Gracie doesn't want to think about her family. She doesn't want to think about growing up in her parents' House of Horrors. And she doesn't want to think about her identity as Girl A: the girl who escaped, the eldest sister who freed her older brother and four younger siblings. It's been easy enough to avoid her parents—her father never made it out of the House of Horrors he created, and her mother spent the rest of her life behind bars. But when her mother dies in prison and leaves Lex and her siblings the family home, she can't run from her past any longer. Together with her sister, Evie, Lex intends to turn the home into a force for good. But first she must come to terms with her siblings—and with the childhood they shared. What begins as a propulsive tale of escape and survival becomes a gripping psychological family story about the shifting alliances and betrayals of sibling relationships.

Donnelly, Lara Elena. [Base Notes](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$15.95). New York City perfumer Vic Fowler, the narrator of this clever standalone, has a somewhat less respectable sideline—murder for hire. To save his financially strapped perfume business, Vic accepts a contract from Joseph Eisner to kill the three partners in Eisner's asset management company. A further condition is that before Vic disposes of the victims' bodies, he must produce a fragrance that evokes a particular memory in Eisner, a task Vic has no idea if he can accomplish. Vic's previous victim was Caroline Yates, whose death was ordered by her husband, a partner of Eisner and now one of Eisner's intended targets. When an investigator comes to interview Vic about Caroline's disappearance, Vic knows he can no longer do Eisner's job himself without raising suspicion. He decides to find three other people to carry out the murders. Whom he picks and how he convinces them to do his bidding develops into a fascinating psychological drama. This intoxicating thriller keeps the reader guessing.

Evanovich, Janet/Steve Hamilton. [The Bounty](#) (\$17). Nick Fox is a former world-class thief who now works for the FBI, and FBI agent Kate O'Hare is responsible for keeping him on the straight and narrow. Here they head to Vatican City to join Interpol in an effort to foil the attempted theft of a diamond ring that once belonged to Pope Paul VI. The thief, Nick's father, Quentin, arrives at the Vatican, but bypasses the ring and instead makes off with a historic treasure map. Nick and Kate set off to track down Quentin, who Interpol believes is working with a neo-Nazi organization known as the Brotherhood. With Kate's father, a muscular former Marine, in tow, they head from Rome to London, and then to Paris, Vienna, Casablanca, the Alps, and the Sahara....

Johnson, Nancy. [The Kindest Lie](#) (\$16.99). "A fantastic story of a marriage and what happens when one spouse secretly had



a child prior to knowing the other.... This modern-day depiction of a woman in crisis and what she discovers about what she left behind is well-written, timely, and oh-so-memorable.” –*Good Morning America*. Johnson’s excellent debut does a deep dive into the life of a Black Chicago woman whose life undergoes seismic changes after the 2008 election. I thought this was one terrific novel.

Mosley, Walter. [Blood Grove](#) (\$16.99). The uneasy passage of Easy Rawlins through late-20th-century Los Angeles continues at the hinge of the 1960s and ‘70s in one of the knottiest cases of the Black detective’s long and bloody career. Patrick reviews: “The return of Mosley’s groundbreaking protagonist Easy Rawlins is always a cause for celebration. Set in 1969, when so much of the youthful idealism of the mid-60’s had been stomped out by violence and disillusionment, Mosley’s latest novel deals with themes of racism and PTSD that unfortunately seem as relevant today as ever. This time out, Rawlins is approached by a young white Vietnam vet who believes he may have killed a man in an orange field outside LA. The young man, who Rawlins realizes is clearly damaged by the war, claims that he and his girlfriend were attacked but that he was knocked out in the ensuing fight, and, when he woke up, the woman and his dog were gone. Rawlins doesn’t really believe the story, but as a fellow combat veteran (WWII) he feels compelled to help the man if he can. Set against the backdrop of LA at one of its most tumultuous moments, this is classic Mosley.”

Neubauer, Erica Ruth. [Murder at Wedgefield Manor](#) (\$15.95). England, 1926: Wedgefield Manor, deep in the tranquil Essex countryside, provides a welcome rest stop for war widow Jane Wunderly and her matchmaking Aunt Millie before their return to America. While Millie spends time with her long-lost daughter, Lillian, and their host, Lord Hughes, Jane fills the hours devouring mystery novels and taking flying lessons—much to Millie’s disapproval. But any danger in the air is eclipsed by tragedy on the ground when one of the estate’s mechanics, Air Force veteran Simon Marshall, is killed in a motorcar collision. The sliced brake cables prove this was no accident, yet was the intended victim someone other than Simon? The house is full of suspects—visiting relations, secretive servants, strangers prowling the grounds at night—and also full of targets. The enigmatic Mr. Redvers, who helped Jane solve a murder in Egypt in [Murder at the Mena House](#) (\$15.95), arrives on the scene to once more offer his assistance. Jane can’t help but make you think of Miss Phryne Fisher, especially when she takes to the air, although the traditions of the Golden Age mystery rule.

✱ Parks, Adele. [Woman Last Seen](#) (Mira \$16.99). Leigh Fletcher: happily married stepmom to two gorgeous boys goes missing on Monday. Her husband, Mark, says he knows nothing of her whereabouts. She went to work and just never came home. Their family is shattered. Kai Janssen: married to wealthy Dutch businessman Daan and vanishes the same week. Kai left their luxurious penthouse and glamorous world without a backward glance. She seemingly evaporated into thin air. Daan is distraught. Detective Clements knows that people disappear all the time—far too frequently. But what happened here, not once but twice? A domestic-thrills author with 20 *Sunday Times* best sellers to her name, Parks limns the unaccountable disappearance of two women in cases that shouldn’t be linked but seem to be....

Patterson, James/Howard Roughan. [Steal](#) (\$18.99). Imagine everyone’s surprise when Carter von Oehson, a sophomore in Dr. Dylan Reinhart’s Abnormal Psychology class, posts on Instagram that he plans to kill himself. 24 hours later and still no one has seen him. Release the hounds. A massive search ensues. But when Carter’s sailboat rolls in with the tide without him or anyone else on it, the worst seems to be confirmed. He really did it... Or did he? The one person convinced he’s still alive is his father, Mathias von Oehson, founder and CEO of the world’s largest hedge fund. But what Mathias knows and how he knows it would ultimately reveal a secret so damaging that it would be as if he were committing suicide himself. There’s no way he can go to the police. But there’s still someone he can turn to. Dylan now finds himself wrapped up in multi-million-dollar secrets and real danger....

Rice, Anne/Christopher. [Ramses the Damned: The Reign of Osiris](#) (\$17). A pharaoh made immortal by a mysterious and powerful elixir, Ramses the Great became counselor and lover to some of Egypt’s greatest and most powerful rulers before he was awakened from centuries of slumber to the mystifying and dazzling world of Edwardian England. Having vanquished foes both human and supernatural, he’s found love with the beautiful heiress Julie Stratford, daughter of Lawrence Stratford, the slain archeologist who discovered his tomb. Now, with the outbreak of a world war looming, Ramses and those immortals brought forth from the mists of history by his resurrection will face their greatest test yet. Russian assassins bearing weapons of immense power have assembled under one command: all those who loved Lawrence Stratford must die. From the glowing jewels at their necks comes an incredible supernatural force: the power to bring statues to life. As Ramses and his allies, including the immortal queens Cleopatra and Bektaten, gather together to battle these threats, Ramses reveals that the great weapon may have roots in an ancient Egyptian ritual designed to render pharaohs humble before Osiris, the god of the underworld.

Westlake, Donald E. [Call Me a Cab](#) (Titan \$14.95). The final unpublished novel by MWA Grandmaster – a wild, romantic road trip across America by taxi cab. Is it possible to write a suspense novel without any crime at all? Here the much missed Westlake answered the question in his inimitable style. You won’t find any crime in these pages – but what you will find is a wonderful suspense story, about a New York City taxi driver hired to drive a beautiful woman all the way across America, from Manhattan to Los Angeles, where the biggest decision of her life is waiting to be made. From Pennsylvania to Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Utah, Arizona and Nevada on the way to California, the characters’ odyssey takes them through uncharted territory – on the map and in their lives.

#### OUR SMALL PAPERBACK PICKS FOR FEBRUARY

Baldacci, David. [Daylight](#) (\$9.99). John Puller #5. FBI Agent Atlee Pine’s search for her sister Mercy clashes with military investigator John Puller’s high-stakes case, leading them both deep into a global conspiracy — from which neither of them will escape unscathed.

Bentley, Don. [The Outside Man](#) (\$9.99). Matt Drake #2. Barely escaping an attack in broad daylight by a team of highly trained assassins, DIA agent Matt Drake searches for answers in some of the Middle East’s most dangerous regions before confronting an anonymous enemy from his past.

Coulter, Catherine. [Vortex: An FBI Thriller](#) (\$9.99). FBI #25. While FBI agent Sherlock helps an investigative journalist piece together the past to bring a killer to justice, FBI agent Savich becomes a target as he protects a CIA operative who was betrayed on a compromised mission in Iran.

Deaver, Jeffery. [The Garden of Beasts: A Novel of Berlin 1936](#) (\$9.99). This is an older book but one of my, Barbara's, favorite WWII spy novels. Reputed for his vow to take only morally righteous assignments in 1936 New York City, a German American hit man is forced by the government to pose as an Olympic contender and kill a member of Hitler's regime. There are many threads being woven into this plot.

Quinn, Kate. [The Alice Network](#) (\$9.99). In 1947, pregnant Charlie St. Clair arrives in London to find out what happened to her beloved cousin Rose, who disappeared in Nazi-occupied France during the war, and meets a former spy who, torn apart by betrayal, agrees to help her on her mission.

## **FEBRUARY SMALL PAPERBACKS**

Carl, Joanna. [The Chocolate Raccoon Rigmarole](#) (Berkley \$8.99). Chocoholic #18. When the resort town of Warner Pier is plagued by a series of strange break-ins that lead to murder, chocolatier Lee Woodyard must help her right-hand woman, Dolly Jolly, clear her boyfriend's name of the crimes.

Cole, Stephanie. [Evil under the Tuscan Sun](#) (Berkley \$7.99). Tuscan Cooking School #3. Working in Italy, American chef Nell Valenti must keep it together when a murder occurs during a private, four-day ziti workshop for a wealthy New York philanthropist that is linked to her boyfriend's family.

Day, Maddie. [Batter off Dead](#) (Kensington \$8.99). Country Store #10. When a knitter is found dead during Friday night fireworks, Robbie discovers the killing is linked to an unsolved homicide and must unravel the tangled relationships deep in the victim's past.

Ehrhart, Peggy. [Death of a Knit Wit](#) (Kensington \$8.99). Knit and Nibble #8. When an arrogant professor, the keynote speaker at a conference on fiber arts and crafts at Wendelstaff College, is poisoned after crashing her knitting club, Pamela Paterson and the Knit and Nibble ladies must find out who is dead set on teaching him a lesson.

Flower, Amanda. [Put Out to Pasture](#) (Sourcebooks \$8.99). Farm to Table #2. Organic farmer Shiloh Bellamy must dig up the dirt on the real killer to save her best friend Kristy Brewer from prison after Kristy is accused of murdering her philandering husband.

Harding, Robyn. [Her Pretty Face](#) (\$9.99). A stay-at-home mom and her confident new friend bond over their disdain for the snobs at their sons' elite school only to be torn apart by a secret about one of their identities.

Hill, Edwin. [Watch Her](#) (Kensington \$9.99). Investigating a suspicious burglary and the disappearances of Prescott University alumni, Harvard librarian Hester Thursby and Detective Angela White uncover financial transgressions, rumors of infidelity, and a decades-old tragedy.

Jewell, Lisa. [The Girls in the Garden](#) (\$9.99). Reissue. When a young girl discovers her 13-year-old sister lying unconscious from an attack during a festive neighborhood party, the once-

picturesque garden-square community is thrown into turmoil by the awareness that someone among them may be responsible.

Kelly, Diane. [Batten Down the Belfry](#) (St. Martins \$8.99). House-Flipper #4. While rehabbing a church, carpenter Whitney Whitaker and her cousin Buck stumble upon thousands of dollars of unaccounted-for cash, and, when an attempt is made on Buck's life, they team up to solve this crime.

Klein, Libby. [Antiques Auctions Are Murder](#) (Kensington \$8.99). Poppy McAlister #7. While attending an antiques auction, Poppy and her Aunt Ginny are stunned when a body falls out of an armoire they were going to bid on, and, surrounded by competitive dealers and an arsenal of weapons, must find out who turned the auction house into a slaughterhouse.

Picoult, Jodi. [Handle with Care](#) (\$9.99). Reissue. Struggling with the realities of their baby's illness, Charlotte and Sean O'Keefe work through their initial heartbreak and the pitying stares of seemingly more fortunate parents by spending time with little Willow, who proves unexpectedly remarkable and forces her parents to reevaluate their ideas about what they might have chosen for their family.

Ryan, Sofie. [Totally Pawstruck](#) (Berkley \$8.99). Second Chance Cat #9. With the assistance of Charlotte's Angels, the senior citizen detectives who rent out part of her shop, Sarah Grayson sets out to prove the innocence of Stella Hall, a member of the library board, when she is accused of murder.