

# Midmonth BookNotes

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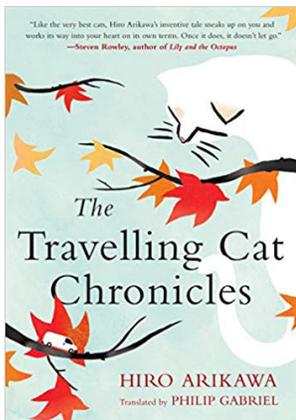
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## Happy Holidays

**Arikawa, Hiro.** [The Traveling Cat Chronicles](#)  
(Penguin \$20)

Nana the cat and his owner, Satoru, take to the road on a journey with no other purpose than to visit



three of Satoru's longtime friends, Or so Nana is led to believe. As the two travel in a silver van across Japan with its ever-changing scenery and seasons, they will learn the true meaning of courage and gratitude, of loyalty and love. Told in the voice of Nana, this heartwarming tale was a best seller in Japan and has

already garnered a number of starred reviews in the U.S. including one from PW, which concluded with "This touching novel of a brave cat and his gentle, wise human will resonate with lovers of animal tales, quiet stories of friendship, and travelogues alike." The perfect gift for any feline fancier or any reader who needs to have their faith in the world restored.

**Berg, Elizabeth.** [Night of Miracles](#)  
(Random \$26)

Inspired by her dearly departed friend Arthur Truluv, Lucille Howard has begun to teach baking classes, sharing the secrets to her delicious classic Southern yellow cake, the perfect pinwheel cookies, and other sweet essentials. Her classes have become so popular that she's hired Iris, a new resident of Mason, Missouri, as an assistant. Iris doesn't know how to bake but she needs to keep her mind off a big decision she sorely regrets. When a new family

moves in next door and tragedy strikes, Lucille begins to look out for Lincoln, their son. Lincoln's parents aren't the only ones in town facing hard choices and uncertain futures. In these difficult times, the residents of Mason come together and find the true power of community—just when they need it the most. Berg follows her uplifting *The Story of Arthur Truluv* with another sincerely charming tale of life in a small town that is certain to put you in the right spirit this holiday with its quiet celebration of the power love, family, friendship, and community can play in our lives.

**Boone, Ezekiel.** [The Mansion](#)  
(Atria \$26)

In this clever homage to Steven King's *The Shining*, broke young programmers Shawn Eagle and Billy Stafford have created something that could make them rich: a revolutionary computer they name Eagle Logic. But the hard work and escalating tension have not been kind to their once solid friendship—Shawn's girlfriend Emily has left him for Billy, and a third partner has disappeared under mysterious circumstances. While Billy walks away with Emily, Shawn takes Eagle Logic, which he uses to build a multi-billion-dollar company that eventually outshines Apple, Google, and Microsoft combined. Years later, Billy is a failure, beset by poverty and addiction, and Shawn is the most famous man in the world. Unable to let the past be forgotten, Shawn decides to resurrect his and Billy's biggest failure: a next-generation computer program named Nellie that can control a house's every function. He decides to set it up in the abandoned mansion they worked near all those years ago. But something about Nellie

isn't right—and the reconstruction of the mansion is plagued by accidental deaths. Shawn is forced to bring Billy back, despite their longstanding mutual hatred, to discover and destroy the evil that lurks in the source code. After reading this, you may want to rethink your connection with Alexa and Siri.

**Chamberlain, Diane.** [The Dream Daughter](#) (St. Martin's \$27.99)

What would you do to save your unborn child? In the case of pregnant Carly Sears it means taking a leap of faith by trusting her brother-in-law, a physicist, who informs her that there may be a way to keep her baby from succumbing to a fatal heart defect. Let's just say that the solution involves time travel. Kirkus called this a "page-turning crowd pleaser" and they are right on the mark. Outlander fans patiently waiting for the next novel may also want to give this a try.

**Horowitz, Anthony.** [Forever and a Day](#) (HarperCollins \$26.99)

Horowitz knows a thing or two about adapting another author's works (he has done television adaptations of Agatha Christie's mysteries and the Midsomer Murders, as well as writing new Sherlock Holmes novels), and is now gaining quite a reputation for his own mysteries including The Magpie Murders. After writing his first Bond book, *Trigor Mortis* (2015), Horowitz now returns to the franchise with a prequel to *Casino Royale* that follows the mysterious demise of Agent 007 in the French Riviera underworld and the emergence of a new agent, James Bond. Fans of the iconic British spy will be pleased with the treatment he receives here even as the author injects a more modern, morally complex element to his storyline.

**Jewell, Lisa.** [Watching You](#) (Atria \$26)

Melville Heights is not the sort of place where people are brutally murdered in their own kitchens. But it is the sort of place where everyone has a secret. And everyone is watching you. Headmaster Tom Fitzwilliam is beloved by one and all—at least that is what it seems like. But one of Tom's students, Jenna Tripp, also lives on the same street, and she's not convinced her teacher is as squeaky clean as he seems. Meanwhile, twenty years earlier, a schoolgirl writes in her diary, charting her doomed obsession with a handsome young English teacher named Mr. Fitzwilliam.

Jewell's latest has received a number of critical raves including one from PW, which ended with "prepare to be blindsided by the murder victim's identity, not revealed until late in the game—and an even more stunning final surprise. Jewell does a masterly job of maintaining suspense."

**Lauren, Christina.** [My Favorite Half-Night Stand](#) (Gallery \$16)

UC Santa Barbara professor Millie Morris has always been one of the guys, and she, just like her four best guy friends and fellow professors, is perma-single. So when a routine university function turns into a black tie gala, Millie and her circle make a pact that they'll join an online dating service to find plus-ones for the event. There's only one hitch: after making the pact, Millie and one of the guys, Reid Campbell, secretly spend the sexiest half-night of their lives together, but mutually decide the friendship would be better off strictly platonic. However, soon afterwards Millie's experiences with some of her online dates prompt her to create a fictional profile in order to weed out the undesirables. Fortunately (or unfortunately depending on your viewpoint) Millie's new digital alter ego "Catherine" does attract a great new man. It just turns out that the new man in Catherine's life is Reid. The writing duo known as Christina Lauren is quickly developing a following among romance readers for her contemporary love stories, the pair's *Josh & Hazel's Guide to Not Dating* was just selected as one of Bookpage's Top Ten Romances of 2018, all of which feature plenty of sexy romance and laugh-out-loud moments.

**Meier, Leslie.** [Silver Anniversary Murder](#) (Kensington \$26)

When the persnickety owner of Tinker's Cove only bridal shop pushes the town to host a silver anniversary wedding bash, Lucy Stone digs up her own wedding gown and is immediately reminded of her old friend and bridesmaid Beth Gerard.



Deciding it is time to reconnect with Beth, Lucy calls her in New York City only to be met with the news that Beth had recently committed suicide. Lucy knows that Beth might have been many

things, but suicidal was not one of them, and after attending Beth's funeral, she decides to do a little investigating of her own since the police seem to have closed the case. As Lucy sifts through potential suspects – including Beth's three ex-husbands as well as her current (and soon-to-be ex) spouse, she discovers there may have been more than one person who might have given Beth a push over the balcony. Meier first introduced amateur sleuth Lucy Stone in *Mistletoe Murder*, and now 24 books later, Lucy is back to celebrate her own silver literary anniversary with a marvelously fun case that takes Lucy out of her familiar small town Maine setting and sends her to the Big Apple on the trail of a murderer. Fans of Carolyn Hart and Katherine Hall Page that have yet to discover Meier's equally entertaining series are definitely in for a treat!

**O'Neal, Barbara.** [The Art of Inheriting Secrets](#)  
(Lake Union \$14.95)

After her mother unexpectedly dies, food editor Olivia Shaw is shocked to discover she inherited a centuries-old English estate— Rosemere Priory - and a title to go with it. Raw with grief and reeling from the knowledge that her reserved mother hid something so momentous, Olivia leaves San Francisco and crosses the pond to unravel the mystery of a lifetime. It has been several years since her last novel, so I was thrilled beyond words to discover this new book by O'Neal, one of the pseudonyms for romance and women's fiction author Barbara Samuel, who has not only won the prestigious RITA award seven times in her career but has also been inducted into the Romance Writers of America's Hall of Fame. O'Neal excels at crafting stories that celebrate family, food, friendship, and love her latest superbly written novel is another small masterpiece.

**Rodale, Maya.** [Duchess by Design](#)  
(Avon \$7.99)

Brandon Fiennes, the new Duke of Kingston, needs a wealthy American heiress to wed in order to restore his family's finances. Upon arriving in New York City, Brandon finds himself immediately falling for the first woman he bumps into while checking into his hotel. The only problem is that the lady is no heiress, but instead is Miss Adeline Black, a simple seamstress with a goal of becoming the city's next fashionable dressmaker. Even though Adeline might not have the dowry Brandon desperately needs, she can help

him achieve his matrimonial goal. In exchange for allowing Adeline to accompany him to society events – and thus providing her with a venue for showcasing her gowns – Brandon wants Adeline to help him sort out which the ladies of New York are worth courting. However, what starts out as simple business transaction becomes something much more complicated when Brandon realizes he just might be falling for Adeline. Rodale launches her new fun and flirty *Gilded Age* historical series on a high note with this expertly crafted love story.

**Shaw, M.B.** [Murder at the Mill](#).  
(St. Martin's \$27.99)

In an attempt to escape her rapidly disintegrating marriage, artist Iris Grey rents Mill Cottage in the quaintly charming Hampshire village of Hazleford. However, all is not beer and skittles as Iris quickly discovers when she is hired to paint a portrait of celebrated local mystery writer Dominic Wetherby. At the Wetherby's Christmas Eve party, the mulled wine is in full flow - but so are tensions and rivalries among the guests. On Christmas Day, the youngest member of the Wetherby family, Lorcan, finds a body in the water. A tragic accident? Or a deadly crime?

With the snow falling, Iris enters a world of village gossip, romantic intrigue, buried secrets, and murder. Shaw is the pseudonym for British writer Tilly Bagshawe, whose earlier literary output consisted of some really fun glitz and glam novels (think Judith Krantz but with a British accent) as well as co-authoring several novels for the Sidney Sheldon estate. With her debut mystery, Shaw proves she is equally adept at crafting a deliciously fun puzzle that should delight anyone who loves a good British crime cozy.

**Simpson, Rosemary.** [Let the Dead Keep Their Secrets](#)  
(Kensington \$26)

Heiress Prudence MacKenzie and former Pinkerton agent Geoffrey Hunter attempt to discover the truth behind the death of opera singer Claire Buchanan's twin sister and newborn niece when Claire confides her belief that they were murdered. Simpson continues her *Gilded Age* series with another expertly plotted tale that superbly showcases her consid-



erable flair for incorporating fascinating details about the era into a nifty mystery. The tone of the whole series is a bit dark – the author herself refers to her books as Historical Noir - making Simpson's books a perfect fit for readers who love Anne Perry's equally realistically gritty mysteries.

**White, Elle Katharine.** [Dragonshadow](#)  
(HarperCollins \$16.99)

The Battle of North Fields is over—or so Aliza Bontaine, now a Daired, fervently wants to believe. But rumors are spreading of an unseen monster ravaging the isolated Castle Selwyn on the northern border of the kingdom. When she and Alastair are summoned from their honeymoon by the mysterious Lord Selwyn, they must travel with their dragon Akarra through the Tekari-infested Old Wilds of Arle to answer his call. And they are not alone on this treacherous journey. Shadowing the dragonriders is an ancient evil, a harbinger of a dark danger of which the Worm was only a foretaste. And soon Aliza realizes the terrible truth: the real war is only beginning. White began this imaginative new series – think Jane Austen meets J.R.R. Tolkien- with her debut 2017 novel [Heartstone](#).

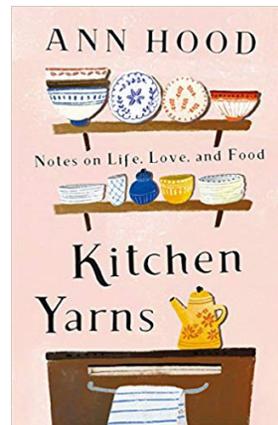
**Willett, Marcia.** [The Songbird](#)  
(St. Martin's \$27.99)

When Tim confides in Mattie that he needs a sabbatical from work and a fresh place to live, she suggests he move into one of the cottages at her family's home in the beautiful English countryside. She senses there's something he's not telling her, but she has faith that he'll fit right in with the eccentric but affectionate crowd at Brockscombe. As he gets to know the warm jumble of family who share their lives, Tim discovers that everyone there has their secrets. There's Kat, a retired ballet dancer who longs to take the stage again; Charlotte, a young navy wife struggling to bring up her son while her husband is at sea; and William, who has tried hard to get over his estranged wife—though it's much harder now that she's trying to move into the cottage Tim just occupied. And, even when she's far away, Tim knows there's Mattie...beautiful, engaging, clever Mattie. Can Tim open up to her? Would it matter, he wonders, if he did? Miss those marvelous British saga sagas of Rosamunde Pilcher? Willett may fit the bill with her warm and engaging tales that capture the old-fashioned appeal of Pilcher's sweetly romantic stories.

## Nonfiction

**Hood, Ann.** [Kitchen Yarns](#)  
(W.W. Norton \$24.95)

In a series of twenty-seven essays, Hood, author of eight previous books including the perennial book club favorite *The Book that Matters Most*, traces



her own life's journey as seen through the prism of food. Chapters cover such topics as her grandmother's Italian classics, the best ways to fry chicken, dinner parties circa 1959, and five ways of looking at a tomato, with each chapter including at least one or more recipes. Writing with her signature humor and tenderness, Hood spills tales of loss

and starting from scratch, family love and feasts with friends, and how the perfect meal is one that tastes like home. If you loved M.F. K. Fisher's writing about food or Laurie Colwin's culinary literary musings, you will love Hood's equally marvelous book.

**Miller, Kelsey.** [I'll Be There For You: The One About Friends](#) (Hanover Square \$26.99)

Today, *Friends* is remembered as an icon of '90s comedy and the Must See TV years. But when the series debuted in 1994, no one anticipated the sensation it would become. From the first wave of *Friends* mania to the backlash and renaissance that followed, the show maintained an uncanny connection to its audience, who saw it both as a reflection of their own lives and an aspirational escape from reality. *I'll Be There for You* is a deep dive into *Friends* history and lore, exploring all aspects of the show, from its unlikely origins to the societal conditions that amplified its success. Journalist and pop culture expert Kelsey Miller relives the show's most powerful moments, sheds light on its sometimes dated and problematic elements, and examines the worldwide trends that *Friends* catalyzed, from contemporary coffee culture to the wildly popular '90s haircut *The Rachel*. Taking readers behind the scenes, Miller traces the cast's rise to fame and untangles the complex relationship between the actors and their characters. Weaving in revelatory interviews and personal stories, she investigates the role of celebrity media, world-changing events and the dawning of the digital

age—all of which influenced both the series and its viewers.

**Spawforth, Tony.** [The Story of Greece and Rome](#)  
(Yale \$30)

From the rise of the Mycenaean world of the sixteenth century B.C., Spawforth traces a path through the ancient Aegean to the zenith of the Hellenic state and the rise of the Roman empire, the coming of Christianity and the consequences of the first caliphate. Deeply informed, provocative, and entirely fresh, this is the first and only accessible work that tells the extraordinary story of the classical world in its entirety. Erudite yet entertaining is perhaps the best way to sum up this fascinating historical survey.