

# BOOKAHOLIC

## For the Mystery Addict

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### WHAT I'VE BEEN READING

***THE TIN ROOF BLOWDOWN*, James Lee Burke, Simon & Schuster. \$26.00**  
***JESUS OUT TO SEA*, James Lee Burke, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks. \$14.00**

I'm reviewing these books together because I read them together. And I did that because I'd heard that Burke, that poet, had fashioned a portrait of the Gulf Coast before, during, and post Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Together these two books offer us non-Louisiana-born readers a look at that region crafted by a writer who is angry and whose heart is obviously broken.

*The Tin Roof Blowdown* is a Dave Robicheaux mystery. Perhaps the best Burke has penned. It begins as Katrina sweeps through New Orleans, leaving that city without power or law and order. Bodies float in the water and hang from the trees, and Robicheaux must hunt down two serial rapists, a priest, and a vigilante in nightmarish conditions.

*Jesus Out to Sea* contains eleven stories, ending with the heartbreaking title story. Reading these two books brings it all back: the horror and the shame.

***DOWN RIVER*, John Hart, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95**

Hart's first novel, *The King of Lies*, received terrific reviews last year and was nominated for an Edgar Award. I found it well written but slow going and suggested a hammock, a mint julep, and a slow summer day with that story. So it was with interest that I picked up this second novel, again set in North Carolina. And, again, I find this author's writing pleasant but plodding. It's me. It has to be me. There are some books that just don't capture me as they seem to capture everyone else. Everybody's favorite book, *The Kite Runner*, is another one I had to put down, so Mr. Hart, you're in good company.

***PYRES*, Derek Nikitas, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95**

So here's one of those moments that come along once or twice a year for a reviewer. A book to be crazy about! It starts out like this: Lucia (known as Luce) Moberg persuades her father to drive her to the mall where she steals a CD from a music store and then, running from security, begs him to drive her home. Now. They are about to pull out of the parking lot when there's a tap at the window and seconds later Luce's father is gunned down in one of those stupid moments that should never have happened. The story takes off from there. Soars in fact. Peopled with fleshed out, complex characters, it

never lets up as it twists and turns to the conclusion. I'm delighted to have discovered Nikitas. I think we're in for some fine books in the future.

**SCORCHED EARTH, David L. Robbins, Bantam. \$13.95 paperback**

Last year, I read *The Assassin's Gallery* by this author and was much impressed. It was about an assassination attempt on FDR's life during World War II. I understand there's a sequel to that due in January about an assassination attempt on Fidel Castro in 1961. I sense a series here. I recently discovered *this* gem from 2002 – an extraordinary mystery is set in the town of Good Hope, Virginia. The time is now and the citizens of that town, black and white, live in apparent harmony although racial tensions bubble beneath the surface, especially where Victory Baptist Church, a centuries-old church for white folk, is concerned. And when the traditions of that church are broken one sweltering summer day, a crime is committed. It's hard to believe that this book sank without a ripple. If I'd read it when I should have, I would have called it one of the best mysteries of the year. As it is, I'll call it one of the best mysteries of 2002, and not to be missed five years on. I believe it is still in print in paperback. Read it.

## ON MY READING LIST

**SLIDE, Ken Bruen and Jason Starr, Hard Case Crime. \$6.99**

Bruen and Starr follow up their enormously popular collaboration, *Bust*, with a sequel. These two authors appear to be having an enormous amount of fun while trying to outdo each other in the murder and mayhem department. I think we're in for a series here.

**BOOK OF THE DEAD, Patricia Cornwell, Putnam. \$26.95**

The new Kay Scarpetta novel finds her on the move. She has opened a private forensic pathology practice in Charleston, South Carolina, where she and her colleagues, including Pete Marino and Lucy, offer expert crime-scene investigation and autopsy services. But somebody wants to run Scarpetta out of town with acts of sabotage, and then the deaths begin. A young man jumps off a water tower. A woman is found ritualistically murdered. The body of an abused young boy is found in a desolate marsh. This sounds to me as though Scarpetta (and Cornwell) are starting anew. No old cases or serial killers hanging around from two books ago. And that would be a good thing.

**WORLD WITHOUT END, Ken Follett, Dutton. \$35.00**

In 1989, Ken Follett wrote *The Pillars of the Earth*, a novel set in 12th-century England, which centered on the building of a cathedral and the many lives it affected. That book received much critical acclaim, and now he's written a sequel. The town is Kingsbridge two centuries after the townspeople finished building the Gothic cathedral, and the cathedral and priory are again at the center of a web of love, hate, greed, pride, ambition, and revenge. This time the cast of characters are at the crossroads of new ideas – about medicine, commerce, architecture, and justice – all set against the backdrop of the greatest natural disaster ever to strike the human race, the Black Death.

**VOICES, Arnaldur Indridason, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95.**

The Christmas rush is at its peak in a Reykjavik hotel when Inspector Erlendur Sveinsson is called in to investigate the murder of the hotel Santa. There is no shortage of suspects – hotel staff, international travelers, etc. – but then a shocking secret surfaces. This series, set in Iceland, is getting to be as popular as the Henning Mankell's Kurt Wallander series. What is happening in those cold climates? Whatever it is, it's producing great mysteries.

**DOWN INTO DARKNESS, David Lawrence, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95**

This is the fourth book in the excellent police procedural series featuring Detective Stella Mooney. Mooney must investigate the death of a woman found hanging from a tree with a message on her back. Then there's another death and another message. I'm delighted that this series is still being published here. It has caused hardly a ripple yet, but if you're an Ian Rankin fan, you're in for a treat.

**SECOND SIGHT, Charles McCarry, Overlook Press. \$25.95**

This is the seventh in the series featuring legendary spy, Paul Christopher. U.S. agents are being kidnapped and brain-drained by an enemy armed with a diabolical new drug. Christopher is called out of retirement to take part in an investigation that has roots in pre-Nazi Germany.

**BLONDE FAITH, Walter Mosley, Little Brown. \$25.99**

The latest Easy Rawlins mystery finds the L.A. detective dealing with the possible death of a friend, as well as the loss of the love of his life who is marrying another man. Meanwhile Mouse is wanted for the murder of a father of 12.

**NOW AND THEN, Robert B. Parker, Putnam. \$25.95**

Spencer is asked to investigate the strange behavior of his client's wife. Well, she's having an affair, and Spenser, after telling his client, considers the case closed. But a couple of days later, three people are dead and Spenser and Hawk find themselves up to their necks in trouble.

**THE ALMOST MOON, Alice Sebold, Little Brown. \$24.99**

Following the tremendous success of her novel, *The Lovely Bones* (dare I say it? I wasn't crazy about it), Sebold takes on matricide. Helen Knightly has always given her life to others – her mother, her father, her children, her husband – but one day, she crosses the line. The story takes place over the 24 hours following the killing and explores the ties between mothers and daughters, wives and lovers, the meaning of devotion, and the line between love and hate.

## FIRST MYSTERIES

***MISSING WITNESS*, Gordon Campbell, Wm. Morrow. \$24.95**

A beautiful woman, armed with a gun, enters a house with her young daughter. Shots are fired and the woman's husband is dead. The case would seem to be open and shut. Everybody thinks the woman is guilty, except her wealthy father-in-law, who hires Dan Morgan, the best lawyer in Phoenix, to defend her.

***THE LAST STRIPEASE*, Michael Wiley, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95**

When Chicago private eye Joe Kozmarski is invited to go fishing by Judge Rifkin, a man with whom he has a history, he suspects that the Judge has more than fishing on his mind. The Judge's assistant, it turns out, is suspected of killing his lover, a stripper, and Joe is asked to hunt for the real killer. But then the Judge is murdered and his assistant disappears.

## NON MYSTERIES OF NOTE

***RUN*, Ann Patchett, HarperCollins. \$25.95**

I keep reading reviews remarking that this is not as good a novel as *Bel Canto*. Does that mean it's not among the top ten novels ever written? Anything by Patchett. Anything.

***BRIDGE OF SIGHS*, Richard Russo, Knopf. \$26.95**

Small town life and family are the themes explored by Russo in his fiction. Will this be another award winner?

## NEWS FROM THE UK

***NAME TO A FACE*, Robert Goddard. Bantam**

A chain of intrigue, deceit, greed, and murder that stretches from 1707 to the present.

***THE CAREFUL USE OF COMPLIMENTS*, Alexander McCall-Smith. Little Brown**

Featuring philosopher and amateur sleuth Isabel Dalhousie.

***SEPULCHRE*, Kate Moss. Orion**

Mystery and adventure by the author of *Labyrinth*.

***SOMETHING WICKED*, David Roberts. Constable.**

A Lord Edward Corinth and Verity Brown murder mystery.

**THE HERRING SELLER'S APPRENTICE, L.C. Tyler. Macmillan**

Ethelred Tressider is a crime writer whose latest novel is going nowhere. Elsie Thirkettle is a determined individual who enjoys neither the company of writers nor literature of any sort, but when Ethelred's ex-wife disappears, Elsie bullies him into embarking upon his own investigation. Quirky first novel receiving some attention in the UK.

**BOOKS OF THE MONTH**

**Barclay, Linwood, *No Time for Goodbye*, Bantam. \$22.00.** Twenty-five years ago a woman's entire family vanished without a trace. Now she is being tormented by mysterious phone calls.

**Beaton, M.C., *Kissing Christmas Goodbye*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95.** Agatha Raisin investigates the poisoning of a wealthy widow who wrote to Agatha just before her death saying that she thought one of her family members intended to kill her.

**Beckett, Simon, *Written in Bone*, Delacorte. \$24.00.** A burning death is assumed to be the work of terrorists. But David Hunter suspects spontaneous combustion. Second in the series.

**Bell, James Scott, *Try Dying*, Center Street. \$21.99.** Small time thug Ernesto Bonilla commits suicide by jumping off an overpass. He lands on a car below and also kills the fiancée of lawyer Ty Buchanan. But a witness tells Ty that it was murder.

**Brown, Rita Mae, *The Tell-Tale Horse*, Random House. \$25.95.** Sister Jane Arnold returns for her sixth adventure in Virginia hunt country.

**Davidson, Diane Mott, *Sweet Revenge*, Wm. Morrow. \$25.95.** Goldy Schultz is thrilled to be catering a holiday breakfast, little knowing that murder is on the menu.

**Gallagher, Stephen, *The Kingdom of Bones*, Shaye Areheart Books, \$24.95.** In 19<sup>th</sup> century England, in the world of music halls, boxing booths, and traveling theatrical shows, a man accused of a series of murders struggles to clear his name.

**Hannah, Sophie, *Little Face*, Soho Press. \$25.00.** An English mother becomes convinced that her baby has been replaced by a nearly identical newborn.

**Harris, Robert, *The Ghost*, Simon & Schuster. \$26.00.** A ghostwriter working on a controversial former prime minister's memoirs discovers global secrets.

**Harvey, Kenneth J., *Inside*, Harcourt. \$24.00.** A wrongly convicted man is released on new DNA evidence but finds life on the outside much crueler than prison.

**Hellman, Libby Fischer, Ed., *Chicago Blues*, Big Earth Publishing. \$27.95.** A collection of dark stories from today's best Chicago crime fiction authors: Sara Paretsky, Barbara D'Amato, Max Allan Collins, Marcus Sakey, Sean Chercover, etc.

**Jackson, Lee, *Redemption*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95.** Ben Trinity is accused of being a terrorist and tries to clear his name as he lives and works in the small town of Redemption. Set in the not too distant future.

**Johansen, Iris, *Pandora's Daughter*, St. Martin's Press. \$25.95.** A young woman must unlock the secrets of her own mind before she loses her life.

**Macomber, James, *A Grave Breach*, Oceanview Publishing. \$24.95.** A legal thriller in which a lawyer is called upon to defend a particularly heinous war criminal.

**Maitland, Barry, *Spider Trap***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. When human bones are discovered in south London, D.C.I. David Brock and D.S. Kathy Kolla of Scotland Yard are called in to investigate.

**Mayor, Archer, *Chat***, Grand Central Publishing. \$24.99. Joe Gunther and his team investigate a disturbing case of homicide and Internet child predators.

**Perry, Anne, *A Christmas Beginning***, Ballantine. \$17.95. Perry's annual Christmas story.

**Miyabe, Miyuki, *Crossfire***, Kodansha. \$11.95. A Tokyo woman uses her power of pyro-kinesis to avenge unsolved crimes.

**Miyabe, Miyuki, *The Devil's Whisper***, Oxford. \$24.95. A teenager, working to help his cab driver uncle accused of manslaughter, discovers a clique of young women all of whom are dying in similar car accidents.

**Rollins, David, *Death Trust***, Bantam. \$24.00. In his American debut, Australian writer Rollins introduces tough, wisecracking Major Vincent Cooper.

**Sallis, James, *Salt River***, Walker & Co. \$23.95. Third John Turner mystery, following *Cypress Grove* and *Cripple Creek*.

**Swain, James, *Midnight Rambler***, Ballantine. \$24.95. Women are being murdered across Florida, and Jack Carpenter, former cop turned abduction specialist, must track down a sadistic serial killer.

**White, Michael, *Soul Catcher***, Wm. Morrow. \$24.95. As the country moves towards Civil War, a gambler turned bounty hunter tracks two runaway slaves.

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