



# Sunriver Books

## February Newsletter

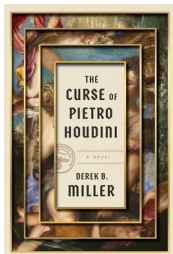
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***It's history, you don't erase it, you learn from it!***  
By Mark Skeen.

The New Year starts out with excellent new releases! February is a great month to enjoy reading, it is dark early, slippery with ice, and perfect for spending the evenings with an interesting book. The daytime offers skiing, walks with your dog, or views of the snow filled meadow. The evening is for reading.

### New Releases.

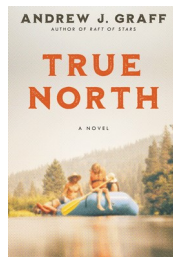


***The Curse of Pietro Houdini*** is Derek Miller's latest novel. I have enjoyed every book he has written; ***Norwegian by Night***, ***American by Day***, ***How to Find Your Way in the Dark***, and ***The Girl in Green***. His new book is historic fiction focusing on WWII in Italy.

In Rome, American bombs kill the child's parents. In an instant, everything changes, the very sky brings danger. The child was just a few feet ahead, but it was enough to be the difference between life and death. Not knowing what to do, the child flees south toward Naples where an aunt resides. But the way is long, the journey dangerous, and in the village of Cassino, Pietro Houdini rescues the child. This is a new start, the old life has been swept away on the tides of war, so when asked for a name, the child gives a new name, a strong name, Massimo.

Taken under Pietro Houdini's wing, Massimo accompanies him to the abbey at Montecasino, high up on a mountaintop, where Pietro is restoring art, investigating the impressive inventory the monks have amassed, and considering his next move. For the Germans will soon arrive, the war is not going so well for them, and they have an appetite for art. Complicating matters are the secrets of Pietro Houdini. As the war draws nearer, Pietro plots for a way to thwart the Germans, make it to Naples, and save Massimo. Clearly, at least clearly to Pietro, the best way to achieve this goal is to smuggle 3 Titian paintings out of the abbey and down the mountain. Adventures ensue.

This is a fascinating story of Italy, WWII, and art (lots of art!) using real incidents, places, and characters. It is also a lovely, entertaining story about a crafty, charismatic older man, with a heap of secrets, bonding with a bereft child. A joy to read.

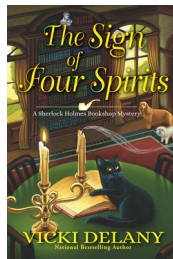


***True North*** is Andrew Graff's second book, his first is ***Raft of Stars***, both are excellent.

Sam and Swami met during their college years when they were learning to be summer white-water guides in West Virginia. Sam was smitten. Ten years on, the couple have three children and Sam is drowning day by day teaching art to school children. He yearns for a different sort of life. Swami is frustrated with all his unrealistic plans and concerned, she wants a stable home for her children, she worries about Sam's dreams.

Sam has convinced Swami to accompany him for the summer to Northern Wisconsin where his uncle Chip is selling Woodchuck Rafting Company and Sam thinks it would be a good investment, a way to make money in the summers, a way to move back to those golden years when the world was full of promise instead of responsibilities. Sam wants to save his marriage and recapture those feelings from the days on the water so long ago. He isn't sure he can do it but he intends to try.

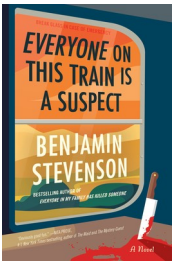
It will be a challenging summer! A nefarious mining company, competing rafting companies, and mother nature letting loose with a flood of the century. It is going to be a bumpy ride, but lots of fun to read!



***The Sign of Four Spirits*** by Vicki Delany is just the ticket if you are in the mood for a cozy mystery. Gemma Doyle is the proprietor, along with her uncle Arthur Doyle, of the Sherlock Holmes Bookshop in scenic Cape Cod. Arthur is a world traveler so the day to day operation is left to Gemma. Along with her friend Jayne Wilson, Gemma also owns an interest in the adjoining tea shop where the two women meet daily for "meetings" that usually include munching on some of Jayne's delicious pastries while drinking a cup of tea made the right way. Daily Gemma is surrounded by books, and Moriarty, the black cat her uncle rescued years ago. Evenings she walks her dogs Violet and Peony. It is a good life.

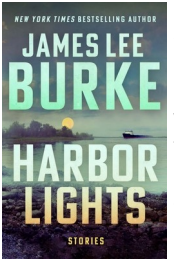
A psychic fair is in town drawing in a crowd, Daniel, one of Gemma's loyal customers, has been telling the attendees about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's interest in spiritualism and directing them to Gemma's shop. Daniel is a true fan of the great detective, interested in anything related, thus he couldn't pass up attending the fair. Gemma is a no nonsense sort of person, so she is not on board when her shop assistant Ashleigh begs Gemma to accompany her to a séance. Ashleigh's mother, the former pop star Bunny Leigh, is a believer and eager to contact someone from beyond. Gemma is inclined to believe it is all flim flam put on to separate easy marks from their material goods. Nonetheless to be supportive of Ashleigh, Gemma agrees to go and convinces Jayne to join them.

It is a dark and stormy night (of course it is! I couldn't resist). Lightening is flashing, thunder rolling, the atmosphere perfect. The séance is being held at Rebecca's home, a spacious place with a magnificent view. In addition to Gemma's friends, there are five other people. As they file into Rebecca's library, Gemma is quickly banished, the non-believer cut out of the flock. She takes up a position outside, resigned to wait until it is over and she can leave with her friends. This plan is foiled when Gemma hears a shriek and bursts into the library to find someone slumped on the table quite dead. The Game is Afoot!



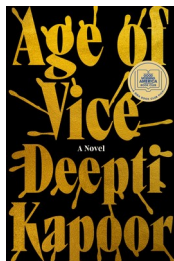
***Everyone on this Train is a Suspect*** by Benjamin Stevenson continues the adventures (or should I say misadventures) of Ernest Cunningham from ***Everyone in My Family has Killed Someone***. The tragic events at the ski resort gave Ernest the material for a memoir that has sold reasonably well, leading to a nice advance and a contract for a new book. This time to be fiction, unfortunately Ernest is finding fiction rather a slog, not as easy when he has to think up a plot, characters and such. So he is excited when he gets an invite to The Australian Mystery Writer Society's Crime Writing Festival. This year the festival is being held on trip across Australia aboard the Ghan, a famous train that would normally cost a bundle, but being a featured author at the festival includes the train trip. Better yet, his invite includes a plus one so he can bring his girlfriend. For several days they will traverse some of the most remote parts of Australia, often with no cell phone service.

Ernest thinks this is just what he might need, a few days going across the land surrounded by other prominent authors and interested readers. Inspiration should strike. As an added benefit, one of his personal favorite authors is attending and will be on panels with him. That goes off the rails rather quickly. Soon enough one of the authors is murdered. More bodies follow. Now Ernest is getting a bit more inspiration than he bargained for, aboard a train in wild inhospitable terrain surrounded by other mystery authors who each know at least a thousand ways to kill, and an equal number of ways to avoid detection. Soon they are all investigating (it is what they know best) to find out which author has jumped from writing about murder to committing it. Written with a clever plot and a generous serving of humor.



***Harbor Lights*** by James Lee Burke can break your heart with his words, he writes with such power and beauty. The eight stories take on the theme of the intersection between evil and good, as people try in various ways to escape evil's incursion into their lives. Each of the stories packs an emotional punch. Hack is an old man, but still standing tall and straight. While his daughter and grandson are visiting, a group of Mexicans take shelter in his barn. They are people having a hard time but willing to work, regular good people. Hack tries to help them, but the local Sheriff is having none of it, there is a history between them and it is not pleasant. One story has a man and his son experiencing car trouble in Montana as a storm approaches. They seek shelter in a roadhouse, but this isn't like any other place they have been and soon they realize the danger around them. In another story, a successful author returns to Louisiana after many years. His desire is to take in injured and abandoned animals, give them aid and a home. He has the acreage and the money to do so. But the local sheriff is against it, and in this part of Louisiana his word is law, always has been. A story set in Montana has a professor who likes his job, is trying to move on from the mistakes of his past, is popular with his students and is doing nothing that would reasonably put him in harm's way. But he has a teenage daughter who gets drunk (as teenagers sometimes do) and runs into the wrong couple. She is severely beaten. Justice proves elusive, the situation spirals out of control.

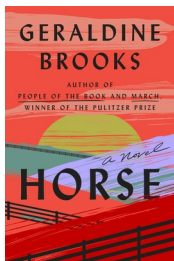
#### Staff Recommendations. Now in paperback.



***Age of Vice*** by Deepti Kapoor. Ajay's family suffered a string of tragedies all stemming from what should have been, in a kinder place, a minor kerfuffle. Instead, it leads to pain, suffering, and poverty. One forced solution is the sale of Ajay to a man who provides the youth to a farmer.

Aja's new master is a kind man and the child likes taking care of the cattle. A few rooms are rented to tourists, a bit of side income. Ajay is a handsome child, soon an attractive young man. When the tourists come, he is happy to take care of them, learns their language and becomes a bit of a pet. Eventually he is hired by a fabulously wealthy young man, learns new skills, and new vices.

As the story opens, Ajay has run over several sidewalk dwellers with his employer's Mercedes. Thrown in jail, he is at first beaten, until his connections are known. But what is his fabulously wealthy young employer up too? How does it involve Ajay? What led him to be in the car when it kills five people on that New Delhi sidewalk in 2004? Money and power intertwine in this epic story of a wealthy family and a young man plucked from poverty and obscurity.



***Horse*** by Geraldine Brooks. If you love history or horses, this is just the ticket! Set in three eras, it tells the story of a black groom, a remarkable stallion, Lexington, and a gifted artist. Tom Scott paints beautiful portraits of race horses. Jarret's father was renowned for his prowess in training horses to run. He taught his son the ways best to treat a horse. Jarret forges a bond with a young foal, a bond that takes the horse to glory on the race track. But the times are a changing, a Civil War will tear the nation asunder with shocking brutality putting Jarret and Lexington in grave danger.

In 1954 Martha Jackson runs a New York gallery known for promoting modern inventive artists. Nonetheless she is captivated by an old painting of a horse.

Jess has been obsessed about skeletons since she was a little girl in Australia. She came to America for college, and stayed for a job at the Smithsonian. By 2019 she is managing a department, doing the work she loves. Theo is a graduate student at Georgetown University studying American Art History. He makes ends meet by sitting in his apartment writing magazine articles, kept company by his dog (an adorable Kelpie). The skeleton of a stallion will bring them together and lead them to the history of Black horsemen in America.

I loved the reading about young Jarret staying the night in the stable to watch over the newborn foal. And Lexington, well Lexington was truly a special stallion. But at its heart this is a story about the way people are treated based not on the content of their character but the color of their skin. In this book you will meet people whose character absolutely shines. Nonetheless, it is dangerous to be breathing while black in America.

Geraldine Brooks succeeds beautifully with a story that embraces art, history, grand horses, and the quiet dignity of people of color whose merits far outshine their persecutors.

## Staff Recommendations. Now in paperback.

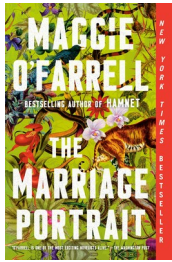


***Flying Solo*** by Linda Holmes. Laurie Sassalyn's fortieth birthday is fast approaching. While her brothers are paired off, some married with children, Laurie is not. She has just cancelled her engagement on short notice, the wedding announcement all sent, the gifts all arrived. It took her months to send everything back. Far from being upset, she feels relieved. She likes owning her Seattle home, her neighborhood, her routine. Laurie writes nature articles with a scientific bent. She travels a lot, trudges through marshes, hikes in the woods. It is a life she suits her.

As a young girl with brothers, she often took refuge in her great aunt Dot's big house to escape the chaos and noise. Her aunt had never married, but led an interesting life, traveling, being involved in all sorts of craft projects, taking photographs. Laurie learns a lot from her great-aunt. When Dot dies, no one else has the time to go through her things. Laurie volunteers, and heads cross country to Maine and her hometown. The place where her first love, her high school sweetheart, still lives. This small town is in so many ways familiar to Laurie, her best friend lives here, she has roots.

Going through Dot's things, Laurie finds a beautifully carved duck hidden under bedding in a trunk. It is a beautiful duck, why is it hidden in the trunk? It doesn't seem to fit with the rest of Dot's things. Soon this lovely duck will be in need of rescue and Laurie is determined to find out just exactly what this duck meant in Dot's life.

Funny and heartwarming, this is the story of a woman solving a mystery, while faced with the choice of two possible lives. Not every woman must follow the same path.



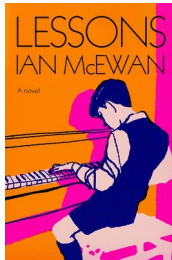
***The Marriage Portrait*** by Maggie O'Farrell is set in Italy between 1544 and 1561. There is little known about the life of Lucrezia di Cosimo de' Medici d'Este, Duchess of Ferrara. I suspect the young Duchess would like the way Maggie O'Farrell portrays her.

Lucrezia is the youngest daughter of Grand Duke Cosimo I de' Medici, she spends her childhood seeking out the nooks and crannies of her home, the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. She shows an empathy for all life, a delight in nature, joy in horseback riding, and true artistic talent. A happy childhood that ends abruptly.

Alfonso II d'Este, Duke of Ferrara is a handsome young man with a problem. He needs an heir. Pronto. A match with the Grand Duke of Florence would be advantageous for both families, thus it is arranged he will marry the Grand Duke's middle daughter, Maria. Then tragedy strikes, Maria perishes and the two men settle on Lucrezia, a child of 13, as a suitable substitute. She is given a reprieve until her 15<sup>th</sup> year when she is handed over to the handsome young Duke to be taken far away from everyone she knows to his distant castle.

Alfonso appreciates many of the same things that move Lucrezia, beautiful music, nature, horseback riding. He takes pleasure in amusing her. But there is a dark, ruthless side to this Duke. He needs that male heir, and Lucrezia is expected to produce. As the story opens, it is clear the marriage has taken a dark turn and Lucrezia's very life is in danger.

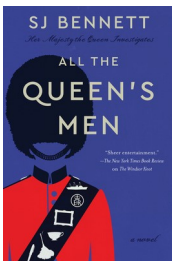
This is a fascinating novel of renaissance Italy, a time when women's lives and bodies were not their own, but were governed by men. Lucrezia is the perfect character for showing an intelligent, spirited woman's life in an era where even for a Duchess, the limits and costs could be dangerous.



***Lessons*** by Ian McEwan is loaded with history, happenings of great importance and their effect on the lives of those caught up in the repercussions of world events.

This is the story of a man who is impacted by history and abandonment. In the aftermath of WWII Roland Baines is isolated from his mother, stranded thousands of miles away in a boarding school where he is noticed by the music teacher and taken under her wing. Years later, as a young man, his wife will disappear, leaving him alone with their infant son.

McEwan makes history MATTER in this gripping novel that marches through time, from the aftermath of WWII, to the Suez Canal Crisis, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Chernobyl disaster. How much control do we have over our lives? How does one man make his life meaningful against the tide of history?



***All the Queens Men*** by SJ Bennett is second in the series that started with ***Windsor Knot*** and proved Queen Elizabeth II is a good sleuth. Her assistant private secretary, Rozie Oshoodi, does the leg work, and is well trained in combat too. They make an excellent, albeit secret team.

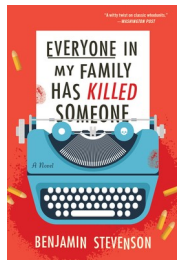
In 2016 politics have hit the crazy button. Brexit is proving difficult, confusing, and leaving tempers short. Buckingham Palace is in desperate need of a major overhaul, in the many gazillion dollar range. The wiring is dicey, the roof unreliable, all sorts of needed systems are going wonky. And across the pond, their ally, the good old USA, is in the midst of a bizarre election. The Queen has quite a lot on her schedule.

The issues that will demand attention, no matter the political hubbub, start small. The Queen notices one of her personal paintings hanging in Portsmouth at a maritime art exhibit at Semaphore house. She wants it back. She would also like to know how it got there in the first place. Rozie is sent off to investigate. Threatening notes are being left for female staff members, crude offensive notes. Sir Simon, the Queen's personal secretary, insists Rozie keep quiet about the staffing problem, it can be handled without bothering her majesty. At least until Sir Simon discovers the body of one of the women, dead at the side of the pool.

An intricately plotted mystery with a royal setting and an original pair of unofficial investigators!



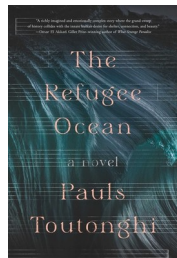
February evenings have a tendency toward cold and icy, perfect weather to stay in all warm and comfy with a good book to read. Then come to Book Club to discuss the book with other passionate readers. Book Clubs meet on Mondays via Zoom at 6 and in person at 4:30. Everyone is welcome. Email [sunriverbooks@sunriverbooks.com](mailto:sunriverbooks@sunriverbooks.com) letting me know which discussion you want to attend and I will send discussion notes the weekend before Book Club meets.



Mystery Book Club discusses ***Everyone In My Family Has Killed Someone*** by Benjamin Stevenson via Zoom 2-5 and in-person 2-12. This clever mystery is set in a remote Australian ski resort that has seen better days. It is narrated by Ernest Cunningham who has been ostracized by most of his family for a few years. Now they are having a reunion organized by his aunt Katherine at the aforementioned resort. They will all be together, Ernest, his mother, step-father, brother, step-sister, sister-in-law, wife, aunt, and uncle. In a remote, location, with a storm coming. Except this family is a bit different, they have a tendency toward murder. Being marooned together in a snowbound resort could be dicey. The body count starts rising.

The story opens a few years prior to the reunion when Ernest receives a late-night phone call from his brother, Michael, who is coming over with a little problem. The problem is a dead body and a bag with \$267,000. It is this incident that leads to Ernest's banishment from the clan.

Humor, a clever mystery, and a family of killers. Which of them is contributing to the rising body count at the isolated ski resort? And who will survive?



Fiction Book Club discusses ***The Refugee Ocean*** by Pauls Toutonghi via zoom 2-19 and in person 2-26.

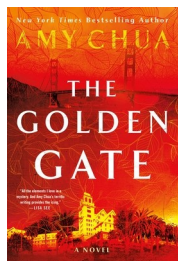
Set-in two-time frames bound together by music; this compelling story presents vivid characters whose lives are touched by cataclysmic events. In 2014 Naim Rahil lives in Aleppo Syria, a city at war with itself, where each sound must be examined for danger. Naim is a young man with a future, through his musical talent he plans to study and have a rewarding career. In the seconds of the explosion, the blast robs him of that hope. With a mangled hand, he can no longer anticipate a brilliant life as a musical prodigy.

Surviving in a refugee camp, he is wracked by anger, despair, and worry. What is to become of him? Where will he go now? Toutonghi captures so perfectly the feelings a young man goes through when his future is snatched from him by violence, when he suffers unimaginable loss, when he is relegated to life in a refugee camp. Anger and despair are reasonable emotions in those circumstances. Now all his hopes are pinned on getting out, on being sent to a country where explosions are not a possibility of daily life. Naim is one of the fortunate refugees, he is sent to the US. But our streets are not paved of gold, and it is hard to adjust to a country with such different ways and attitudes. Making ends meet, learning the ways of this vast and different country is hard.

In 1948 Marguerite Toutonghi is expected to acquiesce in being the currency that will save her family from financial ruin through the good match arranged by her father. The man she is expected to marry has conservative beliefs requiring a wife to relinquish aspirations of her own and who has no love of music. This is abhorrent to her! Music is her life's passion, she is talented, young, and passionate, marriage to him would crush her. Marguerite's dream is to leave her home in Beirut Lebanon to study at the Conservatoire de Paris, a goal that her father will not permit. He needs this union between his daughter, and the rather boring man with money and connections.

Marguerite chaffs at being used to finance her family with the sale of her body and soul. One night, at a dance, she meets a young Cuban man who understands her love of music, is interested in her thoughts, and is not intimidated by a woman having opinions. After a family betrayal, Marguerite throws caution to the wind, and boards a ship to Cuba.

I admired Marguerite and enjoyed reading about her. Naim made me think about the horrible damage war and violence cause to the human soul. The characters are likable and resilient. And yet, here we are still, a world at war in many places. Toutonghi writes of serious events in the lives of his characters, but he does so in a way that is uplifting, and entertaining.



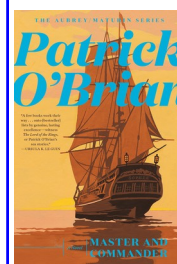
### Upcoming Book Club Dates for Monday Evenings

Everyone is welcome, Meetings are held in person at 4:30 & via Zoom at 6 PM on Mondays.

#### March

3-4 via Zoom & 3-11 in-person ***The Golden Gate*** by Amy Chau **Mystery Book Club**  
3-18 via Zoom & 3-25 in-person ***Master and Commander*** by Patrick O'Brian **Fiction Book Club**

Comment on book clubs, look up future book clubs, or find more information at [Sunriverbooks.com](http://Sunriverbooks.com)



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