

BROWN BAG BOOK REVIEW

FEBRUARY 6TH, 2020

Benedict, Marie *Lady Clementine* (Fiction Benedict) -- Behind every great man is an equally great woman. Clementine Ogilvy Hozier met Winston Churchill at a ball in 1904. Four years later they wed and began a 56-year marriage and political alliance. Clementine is the quintessential political wife. She manages their household, acts as his sounding board, helps him to write and deliver his speeches, and forges the relationships that are essential to his rise in power. The ride is not always smooth; when Churchill serves as Lord of the Admiralty during World War I, 56,000 men perished at Gallipoli. Even though the losses were not all because of Churchill, he bore the responsibility for the failure. The pair plan his exoneration by having him join the Royal Scots Fusiliers at the front. She continues cultivating relationships back home on his behalf while leading women's aide groups. These efforts lead to a more influential position as Britain's Minister of Munitions. It isn't until World War II that Churchill comes to power as Prime Minister. Both Winston and Clementine served important roles in winning the war. Clementine, in particular, was instrumental in recruiting women to fill unconventional roles in decryption, espionage, mechanics, meteorology, and anti-aircraft detection. - **SCR**

Blalock, Georgie *The Other Windsor Girl* (Fiction Blalock) -- Vera Strathmore has lost her fiancé in the war. She lives with her parents while secretly writing scandalous books under the pen name of Mrs. Lavish. After a well-connected cousin introduces her to loyal fan Princess Margaret, she is appointed as #2 lady-in-waiting to the royal. Through Vera's eyes, we follow the changes Margaret undergoes as her sister Elizabeth ascends to the throne. Princess Margaret meets the married Peter Townsend and they fall in love. Peter divorces his wife but it is the Queen who must decide if they can marry. Under political pressure, Elizabeth denies her permission to marry Townsend, but works out an agreement. The pair must wait until Margaret reaches the age of 25, and must also forfeit her rights to succession. The Princess knows she cannot walk away from her life of luxury; she turns him down. Nightly partying and liquor help her to cope with the loss. Later she meets photographer Anthony Armstrong-Jones (later Lord Snowdon), allowing him unprecedented access to take her official portrait. Vera warns her not to marry him, but Margaret pays no mind. Vera resigns when Margaret marries Snowdon, only to learn that he was not her ideal mate. - **SCR**

Bocci, Nina *Meet Me on Love Lane* (Fiction Bocci) -- This is the book for those who love cute, romantic comedies. Charlotte Bishop is fired from her job in New York City and reluctantly returns to her hometown of Hope Lake, Pennsylvania. She was only wanting a temporary place to recuperate before moving back to the city, but she slowly finds herself falling for the charm of the town and is soon caught in a love triangle with two of its residents. - **NM**

Dicks, Matthew *Twenty-One Truths About Love* (Fiction Dicks) -- I don't know if it is a book category already, but if it isn't, I nominate this novel to be the first in my newly invented category: "Neurotica." This category shall be described as having characters who are past their 20s but are still youthfully floundering and not yet fully immune to making very bad life choices. Enter the protagonist of this story, Dan: 37, increasingly overweight (addicted to Little Debbie Cakes), an average (former) teacher who quit on a whim to start his own bookshop, a disappointingly inept bookshop manager, adoring of his wife Jill, and an obsessive list writer. (In fact, the entire story is told through Dan's

journal entries which he composes as lists, since he thinks traditional journals are "bullsh**.") Dan has worries, or perhaps more like neuroses; from comparing himself to his wife's former (deceased) husband constantly, to being too afraid to stand up to his own employees, Dan is not the most adept at...anything. Is Dan likeable? Perhaps sometimes. Is he relatable? Perhaps sometimes. But he's just found out he's going to be a father, so he'd better get his life together quickly. Of course, he doesn't. What he does do is make increasingly bad choices culminating in a bingo-related felony. A rather sweet (neurotic) story, and all I can say is, if I haven't interested you in the story by this point, it's probably not for you. 😊 - HV

Hoover, Colleen *Maybe Someday* (Fiction Hoover) -- A compelling romance filled with depth, emotion and a love for music. Sydney's life seems to be going well until the day she finds out that her boyfriend has been sleeping with her best friend. Now Sydney does not know where to go or who to turn to. Out of options, Sydney ends up moving in with her neighbor who agrees to let her stay while she is figuring things out as long as she helps write song lyrics for his band. - NM

Hunting, Helena *Meet Cute* (Fiction Hunting) -- Daxton "Dax" is Kailyn's childhood celebrity crush who she, quite literally, runs into on her first day of law school. The two become friends and rivals before betrayal tears them apart. Eight years later, a tragic accident brings them back together. Kailyn, now representing Dax's sister, is going to be spending a lot more time with Dax and will soon have to decide if she can let go of the past and work to forgive the mistakes that were made. Helena Hunting perfectly blends loss and sorrow with humor to create this enjoyable contemporary romance. - NM

Jio, Sarah *All the Flowers in Paris* (Fiction Jio) -- After Caroline and her bike are hit by a truck in Paris, she awakens to find herself in the hospital without her memories. She is discharged back to her apartment on Rue Cler after she physically improves. The only thing she can vaguely recall is a man, a little girl, and great sadness. In 1943, Celine lives with her father and 8-year-old daughter in Paris. Father and daughter run a flower shop. Celine is a widow, and newly engaged to Luc Jeanty. The family has a small amount of Jewish blood, which eventually puts them on German radar. Forced to close the shop, Celine is taken to live with a German soldier while hiding her young daughter in her room. As Caroline recovers in her apartment, she discovers Celine's letters and begins to research what happened. She also regains her memory, and comes to understand her feelings of sadness and loss. - SCR

Kantra, Virginia *Meg & Jo* (Fiction Kantra) -- In this modern-day version of *Little Women*, Jo follows her heart to NYC to become a working journalist. Meg lives in the suburbs with her beautiful husband and children. Sister Beth is a musician and Amy is pursuing her design dreams in Paris. As in all Alcott novels, there are some obstacles. When Jo loses her job as a journalist, she is forced to work as a sous chef while moonlighting as an anonymous food blogger. Meg becomes overwhelmed with childcare duties while taking care of her ailing mother. As in the original series, Kantra gives the four women courage and strength to face up to their challenges. - SCR

Kondo, Marie *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing* (Non-Fiction 648 K821ℓ) -- This book is for anyone who would like to simplify and organize their life once and for all. Marie Kondo introduces her KonMarie method of tidying by category and

only keeping those items that spark joy. This is a quick introduction to KonMarie and her first book on the Japanese art of decluttering and organizing. - **NM**

Kondo, Marie *Spark Joy: An Illustrated Master Class on the Art of Organizing and Tidying Up* (Non-Fiction [648 K821s](#)) -- This would be a good book for anyone looking for a guide on how to declutter. *Spark Joy* is an in-depth guide to decluttering and organizing your home. Marie Kondo expands on her KonMarie method, a philosophy of surrounding yourself with things that bring you joy, which in turn is said to change your outlook on life. The KonMarie method of tidying focuses on looking at what items you want to keep, not what you want to get rid of. This is the sequel to *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* and covers the process in more detail than the first book. - **NM**

Krueger, William Kent *This Tender Land* (Fiction [Krueger](#)) -- This tells the story of three students living at the Lincoln Indian Training School in the 1930s under unbelievably cruel conditions. Only Odie and his brother, Alfred, are white and Odie is constantly in trouble with the superintendents, the Brickmans. One night, facing a severe beating and probable sexual assault by a teacher, Odie manages to escape and finds his brother and Mose, a Sioux and close friend. They decide they all have to leave the school. They also have to rescue Emmy Frost, the young daughter of a favorite and kind teacher who had been killed by a tornado. Emmy, an orphan now, had been adopted and held captive by the Brickmans. They confront Mr. Brickman, force him to open the school safe, bag money and papers, gather Emmy, retrieve a canoe Mr. Frost had stowed, and embark on a trip down the Gilead River, eventually entering the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers and arriving at their destination of St. Louis. Along the way they have adventures with One-Eyed Jack, a tent revival group, Hoperville families, and Gertie and a Jewish community on the Flats of St. Paul. Odie locates Aunt Julia and it all comes together. - **SBB**

Land, Stephanie *Maid: Hard Work, Low Pay, and a Mother's Will to Survive* (Non-Fiction [331.7616 L253m](#)) -- Stephanie Land's dream as a young girl was to attend the University of Montana as a creative writing student. A casual fling results in an unplanned pregnancy and she gives birth to a daughter, Mia. Unfortunately, Jamie, Mia's father, is contrary and abusive. Her family is unable to help with money or lodging. Land and her daughter end up in a homeless shelter, where her child takes her very first steps. They are given transitional housing next; while in this housing she finds love with Travis and moves in with him. Their relationship only lasts a few years. Mother and daughter end up in Section 8 housing in a mold-infested studio apartment. Though Land gets SNAP and childcare benefits, and has a job as a maid at \$10.00/hour, they find it tough going. Her scoliosis makes it difficult to do maid's work, but she persists day after day. After taking junior college credits during this time, she finally gets a loan and scholarship funding to attend the University of Montana. Post-graduation, her work has appeared in the *Washington Post*, *Vox*, and other publications. Her memoir hit *The New York Times* best seller list at #3. She is financially independent, but still seems to lack the ability to pick out good men. - **SCR**

Moore, Meg Mitchell *The Islanders* (Fiction [Moore](#)) -- The son of a best-selling author is a best-seller himself. The owner of the local whoopie pie café is a single mother forced to make a life for herself. A young stay-at-home mother of two young sons wants to have a meaningful career. These three characters would seem to have nothing in common, except they are living for a summer on Block Island. As their summer progresses, they meet and grow close, while sharing secrets and burying lies

about themselves. As the end of summer approaches, each of them must decide what they value most and what they are willing to sacrifice in order to keep it. - **JAC**

Polek, Nicolette *Imaginary Museums: Stories* (Fiction Polek) -- This is another book I picked up by chance and was intrigued by the title. It contains extremely short little vignettes about people, scenes, and scenarios. A little snapshot in time about something, anything, random thoughts - rather like a little museum exhibit, which is perhaps what inspired the book's title. There are 4 categories of stories: "Miniature Catastrophes," "American Interiors," "Slovak Sceneries," and "Library of Lost Things." Now, be warned that when I say these are "extremely short," I emphasize the "extremely" - sometimes the stories are as brief as 7 lines! While I wouldn't claim to love this collection, I will say each story rather affected me like a sweet aphorism or adage; it caused me to reflect a little, perhaps laugh and agree, or perhaps just scratch my head in puzzlement. Certainly, these are easy to digest if you are looking for something a little different yet undemanding of your time. - **HV**

Thornton, Stephanie Marie *American Princess: A Novel of First Daughter Alice Roosevelt* (Fiction Thornton) -- Alice was Theodore Roosevelt's first daughter, the only child of Roosevelt and his first wife Alice Hathaway Lee. Lee died of kidney failure two days after giving birth to Alice. She was largely left in the care of Roosevelt's sister Anna, until Roosevelt married Edith Kermit Carow. When President McKinley was shot and died a week later, Roosevelt became the 26th President of the United States. Alice became the darling of the White House and a fashion icon at the tender age of 17. Alice, christened "Princess Alice" by the press, had always been a rebellious child. This does not improve with age. She is known to smoke cigarettes in public, ride openly in cars with men, and party each night. When chided about Alice's free-wheeling ways, her father stated, "I can either run the country or I can control Alice. I cannot possibly do both." When she turned 21, she wed Nicholas Longworth III, a congressman from Ohio, and became an influential political wife. But when her father sought another term in the White House on the Independent Bull Moose ticket, a permanent rift developed between she and her husband, a Taft supporter. Both Alice and Longworth were known for their various affairs; hers with Senator William Borah resulted in the birth of her only child. She remained a strong political figure in Washington her entire life. - **SCR**

Wiggs, Susan *The Oysterville Sewing Circle* (Fiction Wiggs) -- Caroline Shelby assumed she had left her hometown of Oysterville, Washington forever, as she pursued her career in New York as a glamorous fashion designer. Suddenly she finds herself the surrogate parent of two young orphans (totally unrelated to her), and has returned home to try and figure out what she should now do with her life. She returns to the small sewing shop where she had first discovered her passion for design. To her surprise, she discovers that her best friend (who is a model), her original sewing mentor and others in town don't really have the idyllic life she has assumed. They and other local women have hidden abusive relationship troubles for years. These women bond together to support each other through the Oysterville Sewing Circle. - **JAC**