



BiblioFiles

By Ruth Freeman

Readers' Advisor @ the Rowayton Library

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Val McDermid's new book 'Darker Domain' is excellent. The parallel stories of strike breaking during the 1984 coal miners strike in Scotland, and a kidnapping gone wrong at the same time are cleverly woven into the lives of the current cold case squad in Fife. The main characters are believable and touchingly human; we get a glimpse of tough cops who are full of foibles. The author neatly ratchets up the suspense with calculating villains who use their power to stay one step ahead of the coppers. Gritty police work and psychological profiling combine to net the killers, after plenty of twists.

'American Rust' by Philipp Meyer is not an easy book. Told in alternating chapters by the main characters, it is the story of two childhood friends, Isacc English and Billy Poe. They are trying to figure out how to get unstuck from their dreary existence in the rust belt town of Buel, in the Monongahela Valley outside of Pittsburgh. Their attempt to leave goes terribly wrong, and the balance of the book is the inevitable unwinding of their dreams in the aftermath of their terrible luck. Billy's mother and her sometime lover Billy Harris the sheriff are wonderfully drawn, and the palpable despair of trying to make a decent life in a decaying area with limited prospects is sharply drawn. There are sorrowful images, like a new interstate highway that is virtually empty of traffic, that contribute to a very strong sense of place. This is a first novel from a writer worth watching.

'Apples and Oranges' by Marie Brenner is a touching memoir of her brother Carl, who went from being a trial lawyer to an Oregon apple grower. Her efforts to understand how their sibling relationship went wrong involve going back into an unusual family history that spans continents and eras. Carl is a difficult character to love, but fascinating too. Who knew when their mother nicknamed them "apples and oranges" to explain their differences that Carl would embrace his moniker and turn it into his calling. He is an obsessive personality, but what is interesting is observing his sister's equally obsessive approach – they are just different. The inevitable reconciliation is really heartwarming.

'The Local News' by Miriam Gershow is told from the perspective of Lydia, a brilliant high school girl whose brother disappears one night. Cast adrift by totally distracted and grief stricken parents, she has to figure out the social cues in the mysterious arena of high school friendships. Formerly "cool" kids befriend her as she tries to sort through her mixed feelings about her bullying older brother. All the while the serious undertone of her missing sibling



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colors everything. The author seems to have climbed into her head and has absolutely nailed the high school experience, especially the emotional upheavals that come around when your world is turned upside down. The subject of the book is serious but the observations are periodically wry and there are times when you are smiling in spite of yourself. The prose is beautiful; this is a first novel and Gershow is a very talented writer.

Sarah Dunn's new book 'Secrets to Happiness' tracks the lives of several thirty something New Yorkers. Holly Frick is the focal point around which much of the action occurs. She is smart and stuck post divorce struggling to find a path that will bring her a modicum of success and happiness. Her novel has flopped, she is currently writing after school TV dreck with her friend Leonard and trying to fall out of love with her ex husband. Her married best friend Amanda, another friend Betsy, an adopted beagle and a very young lover present her with both wanted and unwanted complications. There is a moral center in this book that differentiates it from standard "chick lit" and makes it truly engaging.

We have some great new cookbooks just in time for the spring season. 'Baked' by Matt Lewis is definitely the baking book of the year. It's full of accessible recipes, tips on achieving beautiful results, and best of all a real sense of fun. Their brownie recipe won the America's Test Kitchen award and I can personally attest that the cover lemon tart recipe is outstanding. Anna Pump, one of the Barefoot Contessa's mentors and the owner of the food store "Loaves and Fishes", authored 'Summer on a Plate'. Keep this book tucked under your arm as you plan your vegetable gardens or stroll the farmers markets. It's loaded with excellent suggestions. Bon appétit!

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