



BiblioFiles

By Ruth Freeman

Readers' Advisor @ the Rowayton Library

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James Lee Burke has written dozens of books and keeps getting better. I just finished 'The Tin Roof Blowdown' and 'Swan Peak'. These are the last two works featuring Dave Robicheaux, the sheriff based in New Iberia, LA. 'The Tin Roof Blowdown' is superb on many levels – as a thriller with a malevolently original set of bad guys, a rumination on the failure of so many parties in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and as a tale of the possibility of redemption. Roller coaster plot twists and believable characters make this a fabulous read. 'Swan Peak' finds Dave and his wife Molly and sidekick Clete Purcell in Montana. They are supposed to be relaxing after Hurricane Katrina, instead a double murder and past ghosts have conspired to trap them in an ugly cycle of violence.

'Rain Gods', featuring Sherriff Hackberry Holland, is Burke's latest. Set in southwest Texas its very original cast contains stone killers, hapless criminals and a ferociously loyal and funny spouse who may yet save her idiot husband from death. This is escape in the best sense of the word.

Karin Fossum's new Norwegian police procedural is called 'The Water's Edge'. It is a deeply atmospheric, tense story of a child's death and the impact of the terrible crime on the community. The dialogue between Inspector Konrad Sejer and his second in command, Jacob Skarre, hooks you immediately as they ponder the broader questions of voyeurism and pedophilia, as well as the exhaustive steps they must take to find the killer. The pleasure of the book is in the unusual setting and a crackerjack ending. Especially recommended for all the fans of Scandinavian mysteries.

'In the Blood' is Andrew Motion's memoir of his boyhood until the time his mother is rendered comatose in a severe riding accident when he is 16. Motion was the poet laureate of the UK from 1999 until this May. The book is really an elegy to his beloved mother and an upper crust rural lifestyle that combined to create a very happy childhood. The chapters on his dawning love of poetry and literature are exciting, and his writing is exquisite.

'Strength in What Remains' by Tracy Kidder is riveting. It's the story of Deogratias, a refugee from Burundi, a landlocked, impoverished African country. Deo arrives in New York with \$200 in his pocket and a lifetime's worth of horrific memories. Burundi went through Hutu versus Tutsi massacres like neighboring Rwanda, sending Deo fleeing from medical school to



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make a new life for himself, beginning as a deliverer of groceries to wealthy New Yorkers. With the help and remarkable kindness of strangers he begins to reconstruct his life with the goal of making a positive difference in his homeland. His amazing journey is chronicled in Kidder's incisive reporting, which is interwoven with thoughtful historical perspectives on the roots of the ethnic violence that precipitated Deo's flight.

Penny Vincenzi's latest book, 'The Best of Times' is frankly too long but engaging nonetheless. Her characters initially intersect randomly at the scene of a major motorway crash outside London, allowing for maximum drama and trips to the local hospital where a cast of attractive doctors can be introduced to the mix. Her fans will appreciate the coincidences and romantic entanglements that emerge from the wreckage. There is great satisfaction watching the author wrap up all the threads, even if it does take awhile.

I wanted to like 'A Gate at the Stairs' by Lorrie Moore more than I did. It is her first book in 10 years and she is a very talented writer. Told through the eyes of Tassie Keltjin, a Midwestern college freshman, it is the story of both her farming family and her experiences at school. School is divided between actual classes, a modest amount of socializing, and the time she spends as a nanny for a family who is in the process of adopting a mixed race girl. Moore is a wordsmith, and her descriptions of the events and people that are a part of Tassie's gradual loss of innocence are often mesmerizing. There is just a nagging sense that this blizzard of words hides a weak center.

'Historic Rowayton' has just been published by the Rowayton Historical Society and is a must read for anyone living in our area. It's a book about "people, places and points of interest in a maritime village". It is a record of the architectural history of the town and how it developed, with beautiful photographs of many of the older homes in the village.

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