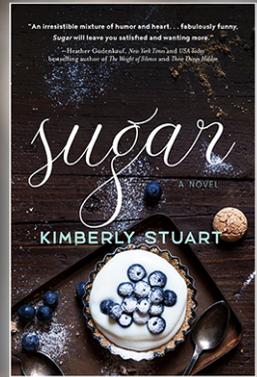




## Spotlight on Writing

# Kimberly Stuart's Sugar and the Recipe for Smart Romance



Also In This Issue:

## Pam Houston

Award-Winning Author

*"Cowboys Are My Weakness"*

THE WRITER  
HOTLIST

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# BOOKS 'N PIECES MAGAZINE-MAY 2019

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Edited by  
**WILLIAM GENSBURGER**



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## FROM THE PUBLISHER

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by William Gensburger

**W**elcome to our May edition of Books 'N Pieces Magazine with our "Spotlight on Writing."

**Happy Mother's Day!**

Do join our **WRITER HOTLIST**, a newsletter that will focus on getting more useful information to you.

And do consider taking out an **ad** in this magazine. You can go as small as having a listing in our Bookshop 'N Pieces section, or a half, or full-page ad. Our rates are very low and we even will design your ad at no charge if needed. You can also use it elsewhere—we'll give you the files.

Enjoy this issue, and do let me know what you think.

Regards,



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## FREE DOWNLOAD DAYS

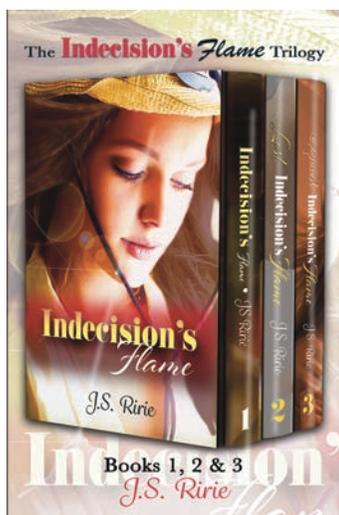
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The following books are available for **download FREE** from Amazon Kindle, **Monday May 6 thru Friday May 10**. Be sure to download them.

### INDECISION'S FLAME TRILOGY

by J.S. Ririe

Engaged, Brylee returns home (Australia) to confront her father about her mother's death only to discover the secrets of the past and her father's new family. And then there's Jake, the handsome ranch hand? Will her engagement survive?



Download it today: <https://amzn.to/2DRZBKF>

In this special trilogy set of the first three books, readers will revel in Brylee's journey, the vivid landscape of the Australian Outback, and the quest to hold on to her values, both part of her character and her faith.

***Indecision's Flame* is a wonderful read for Adults and Young Adults.**

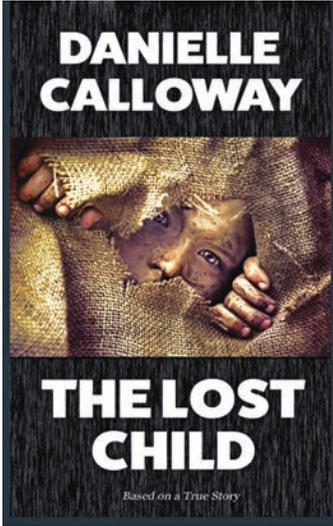
*"This is a romance that has it all. Complex characters, and exotic location that captures the reader's imagination. Mesmerizing. Byrlee is a heroine for the 21st century. Keeps you awake until 2 am wondering if fate will reward her resourceful spirit."* - Peggy O.

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### THE LOST CHILD

by Danielle Calloway

Deaf and abandoned in Ecuador. Can young Nicolás survive?  
Based on a true story. "This is a must read."-Debora H "Engaging from  
the beginning"-Janine H



"This books hooks you from start to finish. It touches your heart to see how Nicolas can preserve his innocence in an evil world that has mistreated him. You can't help but shed tears and root for him and find encouragement in all the good people that help him. Thank you for sharing his story! Definitely recommend this book to anyone looking for a good story to warm your heart." - Monicarod (Verified Amazon Review)

Download it today: <https://amzn.to/2H7p3OB>

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## INTERVIEW: KIMBERLY STUART

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### Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan Movies and Writing



**K**imberly Stuart turned to writing to cope with the isolation and charming chaos of motherhood, she will tell you. A few vignettes turned into the seeds for a novel, which turned into a two-book contract. She hasn't stopped since with a wider range of titles, loads of favorable ratings, and more on the way.

• • •

**Q:** How'd you start your career? What was your initial reaction received from others when you announced you would be writing?

**A:** I started writing during naptime when my eldest, now sixteen, was a newborn. I told no one but my husband and eventually my parents. They were all safe places, and safety was definitely what I was seeking at that point. It took a long time for me to say the words, "I'm a writer," probably not until after I'd sold my first manuscript. My degrees were in teaching, not English or literature or writing. So I felt like a total phony to align myself with the profession until I had some miles under my belt. That was probably a healthy dose of humility, but it also likely impeded me (and others!) from taking my work seriously for too long.

**Q:** What were your best and worst moments thus far?

**A:** The best is still meeting readers who are moved or entertained or just plain excited about my books. I also love the moments when the first copies come in the mail, and all those hours and weeks and months become something I can hold in my hands.

The worst moments are when I get too much in my head and start convincing myself I'd be better off picking up Irish dancing or macrame than writing another book. Perhaps the biggest self-doubt doozy of them all was when, after getting rejections for eighteen months on my latest manuscript, I received a letter from an editor that absolutely shredded the novel. She held nothing back. After I licked my wounds, I started the book again on page one and rewrote the entire thing. It was a brutal process, but I love the book that painful experience produced. The rewrite is my novel, *Sugar*, and I'm grateful it's been so well received. Trust me—that book limped for a long time before it was able to fly.

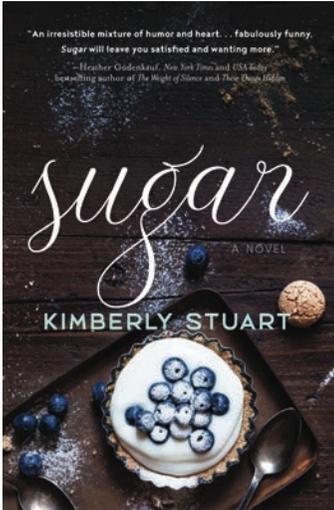
**Q:** Who was your biggest supporter?

**A:** My husband, Marc, my parents, and my close friends are just ridiculous in their cheerleading. They take every success and failure very personally, and the journey is so much the richer with them. My parents, in particular, deserve all sorts of kudos for assuming I could tackle this business. When we could never have afforded such an indulgence, my parents purchased for me a plane ticket to attend a

writers' conference at the very beginning of my career. It was there that I met my first editor, who would go on to acquire my first five books. My parents' outlandish belief in me made that happen.

**Q:** What's your writing process like? Pen/paper, computer, laptop, coffee shops, writing spot.

**A:** I am a laptop girl. Laptop and silence. I even wear ear plugs in my silent house. No music, no distractions but plenty of natural light and a cup of tea are nice.



<https://amzn.to/2V3MnQV>

**Q:** Are you rigid in your writing time and place, or more muse-like, as the inspiration hits?

**A:** I am typically pretty disciplined in the time I write. I treat it like a doctor's appointment I can't possibly cancel. If I wait for the muse to hit, I'm in a heap of trouble when a deadline rolls around, so I chip away at it, scene by scene, chapter by chapter. Often times I do not feel one bit inspired, but writing to me is like any other discipline: I have to put myself (and my rear end) in the position for

good things to happen or they never, ever will.

**Q:** What's the one thing you wish you knew when you started, that you know now?

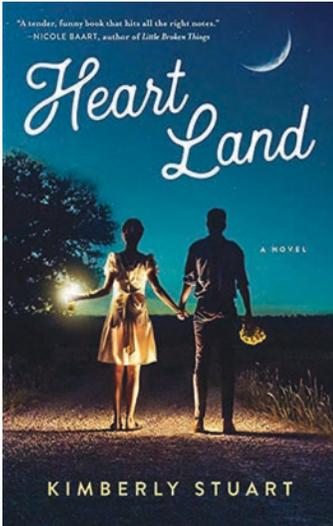
**A:** Get that rough draft out, come what may. Do not listen to the voice saying you're writing drivel and should just stop. It's likely drivel, yes, but at least with a rough, you will have something to seep into, grow out of, launch from.

I'm GLAD I didn't know how much I'd have to learn in terms of marketing and publicity. I never would have gotten on the train, and I would have missed quite the ride.

**Q:** What's your editing and proofing process like?

**A:** After I finish the rough draft, I step away from the manuscript,

ideally for about a month. I don't think about it, talk about it, and I certainly don't read it. After the hiatus, I come back with sharp and critical eyes. I try to excise anything that doesn't serve the story, and when I feel I've done what I can, I send it along to the pros.



<https://amzn.to/2DSKWz7>

**Q:** Your most recent novel is *HEART LAND*, listed on your website as Christian Fiction. Could you tell us a bit about it and the evolution of the story? And also what differentiates your Christian Fiction from General Fiction?

**A:** *Heart Land* is a coming home story. It occurs in the Midwest, which was pure joy for me as I'm a Midwestern girl myself. The main character, Grace, is pursuing a big dream in New York but ends up having to come back home to Iowa against her will. A high school boyfriend, a group of feisty grandmas, and a dream reimagined conspire to make Grace reconsider what

it means to be home.

I've written both Christian fiction and general market fiction, but my writing style and narrative themes are similar in both genres. I like to say that if you like Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan movies, you would like my books. A little chemistry-driven romance, quirky characters, lots of laughter, and maybe a tear or two.

**Q:** With 8 books under your belt, do you find the process gets easier, or is each book as difficult as the one before?

**A:** Some parts of the process get easier. I'm not as intimidated by deadlines because I know I've gotten to the finish line before. I tend not to freak out about the middle of the novel as much as I used to because I know it's a bit of slog and the important thing is to keep moving.

Some things, however, are still difficult and maybe even more so. I raise the expectations for myself with each book, so that can get dicey. I can over-think on the front end of writing to the point of paralysis. I also know the time and effort it takes to really make a book release a positive one, and that the release of a book starts at least six months ahead of the pub date. That knowledge can make one well prepared but also very tired.

**Q:** What recommendations do you have for new authors?

**A:** Read a ton, both in your genre and elsewhere. Surround yourself with writers who share your passion and ability level. Remember to be gracious, humble, and kind, not only because that's just the kind of person you want to be but also because this business is alarmingly small and what you do and say will follow you. And write the story that makes your heart sing. All the other ideas can and should wait.



<https://amzn.to/2DQNoGg>

Website: <https://kimberlystuart.com>

Author Page (Amazon): <https://amzn.to/2LrXXpD>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/kimberly.stuart.10>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/kimberly.stuart.writes/>

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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“ Dear Editor: I enjoyed your last issue with Ellen Michelle. Editing has always scared me, so it was nice to read more about her. ~ Carolyn Martinez (AUST)

*Dear Carolyn. I agree with you that editing can be scary. It is very important and worth spending some solid time having your work edited independently.*  
~WG

“ Dear Editor: I'd love to have all the interviews in a book that I could buy. ~Jon Cardisan (NC)

*Dear John: We are putting together two volumes of the interviews we have conducted and hope to make them available in the next few months. Thanks for asking.* ~WG

*Email your letters to [Info@Booksnpieces.com](mailto:Info@Booksnpieces.com) and add **Letters to the Editor** in the subject line. Publication of letters is at the discretion of the editor.*

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## SHORT STORY: JELLYFISH FEVER

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by Avra Margariti

“Mama is dead,” Trixie says as if she’s talking about the weather. Liza’s body has been down at the morgue for three days, so I don’t know why Trixie feels the need to state the obvious.

“Stop calling her that,” I say through gritted teeth.

When Trixie gets in this dreamy and childish state, she’s dangerous—to herself, mostly, but sometimes dangerous to others, too.

She drapes herself over the back of the living room couch, nose pressed against Liza’s aquarium. She drums her fingers, long nails on clear glass, *tap-tap-tap*, a monotone, grating sound. The amethyst-colored jellyfish inside—the only two miraculous survivors—seem unperturbed, floating around as languid and disinterested as ever.

I want to be those jellyfish. I want the world to seem as distant as a bad dream that can’t reach me through the amniotic-like water gliding over me.

I look down at my own nails, the bloody, bitten stubs. I curl my hands into fists and feel their rough edges pinch into my palms. The pain grounds me, just as tapping seems to ground Trixie.

“Liza always said we should call her Mama, didn’t she?” Trixie says. She winds a strand of hair around a finger, then chews on it absently.

It takes a while for my throat to be able to produce words. "Liza isn't here. We don't have to call her anything."

I spit on the carpet for good measure.

I only hope she isn't anywhere pleasant.

---

The lawyer calls again while I'm standing before the mirror, fighting a losing battle with my tie. The phone rings and rings. I punch the off button before Liza's voicemail fills the room and makes my skin crawl with imaginary ants. On second thought, I yank out the cable, disconnecting the landline altogether.

"What you do that for?" Trixie asks.

Her voice is dream-like again, eyes glazed over. I saw her slinking upstairs to Liza's room earlier. I don't know how she can stand to go in there, but maybe the promise of Valium is enough to flick the ants off her skin.

"The ringing was getting on my nerves."

"What do you think he wants? I doubt Mama left us anything."

"Not our Mama," I growl before I can stop myself. My mother went and drowned herself, Trixie's died in jail, and hell if I know where either of our respective deadbeat fathers are. "Guess we'll see him at the funeral in a few hours."

I have a pretty good inkling about what the lawyer wants, but I don't tell Trixie. That weasel-faced man was there at the morgue when I was called to identify Liza's mangled body after the car crash. He told me, *The house belongs to the bank. You and your foster siblings should clear out before the end of the month.*

The moment I announced Liza's fate, Noah—the snotty boy who used to sleep in my bed when we were kids—packed his bags and vanished with barely a mumbled goodbye. Bay was long gone even before that. I still see her by the overpass sometimes, where she smiles at every car with cold and hunger in her eyes. We could've split months ago since we're both eighteen, but I promised Trixie we'd

graduate high school first. And now only Trixie and I remain, and that house, and Liza's bedroom I can't bear to enter.

Us and those two jellyfish, orbiting each other for all of their small eternity.

Trixie comes up behind me. She snakes her arms around my chest, her fingers twisting my tie into a perfect knot. Her black-rimmed, honey eyes meet mine through our combined reflection.

"There you go." She smooths the tie down, black on white. "You're as helpless as a baby sometimes."

*Baby boy*, Liza used to say whenever she caught me dressing. *Need help with that?*

Trixie's hands move away, but our eyes remain locked together. I want to peer into their depths and find the truth. *Was it you, Trix? Did you screw with Liza's brakes?*

Just for a second, Trixie touches the dark shadows beneath my eyes, so lightly I barely feel it. Then she withdraws and busies herself with getting dressed.

Ever since I got the call about Liza, I've felt like old-TV static has wormed its way inside me. And I thought I was numb *before*.

Trixie mumbles to herself, something about the broken hair curler. She bumps her shin against the coffee table and performs a breathless half-giggle, half-moan. I find myself wandering over to the jellyfish tank. We never named them. There were four jellyfish once, as there were four of us kids. Only the two remain now, swimming away from each other, then coming together again as if the ebb and flow of them is an inevitability. Spinning, twining, coiling their gelatinous tentacles around each other, rubbing their semi-translucent bellies together. They separate into two creatures again and circle their tank in an elegant aerial dance.

I flatten my palm against the tank and wait. The bigger of the two jellyfish, the one with the blue-speckled back, drifts toward me. If it were a dog, it'd nuzzle my hand. As it is, the jellyfish just presses itself against the glass for a second. And in that second, I feel a jolt of electricity travel up my arm, all the way to my chest. Through the numbness, I feel *something*.

"I'm ready," Trixie calls. "Let's go bury M—Liza."

"What about the jellyfish?"

She cocks her head to the side. "What about them?"

"We can't leave them behind."

I don't know how I know this, but I do. A primordial chord vibrates inside me, some gut feeling that tells me I cannot—should not—abandon them in this house.

I bang cupboards and open drawers, rifling through the kitchen feverishly. Trixie watches from the doorway, hugging herself. I find two clear food containers, shove one in Trixie's hands on my way to the living room. I uncap the tank and dip the net into the illuminated lukewarm water, soaking the sleeve of my overpriced rental suit. The jellyfish flee, and why shouldn't they? I'm the disembodied arm descending from the sky. I could have them eating out of my hand, poke and prod and pierce their soft skin, rule over them forever.

My hand trembles so bad I drop the net. It sinks amid the colorful pebbles and plastic shipwreck without a sound.

Trixie's hand grips mine. She retrieves the net and in two quick, fluid motions scoops up the jellyfish and releases them into their respective containers.

I let out a shuddery breath and wipe my dripping hand on my pants.

Trixie nods once, mouth set in a tight, adamant line. She doesn't look spacey or lost in her haze anymore.

She takes my hand again without meeting my eyes. "Let's go. They're waiting for us."

---

We sit at the back of the bus, eyes staring straight ahead as the vehicle lumbers up slopes and bounces over potholes. People come and go—old ladies pulling tartan shopping trolleys, men bent over their phones, rowdy kids skipping school—but nobody approaches us. I don't blame them. Two teens with stony expressions on their faces and jellyfish on their laps must be a strange sight.

I never blamed them—and yet I used to selfishly wish for somebody to notice what we hid.

My heart should be a thump, but it's only a whisper. All the while I'm thinking, *There's nothing left for us, there's nothing left for us.*

There's nothing left.

We reach the Evangelical Church Liza dragged us to for years, the cemetery looming behind it. The stooped, crying people in the yard remind me of Hangman stick figures. Like an unspoken agreement, neither of us rings the bell for our stop.

The road becomes even bumpier. My knees knock against Trixie's whenever the bus makes an abrupt turn, the jellyfish pirouetting in the cramped space inside their makeshift tanks.

Out of the corner of my eye, I catch Trixie's mouth moving. "We should take the jellies back home to the ocean," she says softly. "It's our duty, after everything..."

Her bottom lip quivers. She bites it, hard. I squeeze the plastic container and screw my eyes shut as the bus lurches forward.

There's nothing left here. Nothing left.

---

"Be careful out there," the driver rasps around his cigarette as we get off. "The currents're strong today."

I have to look away when Trixie smiles at him, little-girl sweet.

The bus stop is deserted; the broken-down sign and weed-infested footpath, post-apocalyptic. Trixie's heels teeter-totter on the uneven ground. I feel a thorn digging into the sole of my dress shoe. Halting, I let my weight press on it.

The beach—a long, thin stretch of iridescent pebbles and pale sand bordered by jagged rocks—is empty at this time of the year.

"We haven't been here in a while," Trixie murmurs by my side. "Remember?"

"Yeah," I choke out.

How could I forget? Liza loved seeing us in our bathing suits. She would say, *Come here, Malcolm, keep your Mama company.* She insisted on

rubbing sunscreen onto all of us kids, even though the clouds never let the sun peek through their cover.

The ants are back on my skin, prancing around like they own every inch of me. I put my jagged nails to good use and scratch the ants right off. When I glance at Trixie, I see she's kicked off her shoes and moved closer to the frothy strip of sand where ocean meets beach, spellbound. My body's also drawn to the water; my jellyfish like a compass' needle, the ocean's pull irresistible.

The sea looks like a stormy, gray mirror fogged over. The waves crawl up our ankles, then climb higher to our shins. The wind whips my hair into my eyes.

Trixie brings her container close to her face and whispers something I don't catch. I copy her, feeling like I'm in one of those dreams where you have to trudge through molasses-thick air.

"You're going to meet your family soon," I tell my jellyfish, trying to infuse my voice with certainty. "They're all waiting for you, I know they are."

I stare through the distorted plastic, but the connection I felt with the jellyfish back at Liza's place has been severed.

I don't know what's happening to me, why some smidgen of self-preservation is choosing to come out of hiding now. My heart is somewhat louder in my chest. I can hear it as if I pressed a conch to my ear, the distant echo of it.

"Should we count to three?" Trixie asks.

Her voice betrays nothing. I'm sometimes jealous of her ability to hide anything behind a childish-naïve-bitchy-flirty-alooof smile. Trixie has a thousand personas, all of them seemingly untouchable.

Channeling her, I make my voice steady and colorless. "One."

The waves hit us harder as we wade into the sea. The water is a chilly shock. Trixie's dress billows around her like a curious, tarry anemone. My pants become a million times heavier, like they could drag me to the murky bottom any second now.

When we're waist-deep in water, we pause and regard each other. Trixie holds her container over her heart. She opens the cap solemnly, the sound swallowed by the ocean's vicious shanty.

"Two." My voice could belong to someone else.

With the jellyfish poised high like a supplication to the sea gods, we slide forward, synchronized. I'm taller than Trixie, but even I have to stand on tiptoe when the wind pushes the rolling waves our way. I'm painfully aware of every one of my breaths. Water covers my mouth, and I tilt my head upward.

It's strange. I thought the sky would be dull and milky, but the more I look at it, the bluer it seems. Is this the last thing my mother saw before she drowned? Vast blue all around?

"Ready?" Trixie gasps. "Don't be sad. It's what the jellyfish want."

My throat has closed-off again, so I settle for a small nod. Together, we overturn our containers and free the two jellyfish that have been trapped in Liza's house for far too long. *Plop*, they go. The flabby, slimy creatures look stunned at first. Then they jerk their flowing tentacles, propelling themselves deeper into the ocean. Farther away from us.

It's over in seconds. Soon, even the swirling bubbles pop out of existence, and we can no longer spot the pair of them in the hazy water. Somehow, I didn't think it'd happen this fast. I don't think I'm ready to say goodbye yet.

I am not ready.

"I hope they end up together," Trixie says in a tiny voice.

The thought never occurred to me before. For years they've swum in the same tank, but now they have an entire ocean separating them. There's no guarantee they're going to meet their families. No way to know if they'll—we'll—float toward something better.

Will it *hurt*? God. I don't want it to hurt. Not now that the numbness has begun leaving my body, carried away by those currents the chain-smoking driver warned us about. A belated sob claws up my throat; I snort in water. The shock makes my heart jump start, louder than ever.

"Trix," I sputter. One more step and I'll be completely submerged. Just one more step... but my knees lock up. My heart plunges to the seafloor as my body flails to stay afloat.

A teary smile shatters her bravado, and she's the Trixie I remember from our younger years together. It's that smile that does it.

Trixie's lips curl around the word 'three.'

I scream, "Wait!"

Just like that, the spell is broken. I throw an arm around her waist and haul us both backward. I expect resistance from her, that familiar stubbornness, but she goes limp against me. And then we're scrambling away from the deep, splashing through the shallows, where we stir up whirlwinds of sand and scare away silvery minnows. Panting, we collapse into a frantic mess of limbs on the shore.

The waves crash around us, louder than ever. They thrust burning, salty foam up our nostrils as we dry heave and pat ourselves to make sure we're here, all in one piece. Hysteria comes next, bubbling snorts and cackles that hurt on their way up. Dark seaweed tangles itself in Trixie's hair, so she looks like a vengeful nymph that's crawled out of the depths of the sea. My hair's plastered to my scalp, my skull throbbing with the realization of what we were about to do back there. The sand gets everywhere. Coarse and abrasive, it rubs against our skin and sticks on us like fingerprints, only to be washed away in muddy rivulets by the next deafening wave.

I don't know who reaches out first, but suddenly we're grabbing at each other, mouths smashing together. The kiss is sloppy and fever-hot, the clink of teeth followed by the iodine tang of bitten tongues and the cleansing sting of saltwater. Our soggy clothes turn into a second skin, but our fingers still fumble their way underneath the layers of funeral attire, to caress freezing, prickly flesh.

It's like the moment death is off the table, suddenly everything else is *on*. The second we stop seeking our watery graves, our base, primal instincts kick in.

Trixie climbs on top of me, grinding down hard. I flip her onto her back with my knee pressed between her legs. We keep rolling around in the sand, pure grief, pure want, pure animal. The waves try to pry us apart, but we find each other time and time again. All I can hear is the water, but even its furious din is eclipsed by our groans and moans, our cries and laments. The sound of each other's name swells and crushes louder than the waves.

And then Trixie, still straddling me, strikes the wet sand on either

side of my head with her clenched fists. She opens her mouth wide, cursing Liza in a guttural, savage wail. A wave covers us both head-to-toe, but I can still hear the echo of her screams. The ocean has nothing on Trixie's menace.

My eyes burn. It's because of all the seawater. That's what I tell myself, why I'm crying like a baby.

Goddammit. I never once cried when Liza did whatever she wanted with me. I tried to divert her attention from Trixie. I was strong. I was stoic. And now that she's dead, I'm neither.

All through Liza's sick whims, Trixie was there. With her wry humor, unorthodox sweetness, and steadfast way of holding on, Trixie was always by my side.

I gather her shivering body in my arms. The fire in my bones has settled. The waves are no longer trying to beat and bruise us. They lap at us, gentle, inquisitive. Trixie's sharp bursts of breath even out. She presses our foreheads together, her hands cupping my face. Her lips brush against mine, softly, so softly, like she's afraid of ruining something precious.

And at that moment, I feel everything.

"I'm sorry, Malcolm," Trixie says, over and over again.

She buries her sobs in the crook of my neck, and I hold her tighter than I've ever held anything before, my own thread of life included.

"What are you sorry for?" I ask, although I know already—how could I not?

"For not being braver before," Trixie says. Then: "We should've gotten rid of her sooner."

---

It feels like hours later when we stagger back to the bus stop, sore, dripping, and shivering all over. Holding hands. We will blame that moment of madness on the jellyfish later. But for now, we sit on the salt-encrusted bench, curled around each other.

We breathe in the ocean breeze, and I swear that, for the first time in years, my heart feels light enough to float.

### About the Author



Avra Margariti is a Social Work undergrad from Greece. She enjoys storytelling in all its forms and writes about diverse identities and experiences. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Daily Science Fiction*, *The Forge Literary*, *The Colored Lens*, *Argot Magazine*, *The Arcanist*, *The Writing District* and other venues.

*Jellyfish Fever* first appeared in *The Writing District*.

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## THE WRITER HOTLIST

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## INTERVIEW: PAM HOUSTON

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**Author•Teacher•Speaker by Jill Hedgecock**

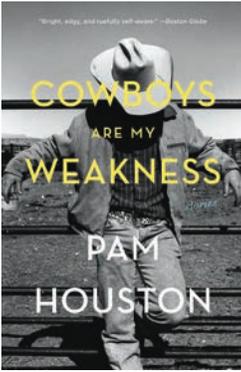


**P**am Houston is an American author of short stories, novels and essays, best known for her first book, *Cowboys Are My Weakness*. This book has been translated into nine languages, and won the 1993 Western States Book Award, as well as being named a 1992 New York Times Notable Book.

Her latest work, *Deep Creek: Finding hope in the High Country* covers her 120-acre homestead high in the Colorado Rockies, and what it means to care for a piece of land and the creatures on it.

**Q:** Which of your books have been the most difficult to write?

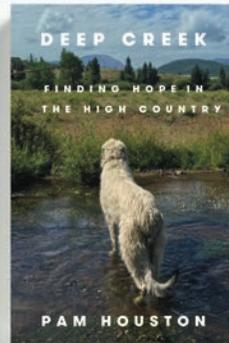
**A:** This one, by far. And what is funny about that is that I thought it



<https://amzn.to/2DQRcaw>

was going to be quick. This book, in a way, was my editor's idea. She wanted me to write a book length adventure, and although we tossed around a few ideas like mushing dogs to a pole, or sailing the whole coast of Turkey, in the end we decided I was already living in the middle of my book length adventure, my life length adventure, called the ranch. Because I have written a lot of personal essays, and because my fiction is largely autobiographical, and because I have been at the ranch for 25 years collecting stories, I really thought it would be—well, not easy, but easier than usual. Wow, was I wrong. In the first place, I knew how to write a personal essay, but in the same way a novel is much different than short stories, a book length memoir is a whole new ballgame. And even in a novel when things get slow and sluggish, you can always invent a character to walk in and shake things up. No such luck with memoir. When a memoir gets slow and sluggish you just have to wait for all that water you have spread across the field to sink into the ground and MEAN something. It took enormous patience, and while I am a perfectionist and an obsessive reviser, I am not good at waiting. I am not good at NOT revising, in other words, while I am waiting for the good stuff to come. A normal book for me takes about 4 years, this one took more than 6.

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<https://amzn.to/2PLNV0m>

**Q:** What advice do you have for aspiring writers?

**A:** Embarrassing or not, I still go back to Henry James. A writer should strive to be a person on whom nothing is lost. My first bit of advice is notice everything. And then read, and write, and live in a place where you are happy doing those two things.

**Q:**What single most ranch experience in Colorado has proven the most valuable in terms of life lessons?

**A:** Honestly, it is letting the animals teach me how to die, and how to be with the dying, and how to live every day as if tomorrow was your last. In my twenty-five years at the ranch I have lost several beloved Irish Wolfhounds, a 40-year-old horse, a miniature donkey, a bunch of sheep (just last year, to the first bear we've ever had come around) and the occasional chicken. In the case of the dogs and the horse, they had their heads in my lap while they died. In the house I grew up in, we weren't allowed to talk about sadness, let alone death, or loss or grief (and yet everyone in that house was grieving). What the dying really want, I think, or at least what a dying companion animal wants is for me to be fully in the moment with them, and for me to tell them I'll be okay if they go. I feel like this lesson is so valuable in its own right, but it is also going to prepare me to face my own death and the deaths of the people I love most.

**Q:** What is your writing process like? Are you a pantsier or a plotter?

**A:** Ha ha. I reject both of those choices, but of the two I am definitely not a plotter. If I knew what was going to happen in a book there wouldn't be any point in writing it. My process: first, I notice everything (as above) and when something grabs my attention, I write it down. This could be as brief as the way the light is reflecting off the surface of the river or as weighty as my mother's ashes going into the rose garden at our church. I write them without explanation or contextualization. Just the physical thing in the world. These bits of writing

become the building blocks of all my stories and essays, so if I am something that is not a plotter or a pantsler, I am a collagist...I'm like the jackdaw, that steals shiny things to line my nest.

**Q:** What has been your greatest experience as an author? What has been your darkest writing moment?

**A:** If you had said highest honor, I would have said the inclusion of my story *The Best Girlfriend You Never Had* in *Best American Short Stories of the Century*, which did and does still make me very proud. Greatest experience though? It would either be getting to interview Toni Morrison for Oprah's magazine, or sharing the stage at Revolution Hall a few months ago with my dear friends Cheryl Strayed and Lidia Yuknavitch in celebration of *Deep Creek's* publication under and beautifully recreated milky way. And I would be remiss to leave out the experience of watching Tommy Orange (I was one of his teachers at the Institute of American Indian Arts) rise to recognition and beyond. I am a writing teacher, before I am anything else, and the success of my students feels even better than my own.

Darkest moment was the letter I received from my editor after I turned the first finished draft of *Deep Creek* in. She disliked everything about it so much, I honestly thought my career was over—and I am not particularly sensitive to editing...in fact I quite like it. Trump had just taken office, so I googled *most progressive small town in Canada*, which came up Nelson, BC, and I went up there and considered giving up the whole writing thing to buy a garlic farm near Kaslo.

**Q:** Why Irish Wolfhounds? And donkeys? Seriously, why donkeys?

**A:** Irish Wolfhounds are the wisest and most emotionally connected beings of any kind I have ever been around. They move like angles and are full of heart. They are watchful, but not needy. I got my first one by accident and life has never been the same.

All I can say to your “seriously” is you must not have spent much

time around donkeys, because the question really is why doesn't everybody have some. They are smart and wicked clowns, who believe their job is to keep the human's and each other entertained.

I love horses, but donkeys have about 50 IQ points on the horses. They are full of mischief and are good for at least a laugh a day in the barnyard.

**Q:** What's at the top of your travel bucket list?

**A:** I'm taking my new husband Mike to Iceland this summer for three weeks as a retirement present and we are very excited about that. I'm also excited these days about going backpacking in the places he has been walking for years in the San Juan mountains we both call home. In terms of more far flung places, there are still a few from the old days I haven't gotten to. Namibia is one. Yemen another, although that might never happen. As emotionally crushing as it is to be there during this climate catastrophe, I am still and will always be drawn to the Eastern Canadian Arctic and would like to do another longish trip there, maybe Greenland too.

**Q:** What are your views about indie publishing?

**A:** If you mean by that, small, independent publishing houses, I am all for them and support them in any way I can. They put very important books in the world, experimental books, books by women and marginalized voices that are either so quiet, or sometimes so loud, large publishers won't touch them. Had my publisher ultimately rejected this book—and it looked for a while like they would—I would have come knocking on their door.

\* See a review of Pam's book **Deep Creek: Finding Hope in the High Country** in this issue.

Visit Pam Houston's Website: <https://pamhouston.net>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pamhoustonwriter/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/pamlhouston/>

Twitter: [https://twitter.com/pam\\_houston](https://twitter.com/pam_houston)

Author Page Amazon: <https://amzn.to/2H5K9g9>

**Jill Hedgecock** is a regular contributor to *Books N' Pieces Magazine* and the author of *Rhino in the Room*. Read more of her work at <http://www.jillhedgecock.com>

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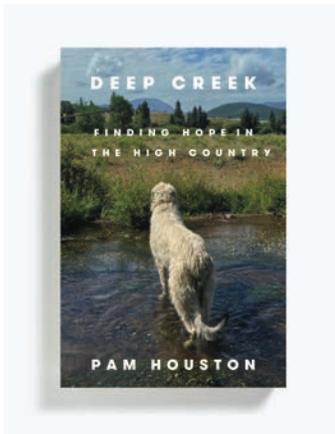
# BOOK REVIEW: DEEP CREEK: FINDING HOPE IN THE HIGH COUNTRY

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by Jill Hedgecock

## Deep Creek: Finding Hope in the High Country

by Pam Houston



<https://amzn.to/2PLNV0m>

In Pam Houston's new memoir, "**Deep Creek: Finding Hope in the High Country**" (2019, W.W. Norton & Company, hardcover, 302 pages, \$13.05), the grit of the author's life experiences and the complexities of man's impact on nature are explored. She balances heart-wrenching stories of her neglectful parents (a self-centered diva mother and alcoholic and abusive father) with hope, by illustrating the way one caring person (a nanny) can prove to be a lifeline and alter a person's life.

The memoir uses a creative structure, weaving tidbits about the hardships of ranch life in the tiny community of Creede, Colorado with snapshots of her early upbringing, and the challenges she faces as an

adult juggling the needs of her pets and livestock and her travel schedule as a writing teacher and coach. A major theme is the influence of nature on her life.

Houston describes the perils of Colorado's winters and wildfires with the ranch and her connection to her remote home in the Colorado landscape as a common thread. Perhaps the most compelling component of the book is the detailed account of the massive firestorm that burned 110,000 acres near Creede in summer 2013. Not only does Houston capture her emotional angst over the concern for her Icelandic sheep, beloved Irish wolfhounds, and her elderly equines, she also provides snapshots of the firefighter language, their heroic efforts, and the communications between the fire officials and the community.

Her descriptions of the post-apocalyptic landscape and her reverence of the amazing healing power of Mother Earth is a testament to Houston's love of the natural world.

Deep Creek also captures a glimpse of the American frontier when ownership required "proving" the land and failure to do so meant losing your property, when neighbors came by to help others in need, and when living in a log cabin was an ordinary way of life. Houston's respect for the legacy of her ranch is both admirable and endearing as she renovates the original homesteader's historic cabin on her property into a usable writing space, incorporating artifacts found beneath the rotting floorboards into the redesign. The respect Houston shows for nature, the people of Creede, the land owners that came before her, the ranch animals and wildlife that share her 120-acre parcel, shines through her prose and leaves the reader with a new appreciation for a rancher's lifestyle and the earth.

Pam Houston is a prize-winning author of *"Contents May Have Shifted"* and has published four other books, including *"Sighthound"*, about an Irish Wolfhound with a few lessons to teach his owner, and a short story collection, *"Cowboys are my Weakness."* When she isn't working as an English professor at the University of California at Davis or travel-

ling the world, Pam lives on her beloved Colorado ranch near the headwaters of the Rio Grande. “*Deep Creek*” will likely appeal to fans of Cheryl Strayed’s “*Wild*”, Jeanette Wall’s “*Half Broke Horses*”, and “*Where the Crawdad’s Sing*” by Delia Owens.

### About Jill Hedgecock



*Jill Hedgecock is the award-winning author of **Rhino in the Room** . She is also the Program Coordinator for the Mount Diablo branch of the California Writers Club. Website: [www.jillhedgecock.com](http://www.jillhedgecock.com)*

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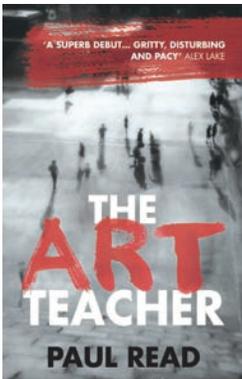
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## AUTHORS ON THE RUN

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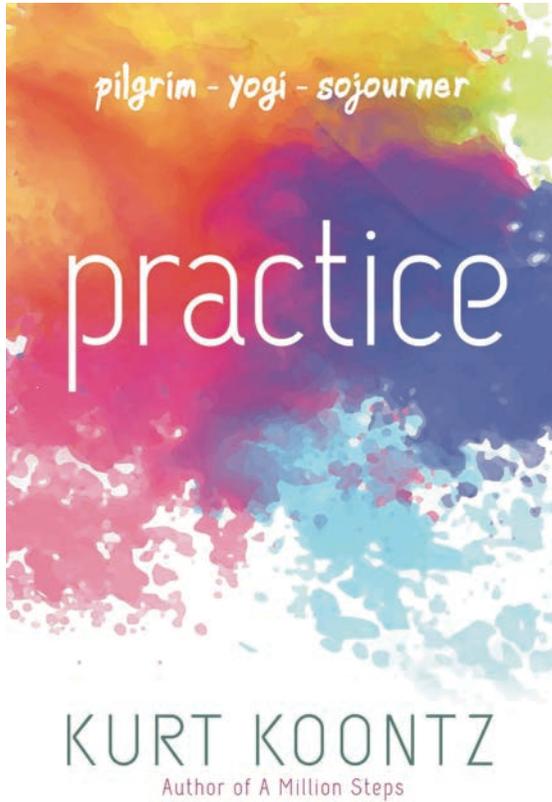
### Quick Questions

**What's your favorite writing tool?**



“My Chromebook. It's robust, portable and instantly uploads anything I've written to the cloud so nothing's ever lost and it's also linked to my phone for useful tinkering whilst on the commute. The battery lasts days. It uses Google Docs but is Word compatible. Dirt cheap too. I hasten to add that I don't work for Google; I was just sick of death of Microsoft crashes! Failing that, my fingers.” ~ **Paul Read**, author of “The Art Teacher” <https://amzn.to/2H5IC1c>

If you'd like to participate in these Quick Questions, email [info@BooksNPieces.com](mailto:info@BooksNPieces.com) and let us know.



*Learn more: <https://anzn.to/2LsfTAq>*

In *Practice*, his newest memoir, Kurt guides readers through his three journeys to India in vivid, poignant detail. With unfailing honesty and humor, Kurt treats his readers to the visual and cultural richness of Rishikesh. Aware of his great fortune in visiting such a beautiful city, Kurt shares his unbound admiration for his new surroundings, and not only for the lush foothills of the Himalayas and the sacred River Ganges, but also for the many families who welcome him. [sponsored]

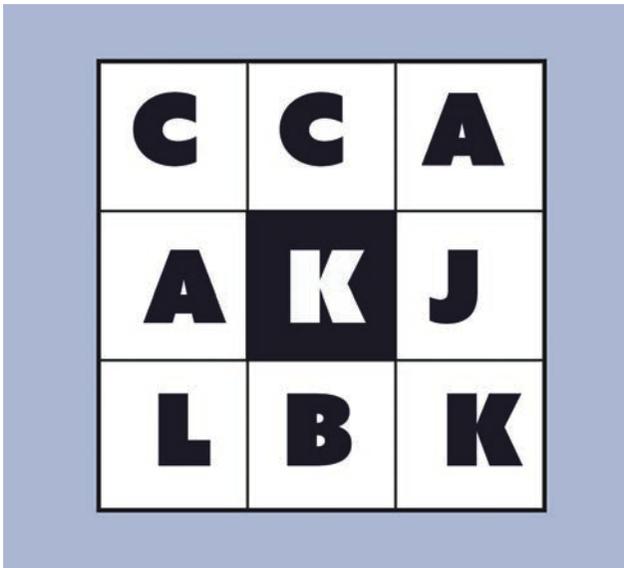
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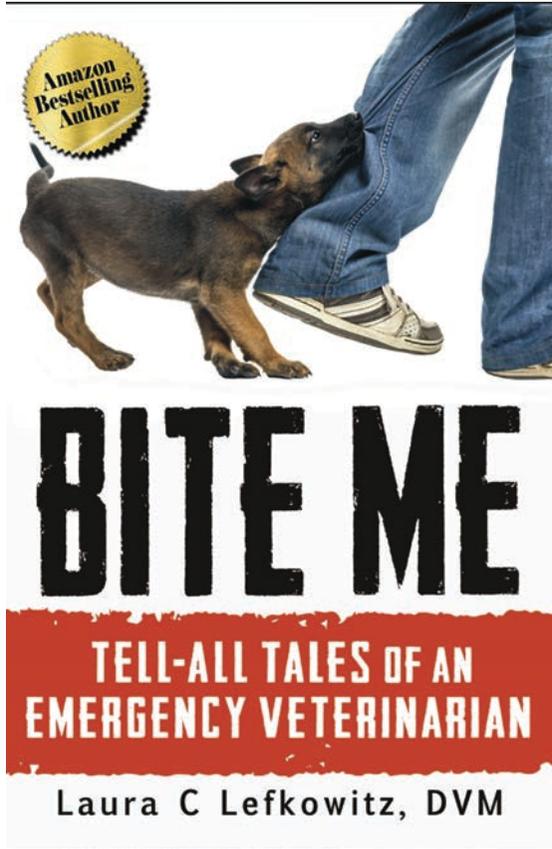
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## BRAIN GAME #4

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**E**njoy this issue's puzzle. There is one 9-letter word and 10 other words to find. Answers are in the back of this issue.



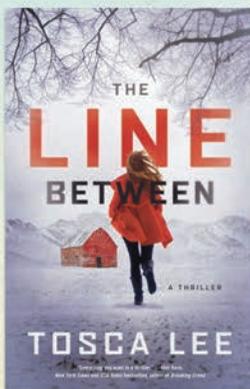
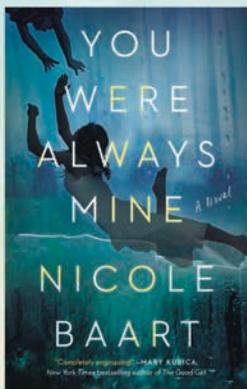


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A reality based, uncensored look at the world of modern veterinary medicine. Follow one veterinarian's story through the course of her career and experience the dramas, the traumas and the comedies that regularly take place in a veterinary emergency room. Learn more: <https://amzn.to/2PODMRa> [sponsored]

# THE TRAVELING PENS!

Nicole Baart - Tosca Lee - Kimberly Stuart



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*The Traveling Pens*



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## CONGRATULATIONS: GARETH L. POWELL

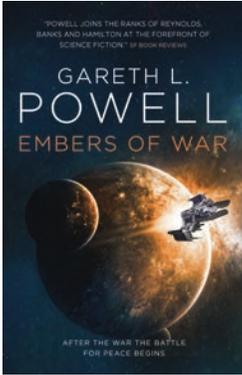
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**BSFA Award-Winning Sci-Fi Wizard 2013 & 2019**

The British Science Fiction Association Awards were held in April, and Gareth L. Powell (whom we interviewed in the last issue of Books 'N Pieces Magazine) won his second BSFA Award for Best Novel.

*“Embers of War* won the BSFA Award for Best Novel, which was just the confidence boost I needed,” Powell reported to fans. “I’d more-or-less convinced myself I didn’t stand a chance of winning. It was such a strong field this year, with exceptional books by Tade Thompson, Emma Newman, Yoon Ha Lee, and Dave Hutchinson, that I was absolutely gobsmacked when Frances Hardinge opened the envelope and read out my name!”



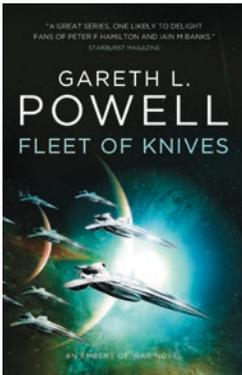


<https://amzn.to/2uxzNP8>

His last win, in 2013, was for the Ack-Ack Macaque tied with Ann Leckie's Ancillary Justice to jointly take the prize.

"In the almost-50 year history of the BSFA Awards, only eight other writers have won the Best Novel Award more than once, so I guess I'm in good company," Powell said.

Our congratulations to Gareth for his award. Be sure to read his interview in our last issue <http://booksnpieces.com/A/?p=2988>



<https://amzn.to/2JSr2K1>

Gareth's books on Amazon: <https://amzn.to/2UkagHr>

Twitter: @garethlpowell

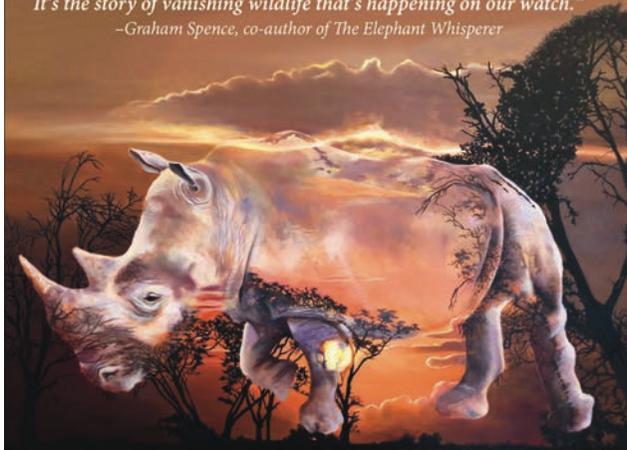
Web: [www.garethlpowell.com](http://www.garethlpowell.com)

Instagram:

[www.instagram.com/garethlpowell/](http://www.instagram.com/garethlpowell/)

Photo credit: Jamie-Lee Nardone

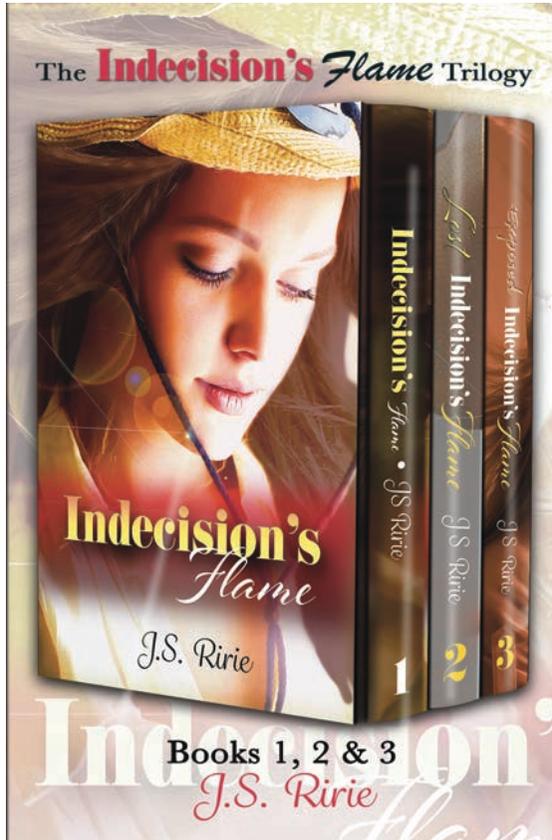
*"...far more profound than a fast-paced thriller.  
It's the story of vanishing wildlife that's happening on our watch."  
—Graham Spence, co-author of The Elephant Whisperer*



# RHINO IN THE ROOM

JILL HEDGECOCK

The last place seventeen-year-old fashionista, Claire, wants to go is on a South African safari with her father. Claire's safari experience improves after meeting Junior, a handsome young guide. But when she breaks a critical game-drive rule, Claire and her father are pulled into the crosshairs of armed rhino poachers. Can Claire and her dad overcome their broken relationship in order to save their own lives and the last two black rhinos from extinction? **New Apple's Book Awards for Excellence.** Learn more: <https://amzn.to/2DS8d4f> [sponsored]



Read it today: <https://amzn.to/2DRZBKF>

Before her marriage to Ben, an American, Brylee Hawkins returns to her home in the Australian Outback so that she can confront her father whom she blames for the death of her mother where she learns the secrets of her past that she never knew, and her father's new family.

Will Brylee find peace amidst the betrayals? Can she survive the truth?

Read it today: <https://amzn.to/2DRZBKF> [sponsored]

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## **SUBMISSIONS UPDATE**

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### **Why Reading Fees Are Needed**

**B**ooks 'N Pieces Magazine has always accepted submissions and offered varying responses, trying to encourage, rather than discourage, writers.

Last year, the sheer volume of submissions became unmanageable, regulating in delays responding to writers. As a result, we have implemented a small reading fee for submissions.

In trying to keep the fee low, we offer a base level of \$2. This covers the cost of a reader if nothing else. Beyond that we offer more detailed rejection responses, with a brief explanation for \$5 and a very comprehensive line-edit explanation why it did not work for us, what we would have liked to have seen, what can be done. This level is available for \$15 and covers resubmission reading fees while supplying valuable information.

Are we making money from this? No. Many stories submitted exceed 5,000 words, often hastily crafted kernels of a story idea with little or no thought to how the final product reads.

Many stories arrive with clichéd language, simplistic themes, undeveloped characters that are completely interchangeable, and sometimes the read is a painful one. But I won't tell the writer that.

Writing is a difficult process. It requires both solid ideas, solid character and plot development, solid language skills, a decent vocabulary and, most importantly, a beginning, middle and ending, although not always in that order.

In our responses we will never tell a writer to give up. If you want to write, like many things, you can develop a skill and a style. Does that mean you will develop an audience? No. But the art of storytelling goes back throughout history, long before the invention of writing.

This year, Books 'N Pieces is trying to buy three stories per issue. You will note that is not the case in this issue. For every 30 stories we receive, we may find one that is close to acceptable. It is quite common for me to reject a story with a note suggesting different ways that the story could be strengthened. And often writers will take that to heart and rework their stories. One writer did so eight times before we published the story. It was worth the wait and the feedback from the author was also rewarding.

Here are some comments I have received over the years about the feedback. Author names have been omitted for privacy.

“I have appreciated this experience immensely. It was my first experience with being part of a book; I hope there are more opportunities in my future. The one on one editing attention I received was so helpful and generous on your part, I learned how to be a better writer through the editing process. I hope to submit more work in the future and continue this relationship.”

“The whole experience for me was quite enjoyable. I appreciated your quick responses and opinions over any questions or concerns I had. You were very helpful and made the process seamless. Also, I thought the editing was spot on.”

. . .

“I have to be honest, I had no idea who you were, but after familiarizing myself ... I like your approach on how a story should be published. You are honest, enthusiastic in what you do and willing to take it all on. The process itself has been fun and personally rewarding. I have mentioned you to a couple friends, encouraging them to send you their work. Thanks so much for your hard work.”

“...has provided a solid and, above all, friendly source of support and I'd like to take the opportunity of thanking William for all the effort he put in turning a story into something marketable. It can't have been easy with what I provided him with originally.”

“You do so much for writers in promoting and supporting them.”

The reading fee is an offset for the amount of time it takes to properly read a story, examine whether it could work in print, what changes would be needed—all of which are time consuming items. The fee also puts the pressure on the writer who may well ask themselves: Have I submitted my best work? Is the story worth more than the \$2 reading fee? Can I do better?

Books 'N Pieces Magazine is part of Alt Publishing, a company that works with writers getting their novels and short story collections ready for publication. Alt Publishing can cover all aspects from cover design, edits, proofing, layouts, marketing and post-release marketing. We work with the author. That said, we are a huge supporter of self-publishing, preferring to work with authors on parts that they themselves feel unable to do.

I look forward to your future submissions. We do pay for stories we accept. You can find that information on our Website.

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## WRITING SPOTLIGHT

### SUBMISSIONS

**READING FEE**....\$2.00

**REJECTION ANALYSIS:**  
brief explanation for  
rejection..\$5.00  
(includes reading fee)

**COMPREHENSIVE  
REJECTION ANALYSIS:**  
Detailed explanation of  
the elements that we  
felt we lacking and  
suggestions to improve  
the story. Includes  
reading fee and also  
resubmission at no  
charge....\$15.00

Payment made at time of  
submission. Submissions  
are for publication  
only. Writing contests  
and writing awards have  
a different form.

**Note #1:** If you submit  
via email, you will  
receive a payment link  
before your story will  
be read.

**Note #2:** Writers  
previously published in  
our magazine do not get  
charged reading fees.

**Questions:**  
[Info@BooksNPieces.com](mailto:Info@BooksNPieces.com)

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## BOOKSTORE 'N PIECES

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### Books and Items You May Find Interesting

Enjoy this month's selection of books. If you would like to have YOUR book listed here, please visit our ADVERTISING page for details.

#### **KATHRIN HUTSON: SLEEPWATER BEAT**

**Synopsis:** They say the pen is mightier than the sword. In Sleepwater's world, words are literally more powerful than bullets.



Read or Buy: <https://amzn.to/2H6rOzu>

Leo could always make people believe anything she says—really believe. When her chest burns and the words come from her mouth, her targets' eyes glaze over, they forget their own thoughts, and they'll do anything she says. It's what keeps her alive after being on the run and living on the streets for years. But after using it on her girlfriend and her dad's drug dealer, it's also what got her here on the streets in the first place.

Then Sleepwater finds her. When Leo discovers there are others out there with similar powers, scattered across the country,

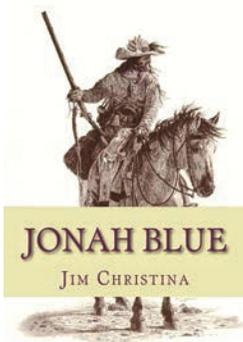
she can't say no to the underground organization. After all, what's a little sit-down with the only people who may ever understand her? What she doesn't expect is to be thrust into Sleepwater's guerrilla war, hunted by government agencies, and used as a weapon. Worse than that, she might be more valuable not for what she can do but for who she was before they found her.

**READ MORE or BUY:** <https://amzn.to/2H6rOzu>

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### **JIM CHRISTINA: JONAH BLUE**

**Synopsis:** Jonah Blue tells the story of a young boy's dream of becoming a Rocky Mountain Free Trapper in 1830.



Running from his family's farm at 10 years old, Jonah is befriended by an older Mountain Man named Rensfeld Doggett. This is the story of Jonah's transition from young boy to young man and eventually a man in the wilds of the Montana Territory in 1853.

**READ MORE or BUY:** <https://amzn.to/2ZZoM7C>

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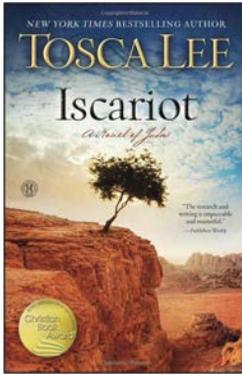
*Read more or Buy:*<https://amzn.to/2ZZoM7C>

### **TOSCA LEE: ISCARIOT**

**Synopsis:** Based on extensive research into the life and times of Judas Iscariot, this triumph of fiction storytelling by the author of Havah:

The Story of Eve revisits one of biblical history's most maligned figures

and brings the world he inhabited vividly to life. In Jesus, Judas believes he has found the One—the promised Messiah and future king of the Jews, destined to overthrow Roman rule. Galvanized, he joins the Nazarene's followers, ready to enact the change he has waited for all his life. But soon Judas's vision of a nation free from Rome is crushed by the inexplicable actions of the Nazarene himself, who will not bow to social or religious convention—who seems, in the end, to even turn against his own people. At last, Judas must confront the fact that the master he loves is not the liberator he hoped for, but a man bent on a drastically different



Read more or Buy: <https://amzn.to/2H6XiFF>

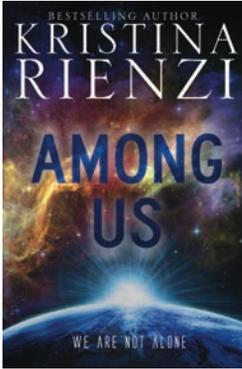
agenda. *Iscariot* is the story of Judas, from his tumultuous childhood to his emergence as the man known to the world as the betrayer of Jesus. But even more, it is a singular and surprising view into the life of Jesus that forces us to reexamine everything we thought we knew about the most famous—and infamous—religious icons in history.

**READ MORE or BUY:** <https://amzn.to/2H6XiFF>

## KRISTINA RIENZI: AMONG US

**Synopsis:** **Danger lurks in the unknown....** Marci Simon lives a double life: conservative professor of English by day, and controversial blogger of aliens by night. But when a classified document lands in her lap, her two worlds collide in an explosive revelation of shocking and deadly secrets. Despite imminent danger at every twist, Marci embarks on an unstoppable quest to expose the terrifying truth. Only she never anticipated the entangled nebula of dark lies, nor the never-ending wormhole the government would spiral through to silence her forever.

**Knowledge can kill.** And Marci knows too much. With global



Read more or Buy:<https://amzn.to/2PTIQVk>

security at risk, no one can be trusted. To debunk the stratosphere of deceit, Marci races at the speed of light to escape the grips of the clandestine Extraterrestrial Security Agency (ESA) hunting her before she vanishes like all the others.

But Marci is unique. She's not only the ESA's prime target, she's also the skeleton key to the deadliest truth in the history of the universe.

The nightmare is real, and it's only just begun. Marci must take a nefarious leap of faith before her options, and her breaths, evaporate into a black hole for all eternity.

**READ MORE or BUY:** <https://amzn.to/2PTIQVk>

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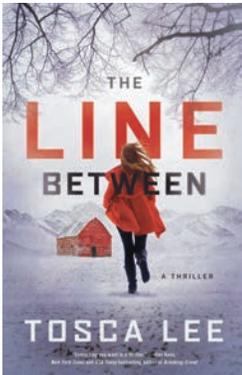
### **TOSCA LEE: THE LINE BETWEEN:**

**Synopsis:** In this frighteningly believable thriller from *New York Times* bestselling author Tosca Lee, an extinct disease re-emerges from the melting Alaskan permafrost to cause madness in its victims.

For recent apocalyptic cult escapee Wynter Roth, it's the end she'd always been told was coming.

When Wynter Roth is turned out of New Earth, a self-contained doomsday cult on the American prairie, she emerges into a world poised on the brink of madness as a mysterious outbreak of rapid early onset dementia spreads across the nation.

As Wynter struggles to start over in a world she's been taught to regard as evil, she finds herself face-to-face with the apocalypse she's feared all her life—until the night her sister shows up at her doorstep with a set of medical samples. That night, Wynter learns there's something far more sinister at play and that these samples are key to understanding the disease.



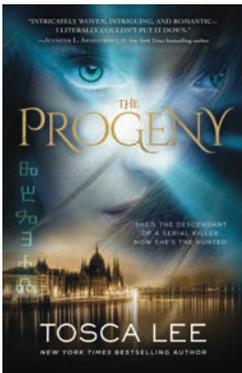
Read more or Buy: <https://amzn.to/2vSpHJr>

Now, as the power grid fails and the nation descends into chaos, Wynter must find a way to get the samples to a lab in Colorado. Uncertain who to trust, she takes up with former military man Chase Miller, who has his own reasons for wanting to get close to the samples in her possession, and to Wynter herself.

Filled with action, conspiracy, romance, and questions of whom—and what—to believe, *The Line Between* is a high-octane story of survival and love in a world on the brink of madness.

**READ MORE or BUY:** <https://amzn.to/2vSpHJr>

### TOSCA LEE: THE PROGENY:



Read more or Buy: <https://amzn.to/2Yi30ul>

**Synopsis:** *New York Times* bestselling author Tosca Lee brings a modern twist to an ancient mystery surrounding Elizabeth Bathory, the most notorious female serial killer of all time.

Emily Jacobs is the descendant of a serial killer. Now, she's become the hunted.

She's on a quest that will take her to the secret underground of Europe and the inner circles of three ancient orders—one determined to kill her, one devoted to keeping her alive, and one she must ultimately save.

Filled with adrenaline, romance, and reversals, *The Progeny* is the present-day saga of a 400-year-old war between the uncanny descendants of “Blood Countess” Elizabeth Bathory, the most prolific female serial killer of all time, and a secret society dedicated to erasing every one of her descendants. It is a story

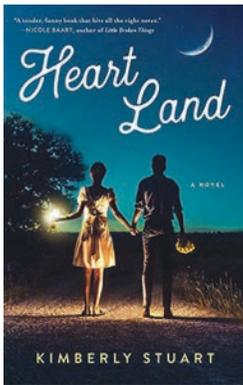
about the search for self filled with centuries-old intrigues against the backdrop of atrocity and hope.

**READ MORE or BUY:** <https://amzn.to/2Yi30ul>

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## KIMBERLY STUART: HEARTLAND

**Synopsis:** A story of reconnection, lost love, and the power of faith.



*Read more or Buy:* <https://amzn.to/2HaGZld>

*Heart Land* follows a struggling fashion designer back to her small Iowa hometown as she tries to follow her dreams of success and finding true love.

Grace Klaren has finally made her dream of living in the Big Apple and working in the fashion industry a reality. But when she's unexpectedly fired and can't afford the next month's rent, Grace does something she never thought she'd do: she moves back home.

Back in Silver Creek, Iowa, Grace is determined to hate it. She rails against the quiet of her small town, where everything closes early, where there's no nightlife, where everyone knows each other. She's saving her pennies and plotting her return to New York when she almost runs over a man who's not paying attention at a crosswalk. It turns out to be Tucker, her high school sweetheart whose heart she broke when she left ten years ago. They reconnect, and Grace remembers why she fell for him in the first place.

And her career begins to turn around when she finds a gorgeous but tattered vintage dress at a flea market. She buys it, rips it apart seam by seam, and re-creates it with new fabric, updating the look with some of her own design ideas. She snaps a picture and lists the dress online, and within a day, it sells for nearly \$200. Suddenly, Grace has her ticket out of here.

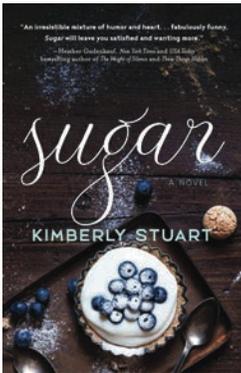
But Grace can't fight her growing feelings for Tucker. Sometimes

when they're together, Tucker paints a picture of what their future could be like, and it feels so real. And when she finally gains the funding to move her new business back to New York, Grace must decide where home really is—will she chase her long-held New York dream, or find a new dream here in the heartland?

**READ MORE or BUY:** <https://amzn.to/2HaGZId>

### KIMBERLY STUART: SUGAR

**Synopsis:** After realizing her coworkers at L'Ombre, a high-profile restaurant in NYC, will never appreciate or respect her,



Read more or Buy:<https://amzn.to/304gc04>

Charlie Garrett allows her ex-boyfriend, Avery Michaels, to convince her to work for him as executive pastry chef at his new Seattle hotspot, Thrill. She'll have her own kitchen, her own staff—everything she ever wanted professionally.

When she arrives at Thrill, however, she realizes that Avery wanted more than a pastry chef for his restaurant—he wanted a costar for the reality show they're filming about the restaurant and its staff. Charlie is uncomfortable with the idea at first, but she soon realizes that this is her chance to show the world

what women in the kitchen are capable of. She sets some ground rules with the film crew, signs a non-disclosure agreement, and promptly meets the man of her dreams, Kai, off-camera.

The show, and her demanding work schedule as head of the pastry kitchen, makes it nearly impossible for Charlie and Kai to spend time together. Drama on and off the set soon take a toll on Charlie's well-being, forcing her to choose if life in front of the camera is worth sacrificing life behind the scenes.

*Sugar* is a contemporary romance, set in the high-pressure commer-

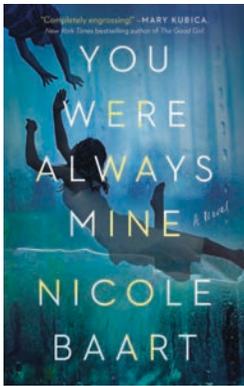
cial kitchens of New York and Seattle. A funny and clever story of how a female chef learns to thrive in the ruthless world of premier restaurants.

**READ MORE or BUY:** <https://amzn.to/304gco4>

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### NICOLE BAART: YOU WERE ALWAYS MINE:

**Synopsis:** The acclaimed author of *Little Broken Things* returns with another “race-to-the-finish family drama” (*People*) about a



Read more or Buy:<https://amzn.to/2DTb0da>

single mother who becomes embroiled in a mystery that threatens to tear apart what’s left of her family.

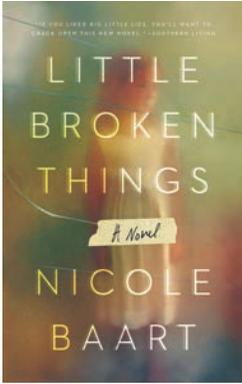
Jessica Chamberlain, newly separated and living with her two sons in a small Iowa town, can’t believe that a tragedy in another state could have anything to do with her. But when her phone rings one quiet morning, her world is shattered. As she tries to pick up the pieces and make sense of what went wrong, Jess begins to realize that a tragic death is just the beginning. Soon she is caught in a web of lies and half-truths—and she’s horrified to learn that everything leads back to her seven-year-old adopted son, Gabriel.

Years ago, Gabe’s birth mother requested a closed adoption and Jessica was more than happy to comply. But when her house is broken into and she discovers a clue that suggests her estranged husband was in close contact with Gabe’s biological mother, she vows to uncover the truth at any cost. A harrowing story of tenacious love and heart-breaking betrayal, *You Were Always Mine* is about the wars we wage to keep the ones we love close, perfect for fans of Liane Moriarty and Jodi Picoult.

**READ MORE or BUY:** <https://amzn.to/2DTb0da>

## NICOLE BAART: LITTLE BROKEN THINGS:

**Synopsis:** “If you liked *Big Little Lies*, you’ll want to crack open this new novel by Nicole Baart.” —*Southern Living*



Read more or Buy: <https://amzn.to/2jnXHVR>

“*Steeped in menace, Baart’s latest is a race-to-the-finish family drama.*” —*People*

An engrossing and suspenseful novel for fans of Liane Moriarty and Amy Hatvany about an affluent suburban family whose carefully constructed facade starts to come apart with the unexpected arrival of an endangered young girl.

*I have something for you.* When Quinn Cruz receives that cryptic text message from her older sister Nora, she doesn’t think much of it. They haven’t seen each other in nearly a year and thanks to Nora’s fierce aloofness, their relationship consists mostly of infrequent phone calls and an occasional email or text. But when a haunted Nora shows up at the lake near Quinn’s house just hours later, a chain reaction is set into motion that will change both of their lives forever.

Nora’s “something” is more shocking than Quinn could have ever imagined: a little girl, cowering, wide-eyed, and tight-lipped. Nora hands her over to Quinn with instructions to keep her safe, and not to utter a word about the child to anyone, especially not their buttoned-up mother who seems determined to pretend everything is perfect. But before Quinn can ask even one of the million questions swirling around her head, Nora disappears, and Quinn finds herself the unlikely caretaker of a girl introduced simply as Lucy.

While Quinn struggles to honor her sister’s desperate request and care for the lost, scared Lucy, she fears that Nora may have gotten involved in something way over her head—something that will threaten them all. But Quinn’s worries are nothing compared to the

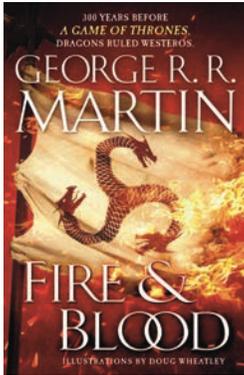
firestorm that Nora is facing. It's a matter of life and death, of family and freedom, and ultimately, about the lengths a woman will go to protect the ones she loves.

**READ MORE or BUY:** <https://amzn.to/2JnXHVR>

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## GEORGE R.R. MARTIN: FIRE & BLOOD

**Synopsis:** Centuries before the events of *A Game of Thrones*, House Targaryen—the only family of dragonlords to survive the Doom of Valyria—took up residence on Dragonstone.



Read more or Buy: <https://amzn.to/2vLfTRj>

*Fire & Blood* begins their tale with the legendary Aegon the Conqueror, creator of the Iron Throne, and goes on to recount the generations of Targaryens who fought to hold that iconic seat, all the way up to the civil war that nearly tore their dynasty apart.

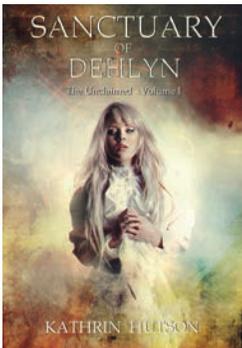
What really happened during the Dance of the Dragons? Why was it so deadly to visit Valyria after the Doom? What were Maegor the Cruel's worst crimes? What was it like in Westeros when dragons ruled the skies? These are but a few of the questions answered in this essential chronicle, as related by a learned maester of the Citadel and featuring more than eighty all-new black-and-white illustrations by artist Doug Wheatley. Readers have glimpsed small parts of this narrative in such volumes as *The World of Ice & Fire*, but now, for the first time, the full tapestry of Targaryen history is revealed.

With all the scope and grandeur of Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, *Fire & Blood* is the the first volume of the definitive two-part history of the Targaryens, giving readers a whole new appreciation for the dynamic, often bloody, and always fascinating history of Westeros.

READ MORE or BUY: <https://amzn.to/2VSURPh>

### KATHRIN HUTSON: SANCTUARY OF DEHLYN

**Synopsis:** When Kherron meets her, he wishes he hadn't.



Read more or Buy: <https://amzn.to/2YaaKhH>

Beholden to the man who purchased his freedom from the Iron Pit, he cannot deny Torrahs this one request--get to know the woman-child named Dehlyn. He also cannot reconcile the gorgeous woman with the stunted, naïve, unnatural workings of her innocent mind. And yet, she's been placed under his care.

On the night he saves her life, Dehlyn transforms, revealing the otherworldly power of the creature she has always been--the creature who, for centuries, no one but Kherron has seen. She asks him to make a vow, to protect her at all costs, and when he can do nothing but submit to such a promise, the world he knows unravels.

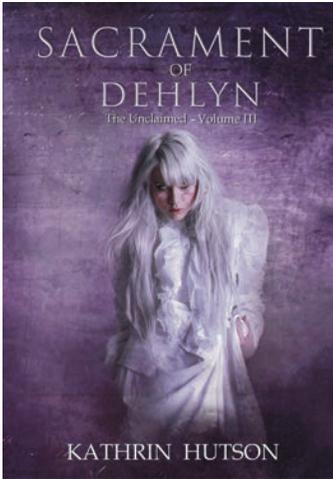
The immortals are at war. Beings wielding forbidden magic run rampant across Eldynia. Powerful men will stop at nothing to pry the world's mysteries from Dehlyn's mind, and all the rules are changing. Kherron's path lies at the center, but if he's to protect Dehlyn at all costs, first he must find her. LEARN MORE: <https://amzn.to/2YaaKhH>

### Kathrin Hutson: Sacrament of Dehlyn

**Synopsis:** Freed from the unending torment of the violet mists and his forty-eight deaths within the void,

Kherron has reentered the world an entirely different man. He's

broken his vow to Dehlyn, to find and protect her at all costs, releasing



Read more or Buy: <https://amzn.to/2LpH3HT>

the amarach vessel's hold on him forever. Without this tether to the green-eyed woman with more ancient power than any one being was ever meant to possess, the path before him is his own to choose.

As a Blood of the Veil, with command over living things and the elements of the natural world, he is a protector—the voice that speaks between the natural world and the unseen. But Torrahs the Wanderer and the Brotherhood still strive to unleash The Unclaimed's vast and terrible knowledge. The foundation of balance

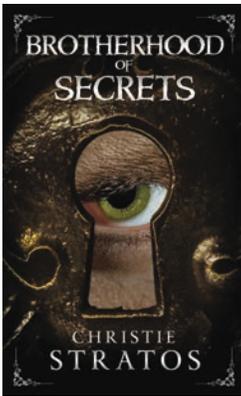
has cracked. The Nateru have lost themselves, the amarach have been undone, and Kherron must do what has been asked of him. Not because it was foretold, but because the things he cares about as a free man now face the edge of destruction. But is his final choice worth the cost of making it? **READ MORE or BUY:** <https://amzn.to/2LpH3HT>

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### CHRISTIE STRATOS: BROTHERHOOD OF SECRETS

**Synopsis:** "Brothers in the art of keeping secrets." This is the mantra Mr. Locke's carefully chosen five employees must repeat together every day before starting work.

If you won't tell them your name for Locke and Keye's ledger, they'll find out. They have their ways—and many of them. Yes, these talented locksmiths can make a new lock and key set for you. They can even make a special padlock for a diary you never want to share with anyone.

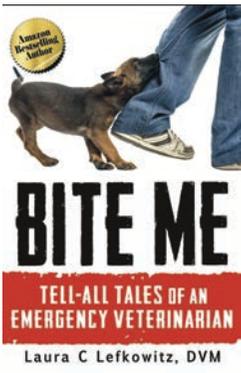


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But just remember: when they make the lock, they keep a key—and it's only a matter of time until they use it. Day by day, each of these young, single, alone-in-the-world workers is being molded into the family they crave. A family in which each member has his use toward an end he doesn't even know exists. How do the brotherhood and the town's secrets interlock? Only Mr. Locke holds the key. **READ MORE or BUY:** [amzn.to/2DKmqAo](https://amzn.to/2DKmqAo)

## Laura C. Lefkowitz: BITE ME: TELL-ALL TALES OF AN EMERGENCY VETERINARIAN

**Synopsis:** A reality based, bestselling, uncensored look at the world of modern veterinary medicine.



Read more or buy: <https://amzn.to/2UjotSs>

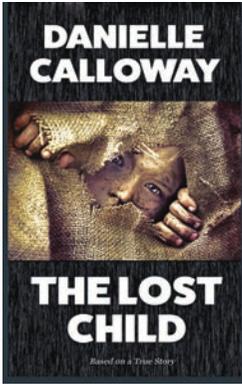
Follow one veterinarian's story through the course of her career and experience the dramas, the traumas and the comedies that regularly take place in a veterinary emergency room. **Bite Me** gives a rare insider's view of the frustrations, the joys and the heartbreak that veterinarians experience on a daily basis and exposes the reasons why the veterinary profession is currently facing some dire and frightening challenges. A must-read for any pet owner, any person aspiring to be a veterinarian, any veterinary student, and any person who has an interest in the welfare of

both animals and people.

**READ MORE or BUY:** <https://amzn.to/2UjotSs>

## DANIELLE CALLOWAY: THE LOST CHILD

**Synopsis:** Nicolás is a deaf boy on the run and trying to survive in a dangerous hearing world.



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Lily moves to Ecuador from the US to teach the deaf, full of uncertainties and trying to adjust, she meets Nicolás. Now Lily must gain his trust to save him.

"You cry, get angry, have hope again, learn, grow, cry some more and finally your pride and belief in humanity is restored. This is a must read." ~Debra Hughes

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# homo idiotus



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“This is a humorous reflection on modern life.” ~Paul L. (Verified Amazon Reader)

Life is replete with signs, both literal and philosophical. We have, as living beings, the choices offered by circumstance and intent. We have, especially in the United States, the ability to make good or bad choices, the right to speak, when we should be silent, the freedom to inflict our viewpoints upon others and to invade their countries in the name of self-defense, real or imagined. Likewise, we have the right to be stupid, and many who exercise that right demonstrate pride in the choice. Thankfully, there are signs that serve to identify these people. For the rest, there are television reality shows.

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## BRAIN GAME - PUZZLE ANSWERS

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9-letter word: Knowledge

### Puzzle Answers

clack    lack

black    kaka

alack    jack

aback    balk

jackal    back

9 letter word:  
blackjack

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## CLOSING THOUGHTS

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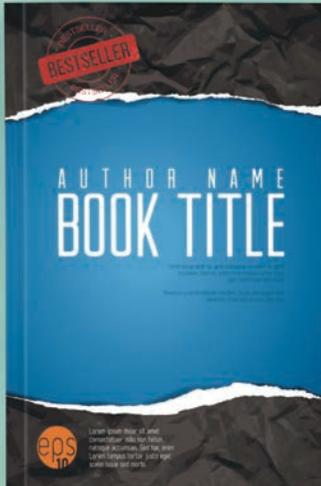
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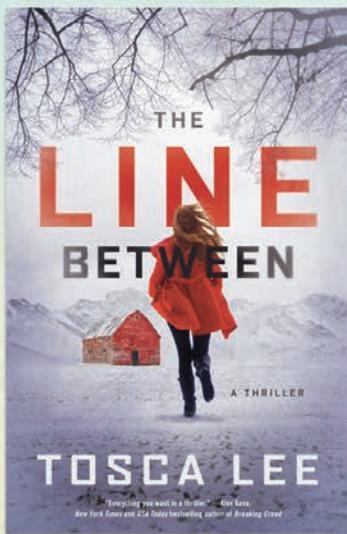
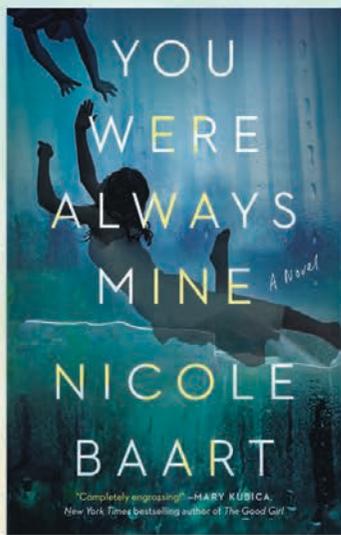
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