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REVIEW: When Light Breaks

Sarah Trowbridge

Fayette County Public Library

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Off the SHELF

The Georgia Library Quarterly reviews books on aspects of life in Georgia and the South, including history, literature, politics, education, and genealogy. Materials written by Southern authors or published by regional publishers may also be considered, as well as those on libraries and librarianship.

Lora Mirza, Off the Shelf Co-editor, Georgia Perimeter College, mmirza@gpc.edu

Patty Phipps, Off the Shelf Co-editor, Georgia Institute of Technology, patty.phipps@library.gatech.edu

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FICTION

We Are All Welcome Here by Elizabeth Berg (Random House, 2006; ISBN 1-4000-6161-X, \$22.95).



In 1964, children in Mississippi lived in segregated communities, with little idea about life on the other side of town. Parents often tried to protect their children from racial struggles that were happening “somewhere else.” Also living separately from the larger community were many people with disabilities. In this novel, Paige Dunn avoids institutionalization for polio to raise her daughter. This could have been a tearjerker, but Berg instead insists that the reader view Paige Dunn and daughter Diana as they see themselves: tough, intelligent survivors. Like many teenagers, Diana daydreams of being an actress, spends time reading fashion magazines and running around with a “wild” neighborhood friend. Always there to rain on Diana’s parade, it seems, is Peacie. Peacie, Paige’s African-American friend and caregiver, has helped to bring Diana up since she was a baby and allows no self-pity from the girl. Peacie and Paige’s friendship and Peacie and Diana’s love-hate relationship form the heart of the story.

In this passage, Peacie asks Diana to go to the grocery store, and Diana at first refuses:

“You can’t spank me anymore, Peacie,” I said. “I’m too old.”

“You too old, you say.”

“Yes, I am.”

“Well, I’ll tell you what. If you so old, you don’t need no one beg you to get groceries that is mostly ate by you.”

“I said I’d go!”

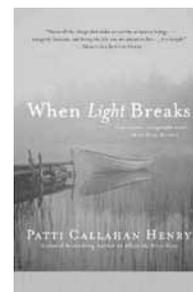
“That’s what I said, too. We in agreement, ain’t that something. Now see if your mother done with that bedpan.”

Together, Peacie and Paige are formidable. Diana will accept life as it is, and not as she wishes it might be. Also in the story are Peacie’s courageous boyfriend, LaRue, who decides to join freedom marchers in his Mississippi hometown; Brooks, a local hardware store owner who has always seen Paige as the beauty that she is; Dell, a handsome drifter who appears in town much like a movie star; and Suralee, Diana’s on-again, off-again best friend. *We Are All Welcome Here* is a terrific story showing how racism, disabilities, and daily humiliations are overcome by bravery and sincere compassion for one’s neighbor. Recommended for all public library adult fiction collections.

— Reviewed by **Teresa Pacheco**
Chestatee Regional Library System

When Light Breaks by Patti Callahan Henry (Penguin, 2006; ISBN 0-451-21834-5, \$12.95).

Set in the South Carolina Low Country, Patti Callahan Henry’s novel focuses on a few months in the life of Kara Larson, a young socialite in the small town of Palmetto Pointe. As the novel opens, Kara is rushing around,

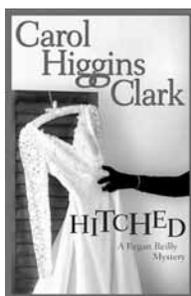


simultaneously organizing a tournament for the PGA golf tour (her employer) and planning her extravagant wedding to pro golfer Peyton Ellers. Kara is haunted by the loss of her mother to cancer when Kara was nine, as well as by the abrupt and dramatic departure of her childhood sweetheart Jack when she was 14. Then Kara meets Maeve Mahoney, a nursing home resident she is visiting to fulfill a service requirement for membership in the local ladies' society. Maeve's tales of long-ago love and loss in her Irish homeland resonate with Kara and lead her to reexamine her life and her plans. Romance fans may enjoy this lightweight offering, although the characterizations are so thin that it is difficult for the reader to fully engage in the conflict and invest in the story's outcome. Even moments that are intended to be soaked in sentiment and drama come across as somewhat flat and detached. The device of overlaying Maeve's reminiscence onto Kara's life is awkward and does little to enrich the story. The happy ending arrives as expected but lacks the warmth and depth to truly satisfy. An optional purchase for medium to larger public libraries.

— Reviewed by **Sarah Trowbridge**
Fayette County Public Library

Hitched by Carol Higgins Clark
(Scribner, 2006; ISBN 0-7432-8942-0, \$24.00).

Detective Regan Reilly is days away from marriage to NYPD detective Jack "no relation" Reilly when the studio burglary of New York wedding-dress designers Alfred and Charisse sends Regan's plans (and those of four other brides) into a tailspin. When not aiding Regan in pursuit of the dress thieves, Jack tracks "The Drip," a serial bank robber so named because of his penchant for rainy-day heists. *Hitched* is the 10th novel in Clark's Regan Reilly mystery series. (The fifth installment, *Deck the Halls* (2000), was co-written by Carol Higgins Clark's mother, mystery novelist Mary Higgins Clark.) Though "The Drip" remains masked until near novel's end, the dress thieves (and their motives) are revealed in the fourth chapter; thereafter, the story alternates between the casework of detectives Regan and Jack and the misadventures of dress thieves Marco and Francis (who flee first to Atlantic City, then Las Vegas). Various side plots include a secretive romance, a conning couple's ruse, and the strange, abruptly resolved abduction of one of the brides. While the story is at times entertaining, readers expecting depth (or real suspense) will be disappointed. Characters are drawn from familiar stereotypes—the tireless detective, the bumbling thief, the histrionic bridezilla, the eccentric

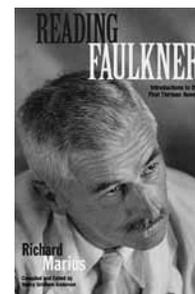


recluse. The plotting weaves together through a number of coincidences, and it seems that everyone in the story's world listens to the same radio station, watches the same television show, visits the same nightclub, and follows every detail of the press's apparent round-the-clock coverage of the April brides and their stolen dresses. Aside from anxious brides-to-be, *Hitched* might best suit readers in search of fast-paced, comedic, PG-rated, potato-chip fare: None of the characters use foul language, violence is limited to a few bumps and bruises, and all evil-doers get their comeuppance in the end. Recommended for public libraries seeking beach reads or light mystery for their adult collections.

— Reviewed by **Christina Hodgens**
Conyers-Rockdale Library System

NON-FICTION

Reading Faulkner: Introductions to the First Thirteen Novels content by Richard Marius, compiled and edited by Nancy Grisham Anderson (The University of Tennessee Press, 2006; ISBN 1-57233-449-5, \$15.95).



The deep affection that he held for the works of William Faulkner is evident on every page of this book collecting the undergraduate lectures of the late Dr. Richard Marius. Transcribed by Nancy Grisham Anderson, *Reading Faulkner* is casual and conversational in tone and geared as it is toward first- or second-year non-English-major college students, it is much more accessible to the average library patron than most other works of literary criticism. Dr. Marius covers Faulkner in depth, but not so deeply as to scare away anyone who might want to know more about William Faulkner but doesn't want to go to graduate school to do so. The subtitle, *Introductions to the First Thirteen Novels*, is somewhat misleading as the lectures do not cover just the early works of the Mississippi Nobel Laureate. The first 13 novels include *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom! Absalom!*, generally considered Faulkner's best works and the apex of his career. Throughout, Dr. Marius touches upon the common threads that the books share, notably those that distinguish these works as Southern literature. Frequently, Dr. Marius discusses the importance of the oral storytelling tradition in the American South and the effect that this has on the style of Faulkner: long, flowing sentences nearly free of punctuation, alliterative passages with a use of unusual words ("the curbedge's channelbrim"); the reader can almost hear the stories being recited aloud rather than written. Marius also