



Summer 2025, Volume 56

***TBR* is a quarterly newsletter of the Women's Fiction Writers Association.**

[Click here to learn more about WFWA.](#)

EDITOR'S NOTE

When WFWA first launched its *ReadON!* newsletter to celebrate the best of women's fiction, its name was a call to action: read! Read widely, adventurously, intentionally, curiously, riotously, joyfully—because reading enriches our lives in transformative ways. We read for so many reasons: to discover, to feel, to connect, to heal, to let go, to overcome, to laugh, to cry, to lose ourselves, to find ourselves, to feed our souls, and to celebrate the mystery of what it means to truly live.

In this exciting sequel, WFWA's *TBR* newsletter will keep with the spirit of celebrating women's fiction, with expanded features to connect readers with new books and the authors who write them. As a concept, *TBR* (short for "to be read") is a statement of hope. It insists on the belief that there will always be books we want to read and stories with the potential to move and sustain us, year after year. It is with optimism that *TBR* enters this new chapter, and we invite you to read along with us. After all, your next favorite book is likely waiting for you on these shelves.

BOOK TALK WITH...



...Raquel Y. Levitt

On your nightstand now: *The Mad Women's Ball* by Victoria Mas. Feminist, historical, paranormal. A blend of all my favorite genres.

Book you've faked reading: *Finnegan's Wake* by James Joyce. Years ago it was required reading in one of my grad classes. Have you ever tried to read that? Holy smoke. Thankfully my prayers to not be called on in class that day worked (lol).

Book that changed your life: Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. It was the first novel that made me want to be a writer.

Book you wish you'd written: *Dear Edward* by Ann Napolitano. I read it while on a plane and sobbed so hard at the end that my seatmates, who were strangers, were concerned.

Advice for aspiring writers: I would tell aspiring authors (and my younger self) that only you can define success, and that it might take years to achieve it. So be patient, be persistent, and trust yourself more than anyone. You'll know what feels right when it comes to revision suggestions, or deciding to indie publish instead of traditional, or vice versa. And, although it's difficult, try to understand that criticism of your work is not criticism of you as a person.



***The Seer* by Raquel Y. Levitt**

Sarah Richardson is a young woman whose psychic abilities present a remarkable problem in all of her relationships. It's a story that weaves together visions and lies, promises and betrayals, sisters and friendships, violence and love at the end of the nineteenth century.

Learn more on Raquel's [website](#).



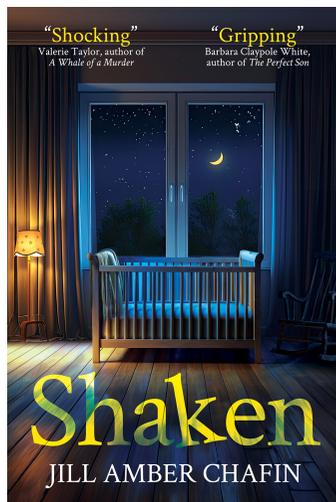
...Jill Amber Chafin

Favorite line from your book: “There’s a fine line between the good guys and the bad ones,” Simon began. “Someone has it all together, they make one mistake and cover it up, then another, and before you know it, their entire life has unraveled.”

Are you a plotter or pantsers: I’ve always been a pantsers. If I outline an entire book, I lose the inspiration to write it. The unknown keeps me on the edge of my seat, motivating me to keep going to find out what happens next. However, this approach ends up creating major inconsistencies that require a LOT of work in the revision stage. Despite my natural inclinations, I’m going to push myself to stick to a (loose) outline for my next novel.

Advice for aspiring writers: Find a support group to keep you on track! This can be weekly writing meetups (virtual or in-person), critique groups, brainstorming sessions, or a text thread to share your progress. Having a group of writers cheer each other on can help make the writing process a little less lonely, especially when you hit a major block.

What you’re working on next: I’m currently revising a young adult mystery. It’s been through one round of beta readers, but I still have to address major plot holes, inconsistencies, and strengthen the teen voice. If all goes as planned, I hope to submit it to my agent by the end of this summer.



Shaken by Jill Amber Chafin

A young mother’s desperate moment spirals into an unthinkable mistake in this gripping domestic thriller. Perfect for fans of Jodi Picoult, Lisa Jewell, and Freida McFadden, *Shaken* explores the intense, often unspoken, struggles of new motherhood and the complexities of human fallibility, raising an unsettling question: Does one irreversible mistake define you forever?

Learn more on Jill’s [website](#).

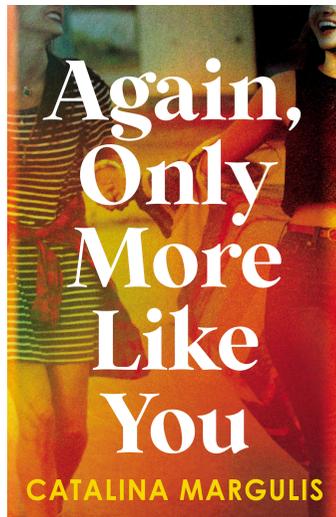


...Catalina Margulis

Favorite book when you were a child: When I read *The Girl Who Owned a City* by O. T. Nelson in grade school, it sparked a love for apocalyptic and survivalist stories, like this one and *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, all of which explore questions of how to live, what is living, and how do we live with others. At the heart, I think this is what all my books are about. Besides that, *Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White is a favorite from my childhood that I was so excited to share with my own kids when it was their turn. It still makes me cry!

Are you a plotter or pantser: I'm a pantser, 100 percent. But this is such an important question because I find that pantsers and plotters can get stuck when they don't know this answer. I always say, go where the energy flows. If something drains your energy, walk away. Focusing on the details really brings me down, but some writers need a lot of information before they can begin. Regardless, books usually come to me in their entirety—beginning, middle and end. That's when I know I have a book. And the rest is feeling my way through to connect the dots. Then I put on my plotter hat to revise the book and reverse engineer it so that it works on all levels.

Advice for aspiring writers: You hear this all the time, but truly, enjoy the journey. Writing a book is magical and transformative, if you let it be. It's not about getting the book done, though that's important too. But what does this story want to teach you that you can share with others?



***Again, Only More Like You* by Catalina Margulis**

Again, Only More Like You offers a poignant and humorous look at friendship and reinvention at 40.

Dumped. Pregnant. Fired. For best friends Carmen and Ally, the approach of their 40th birthdays is anything but a celebration. Yet, it might be exactly what they need to set their lives on the right path. The strength of their friendship is tested when tragedy strikes, bringing hidden resentments to the surface and forcing them to confront their past and each other. In the process, they must answer a pivotal question: Are their best years really behind them, or is turning 40 just the beginning of their greatest adventures?

Learn more on Catalina's [Goodreads](#) page.

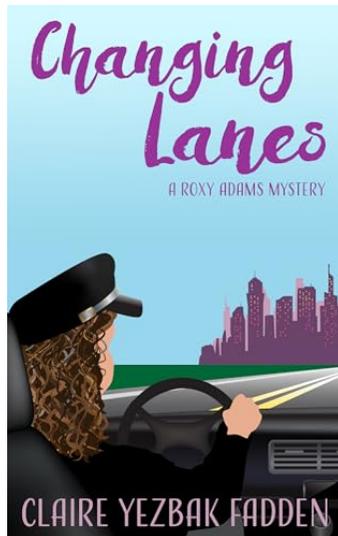


...Claire Yezbak Fadden

Favorite book when you were a child: Hands down my favorite childhood book has to be *Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White. As a young girl, I was impressed by the creative story, the vivid characters, and the salient ending.

Are you a plotter or pantser: I am most definitely a pantser, or as I call myself—reverse plotter. I start each book with a “story tent outline” (with placeholders for the set-up, eden state, inciting incident, response, attack, and resolution). Then as I write each section, I fill in the main elements of each scene with goal/conflict/disaster and each sequel with reaction/dilemma/decision as I go along.

What you're working on next: I'm in the beginning stages of book two in the Roxy Adams Mystery Series. I'm enjoying writing Roxy, a character I'm familiar with, and placing her in another difficult situation. Remember that rock star in book one? Well, he's returned.



Changing Lanes by Claire Yezbak Fadden

For Roxy Adams, life is simple until Sam, the man she loves and shares a business with, vanishes with their savings. Broke and confused, she learns they never owned the business. Convinced there's no knight in shining armor riding to her rescue, Roxy dusts off her chauffeur's hat and gets to work. It seems Foxy Roxy is back until Sam turns up dead in the trunk of her limo. And Roxy is the prime murder suspect.

Learn more on Claire's [Goodreads](#) page.



...Elaine Stock

On your nightstand now: In no special order: *The Keeper of Lost Art* by Leilita Baldock, *The Artist of Blackberry Grange* by Paulette Kennedy, *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* by Taylor Jenkins Reid, and *Escape from the Ghetto* by John Carr. I'm also listening to *The Women* by Kristin Hannah on audiobook.

Book you're an evangelist for: I love books that champion resilience, which we desperately need in this spinning world: *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins, *The Nightingale* by Kristin Hannah, and *The Invention of Wings* by Sue Monk Kidd.

Favorite line from your book: It's from the John Pierrakos quote I use at the beginning of *The Last Secret Kept*. I believe it sets the story's mood nicely: "Love is the highest form of intelligence we can experience."

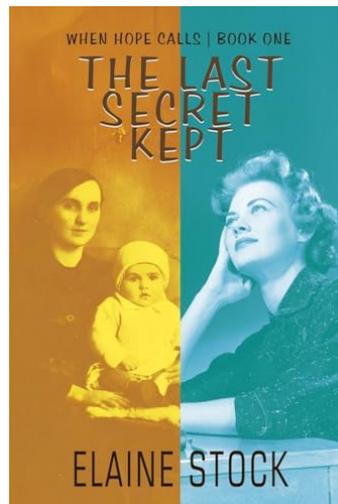
Are you a plotter or pantser: I am definitely a pantser. I feel too restricted by an outline and adore the surprises when plot twists redirect my path and characters weigh in their opinions on what I should be doing.

Advice for aspiring writers: Believe in yourself and your story. Do not worry about what critics will say.

***The Last Secret Kept* by Elaine Stock**

It's 1961, and Fanny's a defense attorney who believes women can have careers. She meets Gina, whose husband Kenny is accused of murder, and takes on his case. When a long-hidden act of betrayal surfaces, it threatens to unsettle Gina and destabilize Fanny's defense case. Set against the backdrop of the construction of the Berlin Wall, the story explores individualism while demolishing the walls built between ourselves and our loved ones.

Learn more on Elaine's [website](#).



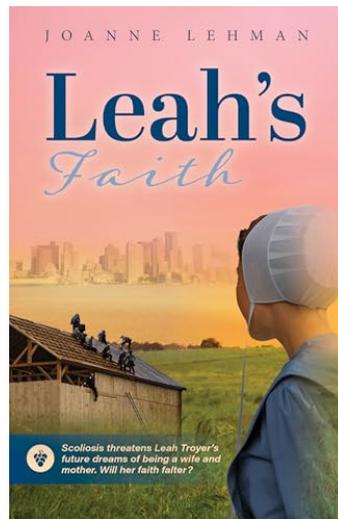
...Joanne Lehman

Favorite book when you were a child: Growing up, I didn't have many books, so I borrowed books from the county bookmobile and the church library. I also bought books at the local Ben Franklin store using my allowance. I read *Heidi* by Johanna Spyri several times. I felt connected to those mountains and Heidi's rural life, perhaps because I was Mennonite and my ancestors were from the Alsace region. I also read *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, and I identified with Jo, who was a writer and a teacher. The Little House Books appealed to my sense of adventure and self-sufficiency. These books all emphasize the family and community values found in my novels.

Are there authors who influenced your writing: *Plainsong* by Kent Haruf has a special place on my bookshelf. Its chapters give voice to various characters who form a community to support a troubled teen. I do something similar in *Leah's Faith*. *The Bean Trees* and other books by Barbara Kingsolver address social issues, have memorable characters, and show love for the natural world. Again, these are values in my stories.

Advice for aspiring writers: My advice for aspiring writers is to learn all you can about craft. If you're inclined to read and

write poetry, do it. It can help you develop your voice and tighten your writing. Familiarity with literary devices is useful in both poetry and fiction writing. Participate in writing groups and critique groups. Attend conferences and take courses. You need the support and expertise of other writers and a network of writing friends to keep you going. Keep working and follow up on any leads, new ideas, or random impulses. You never know when the spaghetti you throw at the wall will stick. I queried many agents, but in the end, I found a small press that offered me a traditional publishing contract. I couldn't be happier with the outcome.



***Leah's Faith* by Joanne Lehman**

Leah dreams of having a husband and children but believes she must accept scoliosis and disability as God's will. When a surgeon offers to help, Leah leaves her rural community. Will her faith falter when things don't go as planned? Leah struggles with the choices she's made, then letters from Aaron Keim, a childhood friend, hint at the impossible. A story of unlikely relationships, a supportive community, and true compassion, *Leah's Faith* is the perfect blend of Christian women's fiction and Amish romance.

Learn more on Joanne's [website](#).



...Catherine Matthews

On your nightstand now: Currently, I'm reading *My Friends* by Fredrick Backman. Backman is not to be read in public, as I learned sobbing through the last chapters of *A Man Called Ove*, while waiting for an oil change. Backman makes prosaic events consequential. His stories confront life's essential questions through characters who are, paradoxically, as unique as they are universal.

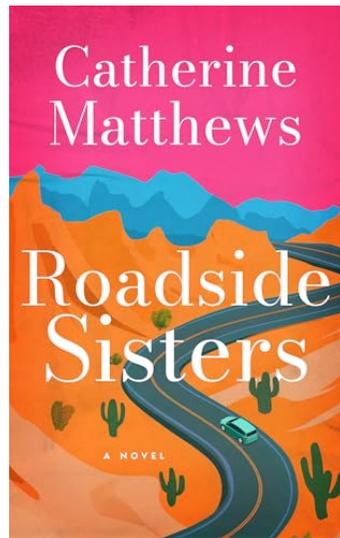
Book that changed your life: *The Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* by Rebecca Wells came out when I was barely established in my profession and on the cusp of parenthood. Bringing every emotion to the page, Wells made carnate what I'd understood only intellectually about inheriting trauma. From her excavation of the ordinary, albeit messy, moments in life, I reflected on my family history and how my actions might echo in future generations.

Book you wish you'd written: I love to read character-driven stories in which complex relationships and family secrets are the foundation of a plot structured more like a web than a mountain. While *Beach Music* by Pat Conroy epitomizes all of that, it's his prose that makes me wish I'd written this novel. Thirty years later, I still remember pausing to admire

sentences. His voice, word choice, and imagery captivated me. I want to write stories that still evoke emotion decades later and sentences that cause people to pause at the truth and beauty in the words.

Advice for aspiring writers: Writing a novel is an arduous journey. While you write alone, you do not have to be alone. Find a community of writers. When doubt seeps in, they'll share their knowledge and support. WFWA is that for me.

What you're working on next: Currently, I'm drafting the sequel to *Releasing the Reins*, a women's fiction suspense novel set in Alaska. This time, the Cooper family takes center stage.



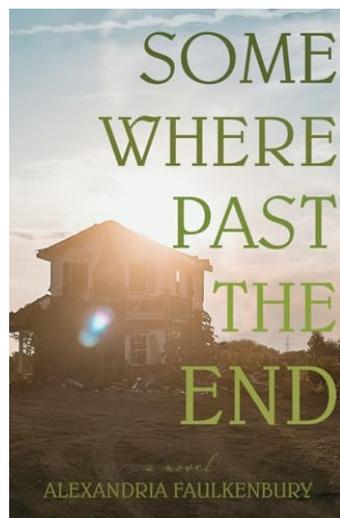
Roadside Sisters by Catherine Matthews

When Molly asks her estranged sisters to drive her home from Reno to Seattle, they're reluctant—until they learn she has cancer. Recreating the last road trip their family took before everything fell apart, she hopes to heal their rift. Instead, misunderstandings and repressed grievances explode across state lines. When Molly's condition worsens, the sisters are forced to confront their unresolved feelings and decide if they can release their grip on the past before it's too late.

Learn more on Catherine's [website](#).

NEW RELEASES

Sunshine, sandy shores, roses in bloom: summer's the perfect time to unwind with a good book. We're spicing up our summer reading with these women's fiction titles.



Somewhere Past The End by Alexandria Faulkenbury

Told in dual timelines, *Somewhere Past the End* follows Alice Greene as she tries to put her life back together following the mysterious disappearance of members of the cult she's both loved and longed to leave all her life. Ultimately, the novel offers a panoramic view of one family and how the repercussions of their choices muddy the lines between truth, belief, and delusion.

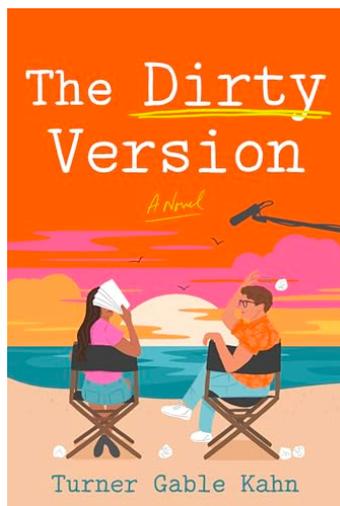
Visit Alexandria's [Goodreads page](#) to find out more!



***Hush Little Fire* by Judith Newcomb Stiles**

When Mary Newcombe returns to Cape Cod to track down her birth mother, a suspicious fire erupts in the old health clinic, and she becomes the lead suspect. As the days tick by and pressures mount to find the arsonist, Mary digs deeper into Wellfleet's history, and secrets start to unfurl. Because in Wellfleet, if you can't keep a secret, start a fire. *Hush Little Fires* is a cross-generational mystery told through the perspectives of four women and a perfect read for fans of Bonnie Garmus and Dennis Lehane.

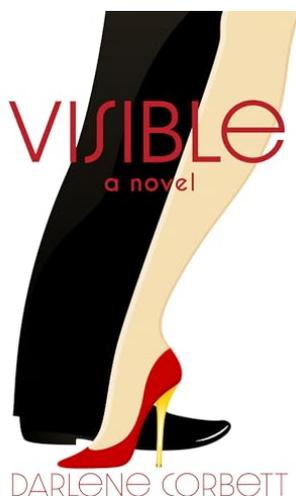
Visit Judith's [Goodreads page](#) to find out more!



***The Dirty Version* by Turner Gable Kahn**

Sparks fly when a surf-town author and an intimacy coordinator are thrown together to write new, steamy sex scenes for a TV series based on Tash's hit novel in this deliciously fun debut romance. Soon Tash and Caleb are burning up their new pages, but just when Tash feels it's all coming together, the whole plot falls apart. Can she find a narrative that saves her show and her own love story, or are both lost forever?

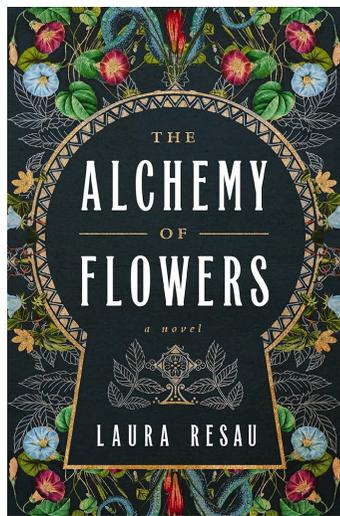
Visit Turner's [website](#) to find out more!



***Visible* by Darlene Corbett**

What happens when a psychotherapist runs a group for millennials and discovers deep issues of her own? Widowed and estranged from family, Rachel wonders if she'll ever find love again. When her own therapist tells her to "get back in the game," Rachel enrolls in dance classes where she learns the Tango. The sensual dance embodies everything missing in Rachel's life, including a handsome dance partner. Even as her clients learn to support each other, she yearns for deeper connections in the next stage of her life. But will it be with or without Michael?

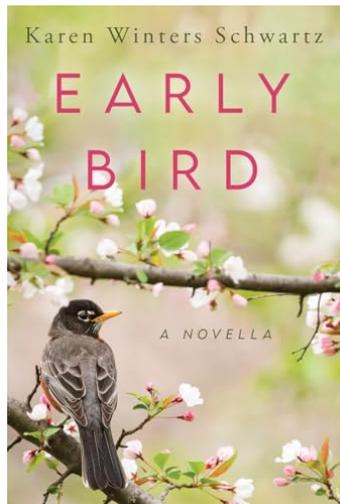
Visit Darlene's [Goodreads page](#) to find out more!



***The Alchemy of Flowers* by Laura Resau**

When Eloise Bourne finds a mysterious job at a chateau in Provence, she hopes to escape reminders of children, but soon discovers an enigmatic little girl who needs her help. This debut adult novel is an enchanting, modern-day take on Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, sprinkled with magic. Perfect for fans of Sarah Addison Allen.

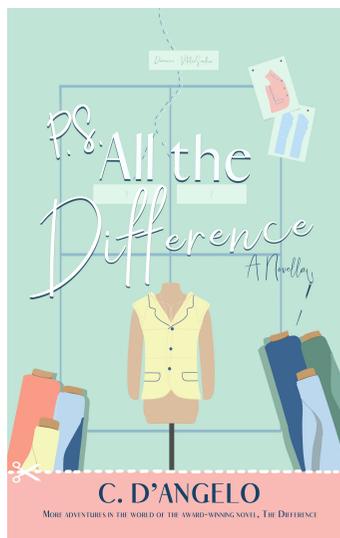
Visit Laura's [Goodreads page](#) to find out more!



***Early Bird* by Karen Winters Schwartz**

As a little girl, Robin Aletta Byrd dislikes being named after a bird. Over the years, birds flit in and out of her life, and she develops a love for all things avian. While she experiences remarkable bird encounters, her relationships with her difficult big brother, Jay, and her sweet mindless sister, Wren, ebb and flow, and her funny family of five is jostled by a multitude of joyous and poignant events. Through it all, Robin is lifted and guided into adulthood on the wings of birds.

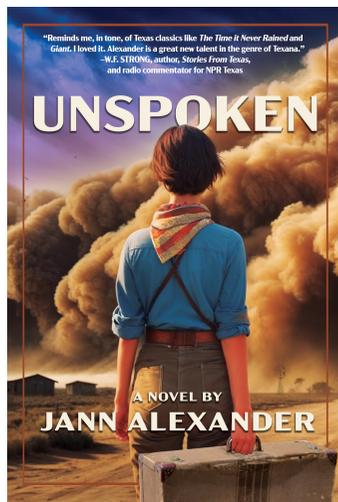
Visit Karen's [website](#) to find out more!



***P.S. All the Difference* by C D'Angelo**

One last time, Rachel must go on an ancestry mission to uncover the remaining pieces of her grandpa's Italian immigrant youth or risk her mental health relapsing to the darkest era in her life, where she could lose everything.

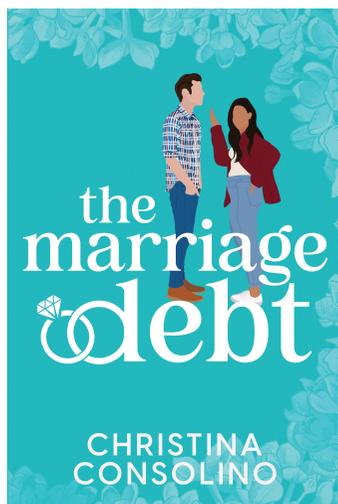
Visit C D'Angelo's [website](#) to find out more!



***Unspoken* by Jann Alexander**

A farm devastated by the Dust Bowl. A dream destroyed. A family scattered. And one Texas girl determined to salvage the wreckage. Heart-wrenching and inspiring, the tale of Ruby Lee's dogged perseverance to get back home and Willa Mae's endless love for her daughter shines a light on women driven apart by disaster who bravely lean on one another, find comfort in remade families, and redefine what home means.

Visit Jann's [website](#) to find out more!



***The Marriage Debt* by Christina Consolino**

From the outside, Nika Stewart's life looks perfect: two loving kids, a fulfilling job as an elementary-school librarian, and a wonderful second marriage to Ethan, her sexy husband. The only problem? She doesn't want to have sex with him. Filled with humor, candor, and at least one pair of role-playing chaps, *The Marriage Debt* examines the hard truths about sex that overbooked women face in their forties, as well as the joys still to come once a woman knows who she is and how to ask for what she wants.

Visit Christina's [website](#) to find out more!

If you are a WFWA member and want to be considered for *TBR*, please fill out a book submission form [here](#).

Enjoyed this newsletter? Forward it to your friends!

Received this newsletter from a friend and want your own copy? Sign up [here](#) to receive TBR, a quarterly newsletter from WFWA.

EDITORIAL STAFF

Rachel MacDonald, Editor | readon@womensfictionwriters.org

Caraline Bullen, Assistant Editor

[WFWA Online Community on Mighty Networks \(private\)](#)

The place for Workshops, Live Events, a massive Learning Library, making connections, and more!

Connect with us:

[WFWA Home](#)



[Goodreads](#)



[Instagram](#)



[Facebook](#)



[Pinterest](#)