

Kathleen's Recent Reads—December

Fiction

Christmas on the Island by Jenny Colgan

Flora, Saif, and Lorna return in this continuation of Colgan's Endless Beach series, set on the fictional island of Mure in Scotland. As Christmas approaches, a tipping point is reached, and events force them all to re-evaluate their relationships. Cozy, domestic fiction.

Matrix by Lauren Groff

Historical fiction inspired by the poetry of Marie de France does not automatically sound very thrilling, but this slim book was written by one of America's most talented writers, and yes—it is thrilling. Marie comes to the English court of Eleanor of Aquitaine after the deaths of her warrior aunts and mother, but Eleanor deems her unsuitable for marriage and court life, and sends her (aged 17) to run a struggling convent. Marie's journey from raw teenager to revered mystic is gripping, the story is fantastic, the characters memorable—and Groff's talent awe-inspiring.

Skipping Christmas by John Grisham

If you only associate John Grisham with legal thrillers, you're in for a surprise with this title. After his daughter joins the Peace Corps and decamps for Peru right before Christmas, accountant Luther Krank decides to forego all the expensive holiday traditions and convinces his wife Nora to take a Caribbean cruise instead. Hilarity ensues as neighbors, friends, coworkers and charitable institutions are informed the Kranks won't be participating in the giving season, and express their displeasure. Then, of course, like all the best-laid plans, Luther's hits a snag. Light and entertaining.

The Madness of Crowds by Louise Penny

Armand Gamache and his friends and family are back in Three Pines, and dealing with the fallout from both the pandemic and a statistician's proposal that the world can no longer afford to support those with physical disabilities, which although rejected by the Canadian government, has spread like wildfire thanks to social media. Timely material, presented just as the fans of Penny's mystery series will like it.

Audiobooks (available on cloudLibrary)

The Fiancée by Kate White

Summer, an actress, is looking forward to her annual vacation with her husband's tight-knit family at her in-laws' summer home in Bucks County, PA. She is surprised to discover that her youngest brother-in-law's new girlfriend is an actress she worked with, and even more surprised when the woman denies ever having met her. Tensions simmer, and the body count grows, as the "vacation" wears on. A well-plotted, engrossing thriller.

Early Morning Riser by Katherine Heiny

Jane, a new teacher in a small town in Northern Michigan, falls in love with Duncan right after coming to town. He is charming, easy-going, and very appreciative of Jane. Could it really be this easy? Of course, the answer is no; Duncan has his own baggage, including a complicated relationship with his ex-wife, a sense of responsibility for his mentally disabled employee, and a legion of former girlfriends scattered across the state. Leisurely, charming, and full of optimism, this feel-good novel is a good choice for anyone who enjoys books about small-town life.

The Scent Keeper by Erica Bauermeister

Emmeline has never left the remote island in Washington State where she lives with her father, a scientist. Together they live in harmony with nature, foraging for food and living as the seasons dictate. Necessities magically appear on the beach; “mermaid party”, says her father when she is young, and to Emmeline, living a practically enchanted life, it’s as good an explanation as any. One thing he does not explain is why he has a collection of scents in stoppered bottles lining the walls of their cabin. When tragedy befalls them and Emmeline is brought away from the island, she learns the secrets her father was keeping, and how she might fit into this “brave new world”. Try if you enjoy stories with a touch of fantasy.