

hood home of his deceased father's sadistic energy. Eccentric bookshop owner Fintan Hulme, who has managed to stay honest for a few years, stumbles back into purchasing and selling stolen antiquities. Given the nature of their professions, both men know a romantic relationship is ill-advised, but they struggle against a potent physical and emotional attraction. A multi-ethnic, diversely gendered cast of characters inhabits this homey universe. Some are sweet, like runaway Sarah, and others drawn with comic exaggeration, like criminal twins Benny and Lisa, "thin and swift and nervous as the speed-freaks they were." Finn's belief that "if the heart is going to err... It's surely always best to err on the side of love" underlies an entertaining, emotionally satisfying mix of intrigue, mourning, adventure, comedy, and romance. *Agent: Louise Fury, Bent Agency. (Feb.)*

Must Love Breeches

Angela Quarles. Angela Quarles, \$4.99 e-book (306p) ISBN 978-0-9905400-0-7

Time travel and romance taste great together in Quarles's Must Love series launch. Isabelle Rochon is an American historian working at London's British Museum, desperately hoping to land the job that will allow her to remain in London permanently. Fate, however, has other plans. During a re-enactment ball, a stray thought and a magical card case send Isabelle back to a ball in 1834 and straight into the arms of the Vicious Viscount, Phineas Montagu. Montagu's carefully crafted nefarious reputation once served a vital purpose, but now he needs to acquire an air of benevolence, and he hopes to do so with the strange Isabelle's assistance. The pressing question becomes whether she'll still be there when he needs her the most. Filled with historical tidbits and larger-than-life characters, the sweet story is a delight, though sometimes it meanders. *(BookLife)*

Inspirational

In Defense of Love

Pat Simmons. Whitaker House, \$13.99 trade paper (224p) ISBN 978-1-62911-292-3

The main characters in this novel share a love replete with sweet nothings,

flowers, and shivers of joy—and a connection with Christ. Simmons (*Guilty of Love*) highlights these aspects of the relationship with repetition that is charming at first but ultimately unsatisfying. Nash, a U.S. Marshal, courts Carmen, an attorney, despite being haunted by an abruptly ended relationship. The two begin a dramatic courtship in the church band that also sometimes spills over into the courtroom, prison ministry, and church, all places where the two characters spend time. Simmons ignores several opportunities to exploit narrative tension: Nash reveals the secret that haunts him and Carmen has no real reaction; a jarring scenario at the end of the book is implausible even to the faithful because it lacks a setup. As a fairy-tale romance centered on very chaste, church-approved love, the novel works, but just barely. *(Mar.)*

Sabotaged

Dani Pettrey. Bethany House, \$14.99 trade paper (336p) ISBN 978-0-7642-1196-6

The McKenna family saga comes to a roaring finale as former troublemaker Reef joins his siblings in volunteering for the Iditarod search-and-rescue team. Surprised to see his childhood friend Kirra Jacobs on the team as well, he soon finds himself paired with her on a dangerous high-stakes rescue: Kirra's uncle Frank, an experienced musher, has disappeared from the race course. But Frank is in more trouble than they first realize, and Reef and Kirra are forced to chase clues up and down the Alaskan coast and neutralize unknown foes, who are using Frank for their own destructive purposes. The pair's harrowing adventures uncover old hurts and carve new spiritual paths. Reef and Kirra begin to see beyond past impressions of each other, and fans new and old will be cheering for love to win. The imposing Alaskan landscape, a powerful character in its own right, centers everything. Pettrey (*Submerged*) keeps the pages turning with a wicked pace, snappy dialogue, and likable characters, while deftly handling deep emotional and spiritual struggles. Series fans will relish—and mourn—the conclusion of the McKenna siblings' adventures. *Agency: Books & Such Literary Agency. (Feb.)*

Paper Hearts

Courtney Walsh. Tyndale, \$14.99 trade paper (416p) ISBN 978-1-4143-9869-3

Abigail Pressman is more than the owner of the Book Nook in Loves Park, Colo.; she's a descendent of the city's founders. To her mother's chagrin, Abigail is also one of the few single women in a town dedicated to romance, in keeping with its name. When Jacob Willoughby buys her building, Abigail faces eviction if she can't convince the handsome doctor that the Book Nook needs to stay. As Abigail and Jacob waffle between disdain and affection for each other, Abigail discovers the paper hearts contained in a love letter. Sent to Loves Park to obtain the town's romantic postmark anonymously each Valentine's Day, the letters (and accompanying hearts) reveal a couple's intimate love story, and Abigail's frosty stance toward romance begins to thaw. When she decides to share the decorative paper hearts, and the story behind them, with her customers, the result is a boom in business that may just stay her eviction. Walsh (*A Sweethaven Summer*) pens a quaint, smalltown love story, complete with an overbearing mother, an unscrupulous business partner, and a group of busybodies whose hearts are in the right place even if their actions are questionable. While certain elements are predictable, Walsh develops enough plot twists to make this enjoyable to the end. *Agent: Sandra Bishop, Transatlantic Agency. (Feb.)*

The Last Heiress

Mary Ellis. Harvest House, \$13.99 trade paper (352p) ISBN 978-0-7369-5052-7

Amanda Dunn, heiress to an English textile fortune, is asked by her ailing father to travel to Wilmington, N.C., to resume cotton shipments to the mills, since the supply has been disrupted by the Civil War. While there she can also repair her relationship with her twin sister, now the wife of an American gentleman. Amanda does as asked, reuniting with Abigail Henthorne, reestablishing cotton shipments with the help of her brother-in-law, and meeting dashing shopkeeper Nate Cooper along the way. The Civil War and slavery are part of the narrative, with Amanda and Nate debating whether England's servant class is any different