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Author On the Bookcase: Mara Purl, author of The Milford-Haven Novels



Submitted by [Barbara](#) on Tue, 08/09/2011 - 13:27

Author On the Bookcase
Mara Purl



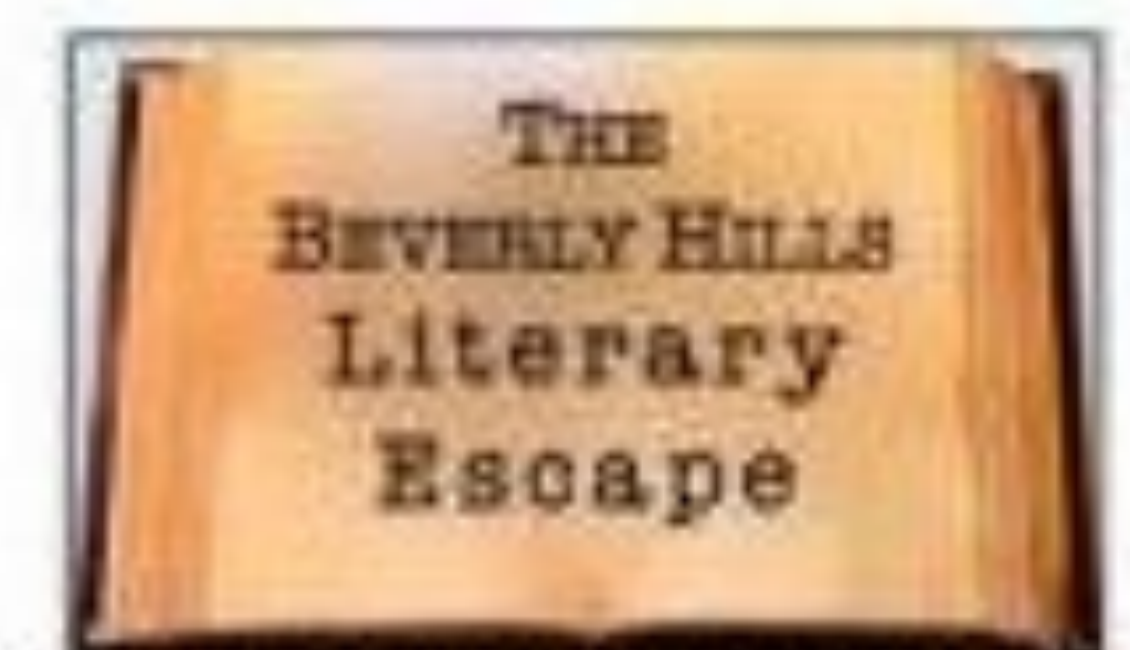
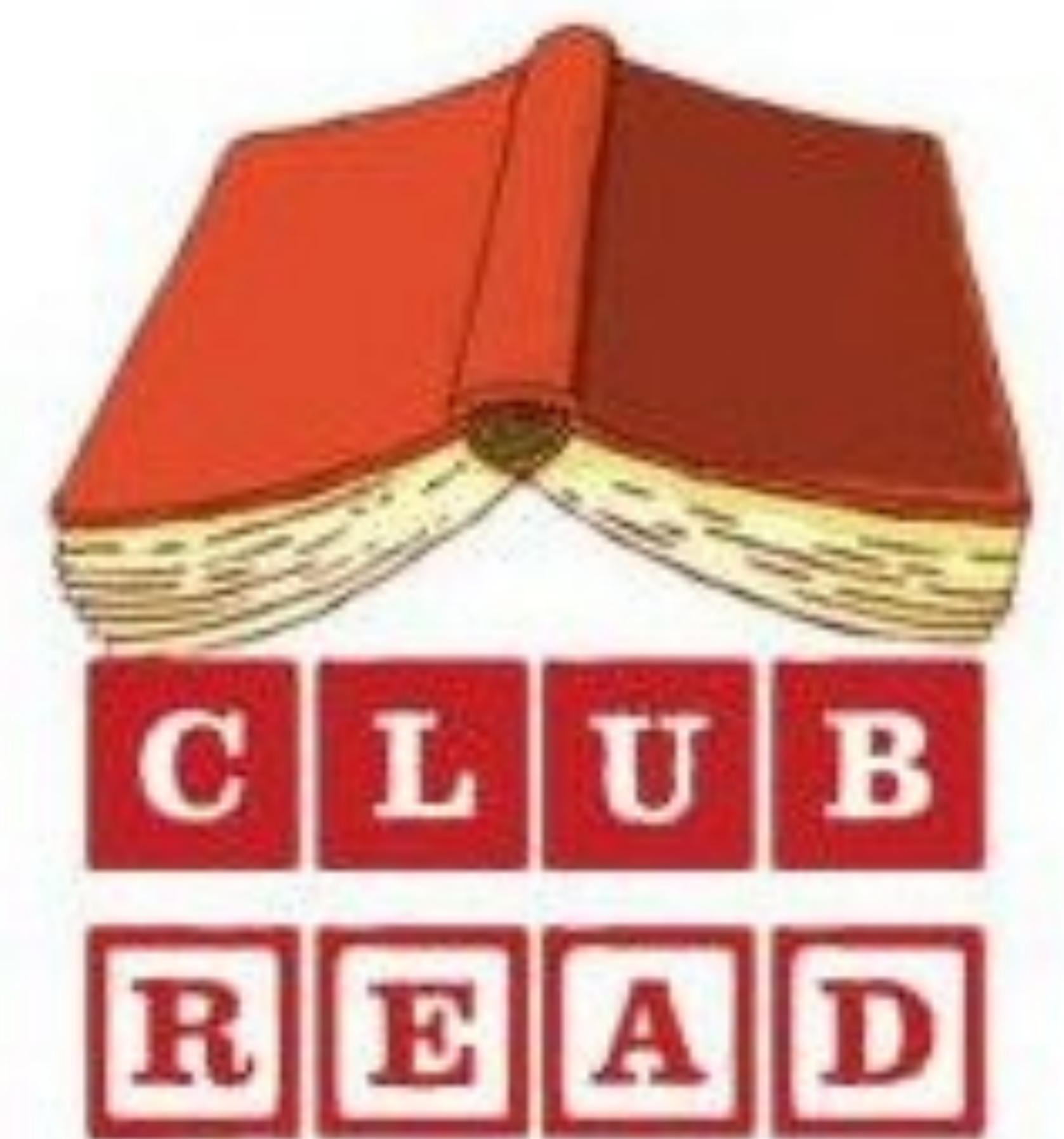
I'm excited to welcome Mara Purl, author of The Milford-Haven Novels, to On the Bookcase. Milford-Haven is a fictitious town on California's Central Coast. Pre-9/11, housing is on the rise, the stock market is booming, and Milford-Haven is full of the upwardly mobile pouring out of Los Angeles in search of a fresh start or a weekend getaway. The

novels are based on Purl's BBC Radio drama Milford-Haven U.S.A.

The first in the Milford-Haven series, [What the Heart Knows](#), features Miranda Jones. Artist Miranda begins to trust her heart enough to escape from her life of privilege and start over in Milford-Haven. Now that she's moved, deeper questions surface: What is her life purpose? What's missing? And what does her heart know that her head keeps ignoring? Miranda connects with environmentalist Samantha Hugo -- a brilliant PhD twenty years her senior who gave up a son years earlier and with restaurant owner Sally O'Mally who left Arkansas to create her own dream. Each woman wrestles with her own core issues while balancing demanding careers. What happens in Milford-Haven when journalist Christine Christian is found murdered while investigating a half-built house?

Look for the sign to Milford-Haven, pull off Highway 1 and discover for yourself . . . What the Heart Knows.

Mara chats about her Author Chat with a book club and how her "characters became springboards for philosophical considerations and self-examination" during the book club discussion.



Don't just read a book. experience it...



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When I think of book clubs, I think of a special evening when I was the guest of a group in Thousand Oaks, California. The meeting was held at a beautiful home nestled in the hills. Spacious and comfortable, the home was also fragrant with cooking aromas when I arrived.

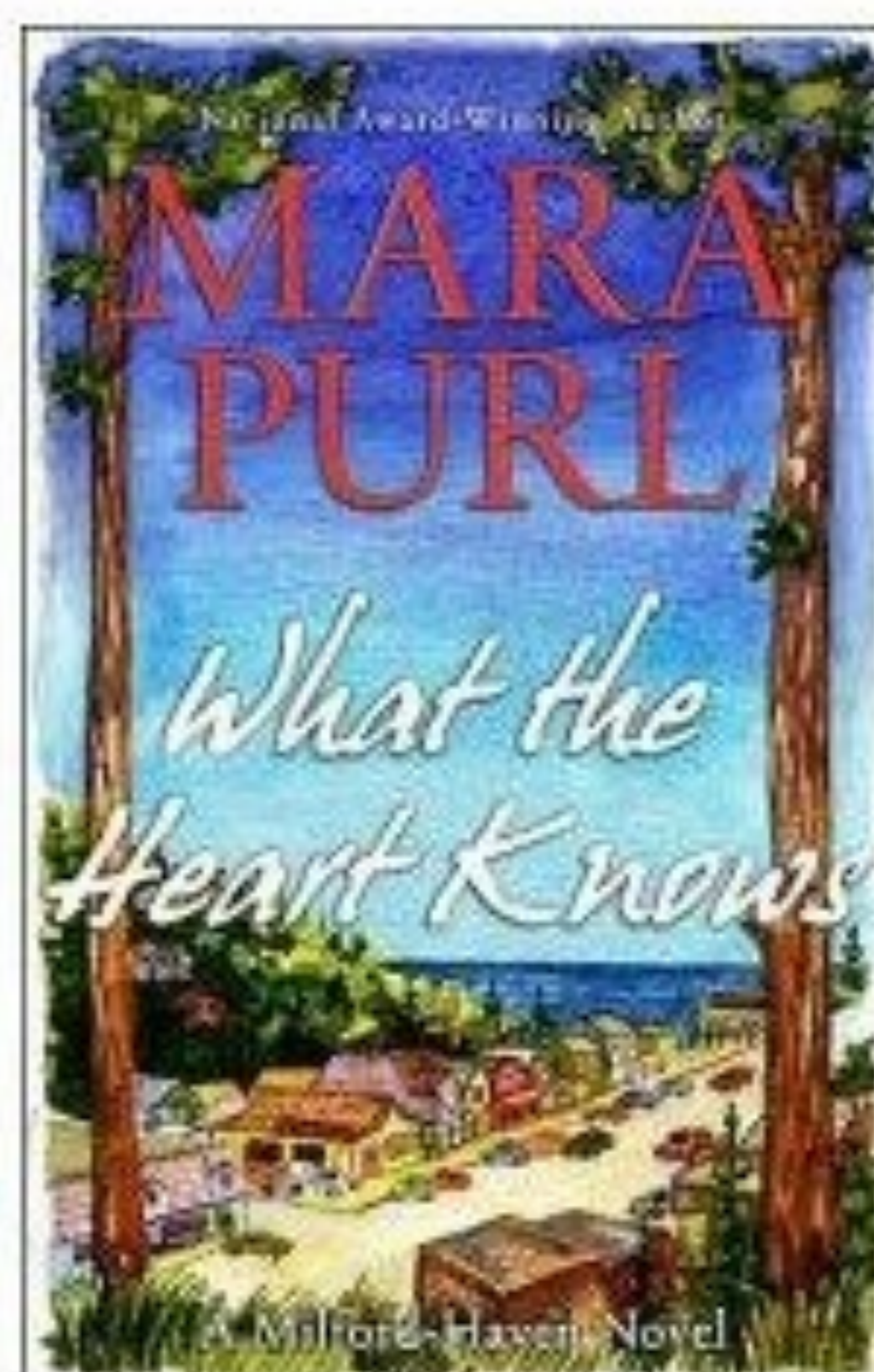
After being welcomed, I was invited to sit at a large dining table where the group of twelve women assembled. Our plates were heaped with a sumptuous array of perfectly cooked foods, and as we began to share the meal, one of the book club members introduced me formally.

It soon became clear that not only had everyone there read my book; each had read it carefully and apparently made notes, as notebooks and index cards, and print-outs of the Reading Guide from the Reading Group Choices website began appearing next to their plates. The first volley of questions were about story details: Why did Samantha, an environmentalist, drive a Jeep Cherokee? Why was Miranda, obviously attracted to Zack, suspicious of his behavior? The second set of questions were aimed more at larger writing issues. Did I really believe I could keep developing so many characters? How did I plan to inform readers who started with book three what had already happened in the series?

Some of their questions put me on the hot seat, but I experienced it as more of a “warm” seat—a comfortable place to be, gratified by their obviously genuine interest. But as dinner finished and desert was being served, things got even more interesting. Now the characters and their experiences became springboards for philosophical considerations and self-examination. Now we were a group of women interested in working on our lives, talking through issues, and revealing deep feelings.

We were women who’d moved from our heads to our hearts. And this was the most thrilling part of the evening for me. For this is the theme of my entire series, and the reason book one is titled *What the Heart Knows*. In our culture, we’re not only encouraged to “use our heads,” but admonished that the only way to get ahead is to use smart tactics and learn how to strategize. This is all to the good!

Yet, when it comes to “following our hearts,” we’re often advised we’re being “overly emotional,” “immature,” or just “foolish.” I believe the heart—our intuition, our instincts, our gut-feelings—can offer information that is every bit as valuable as what our heads have to tell us. So I challenged myself: what would life look like for a character who began to listen to what her heart says? This is my protagonist’s journey. And, to some extent, it’s the journey of each character in Milford-Haven.



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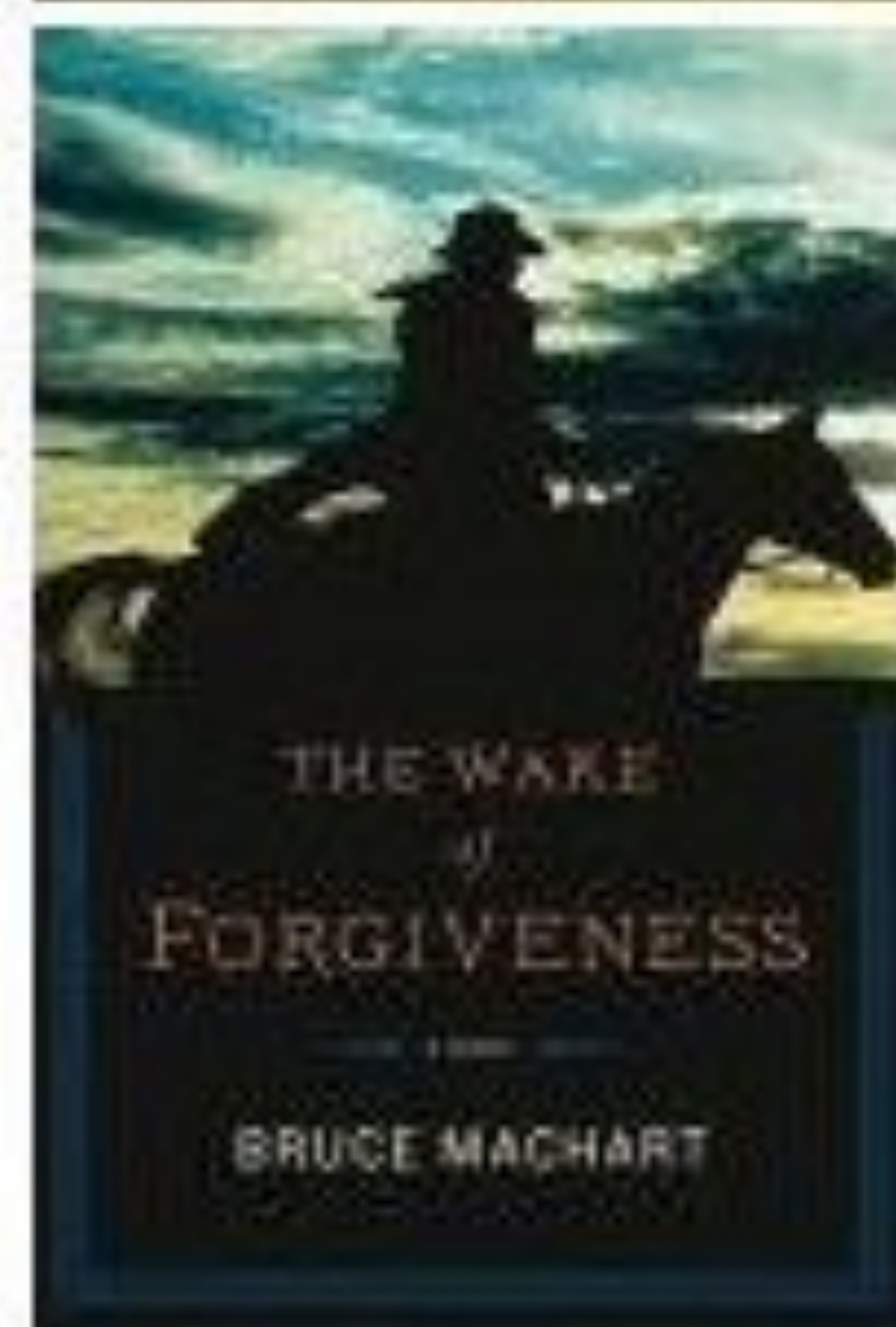
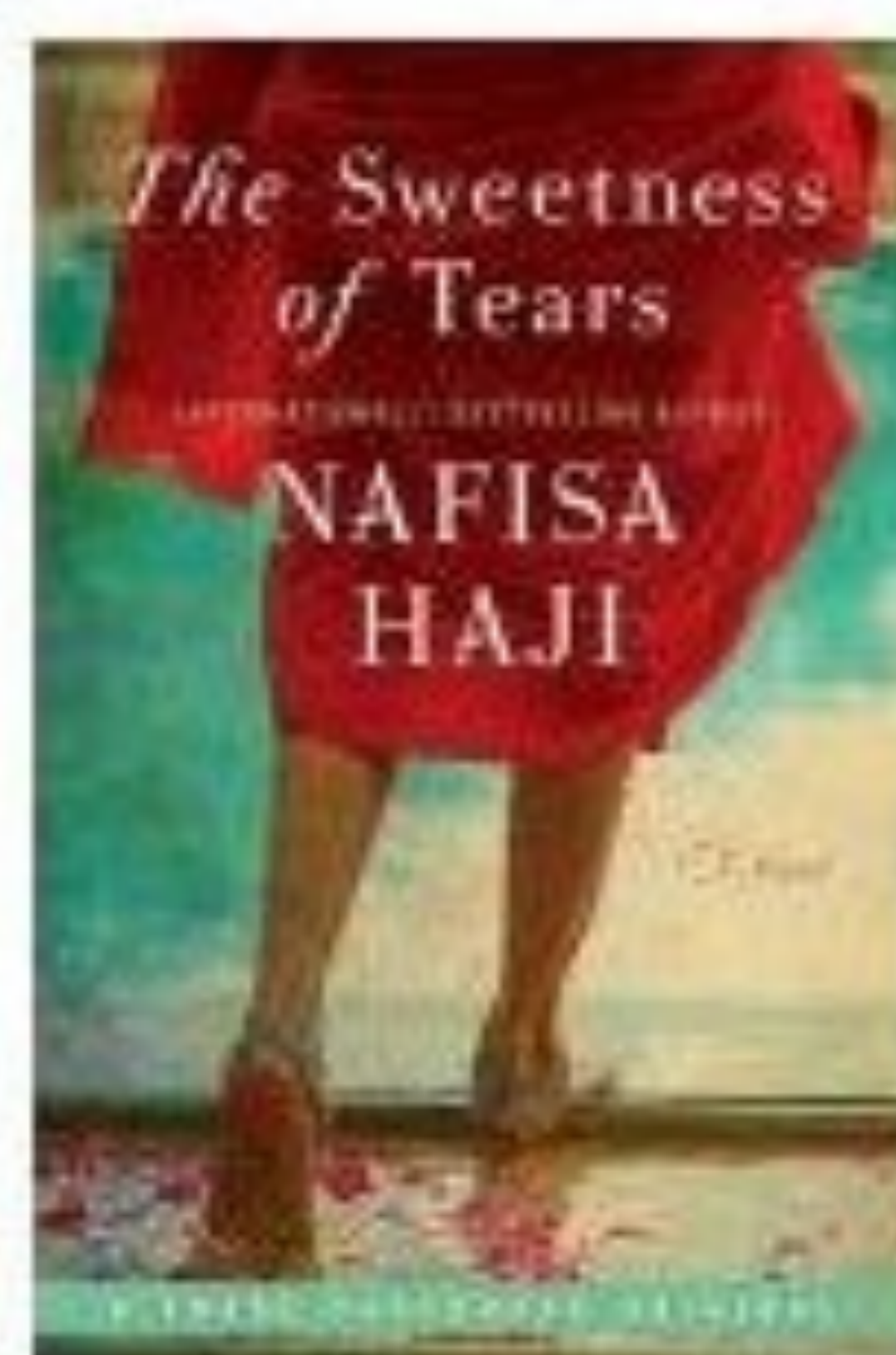
like that. RT [@AnnKingman](#): I think my motto for today is, sadly, "don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good." [about 6 hours ago](#)

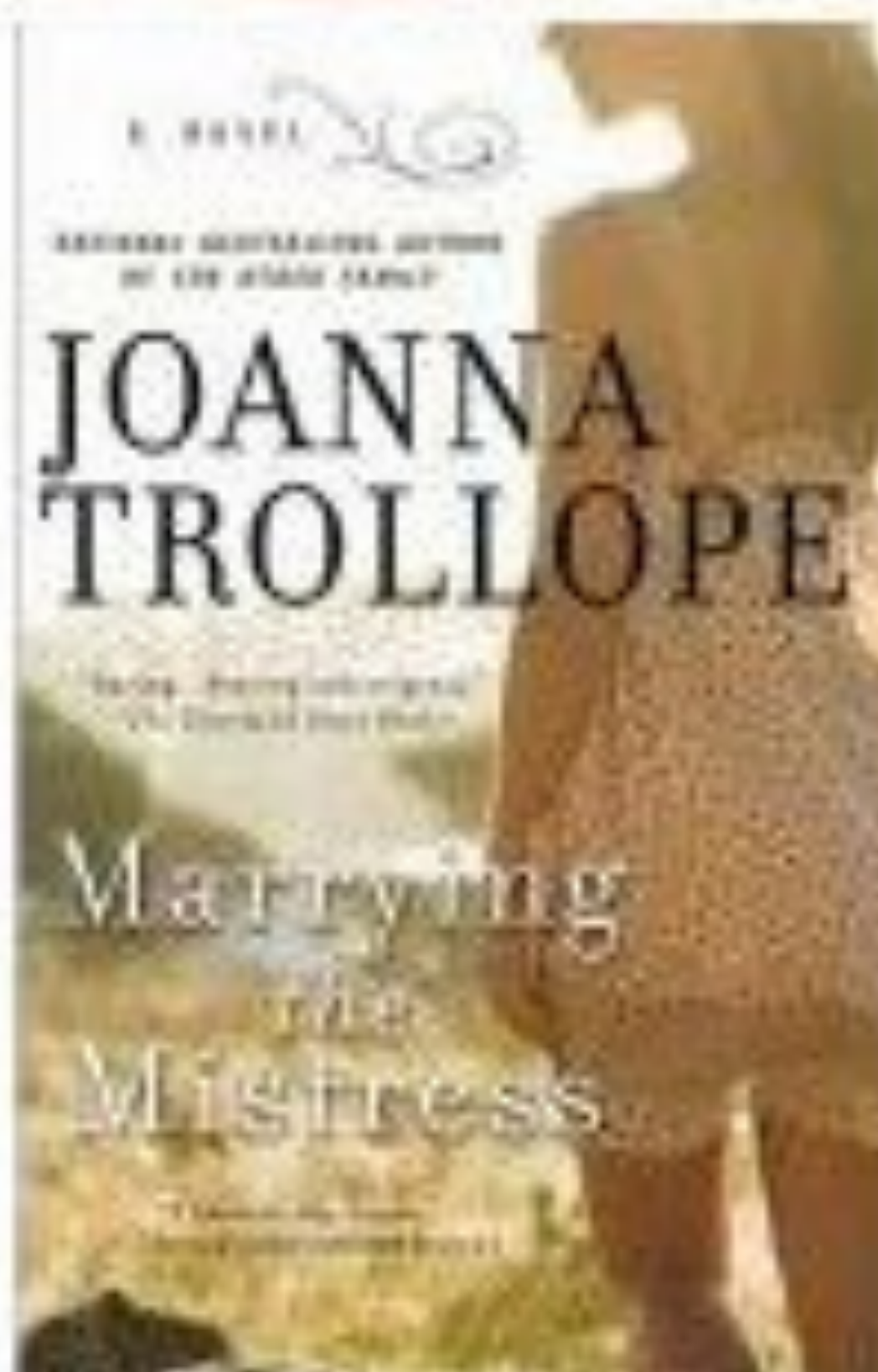
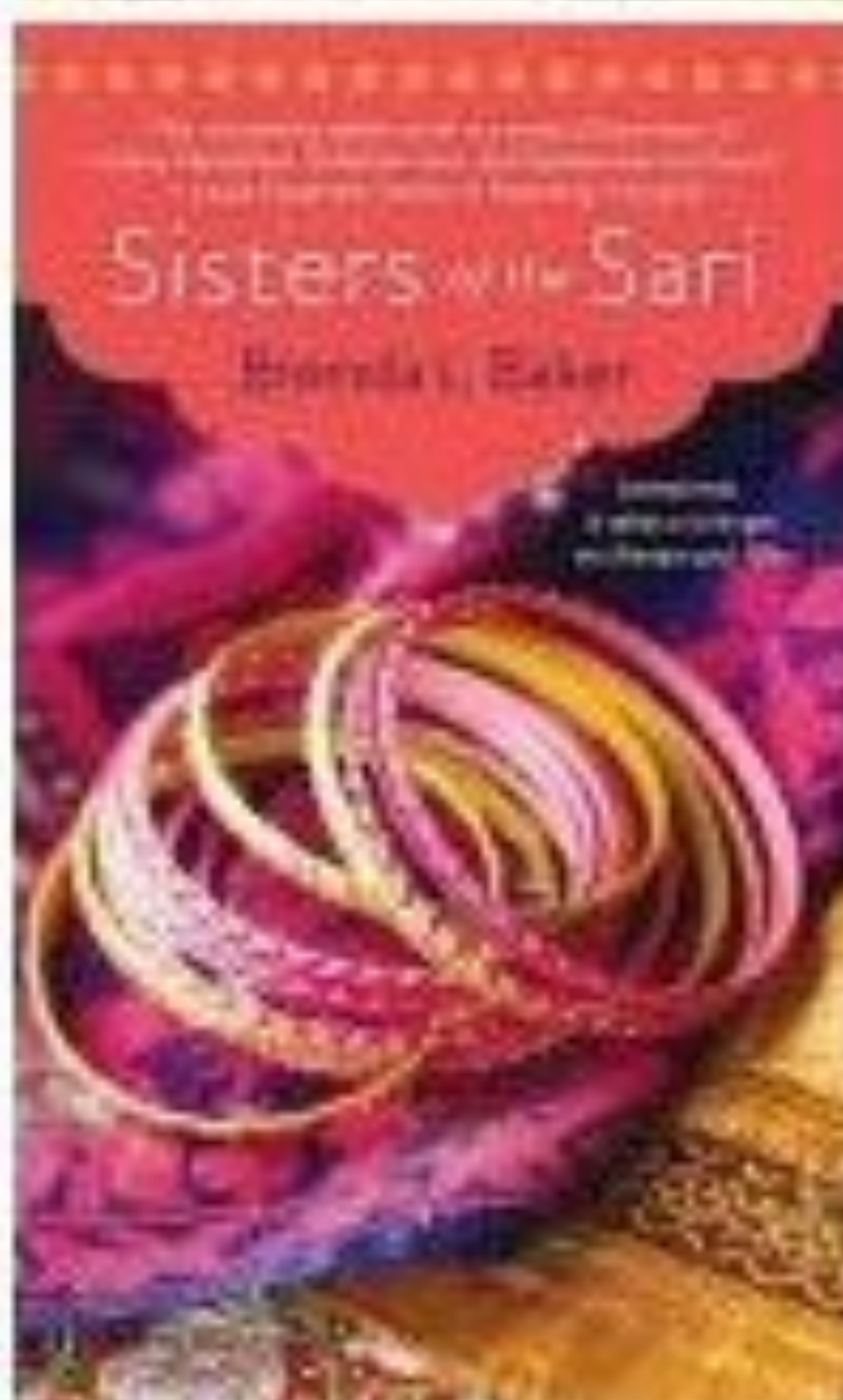
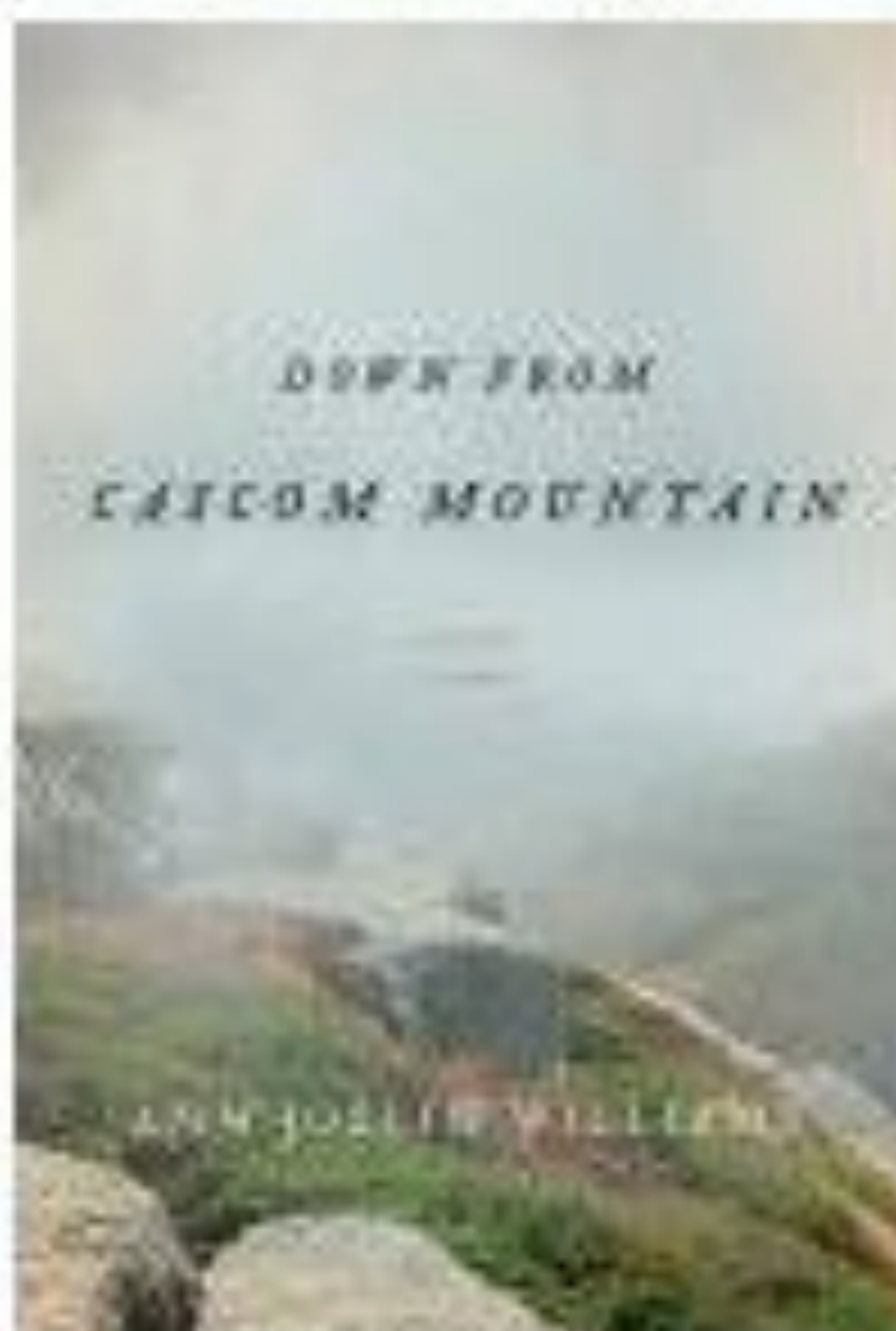
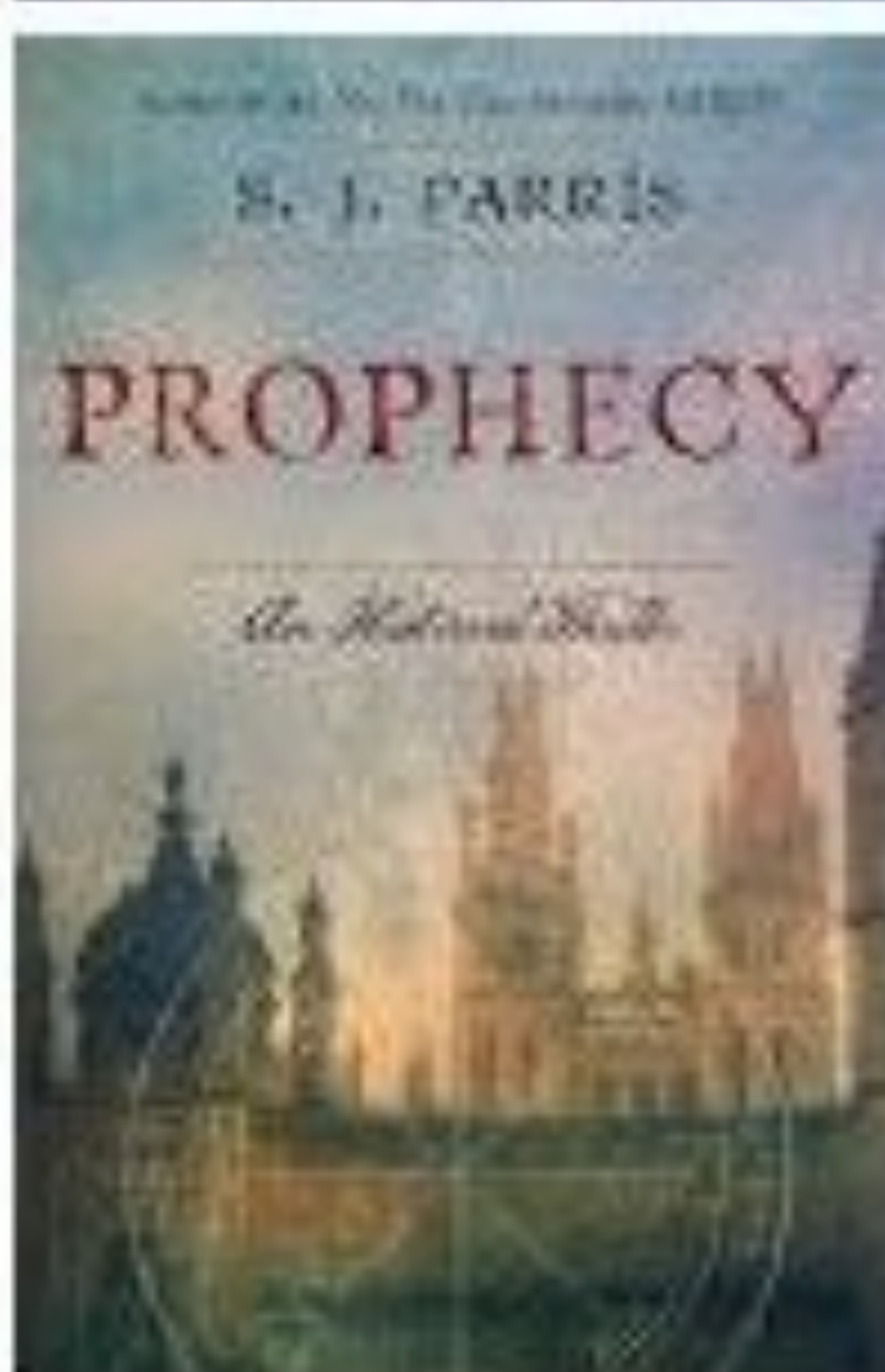
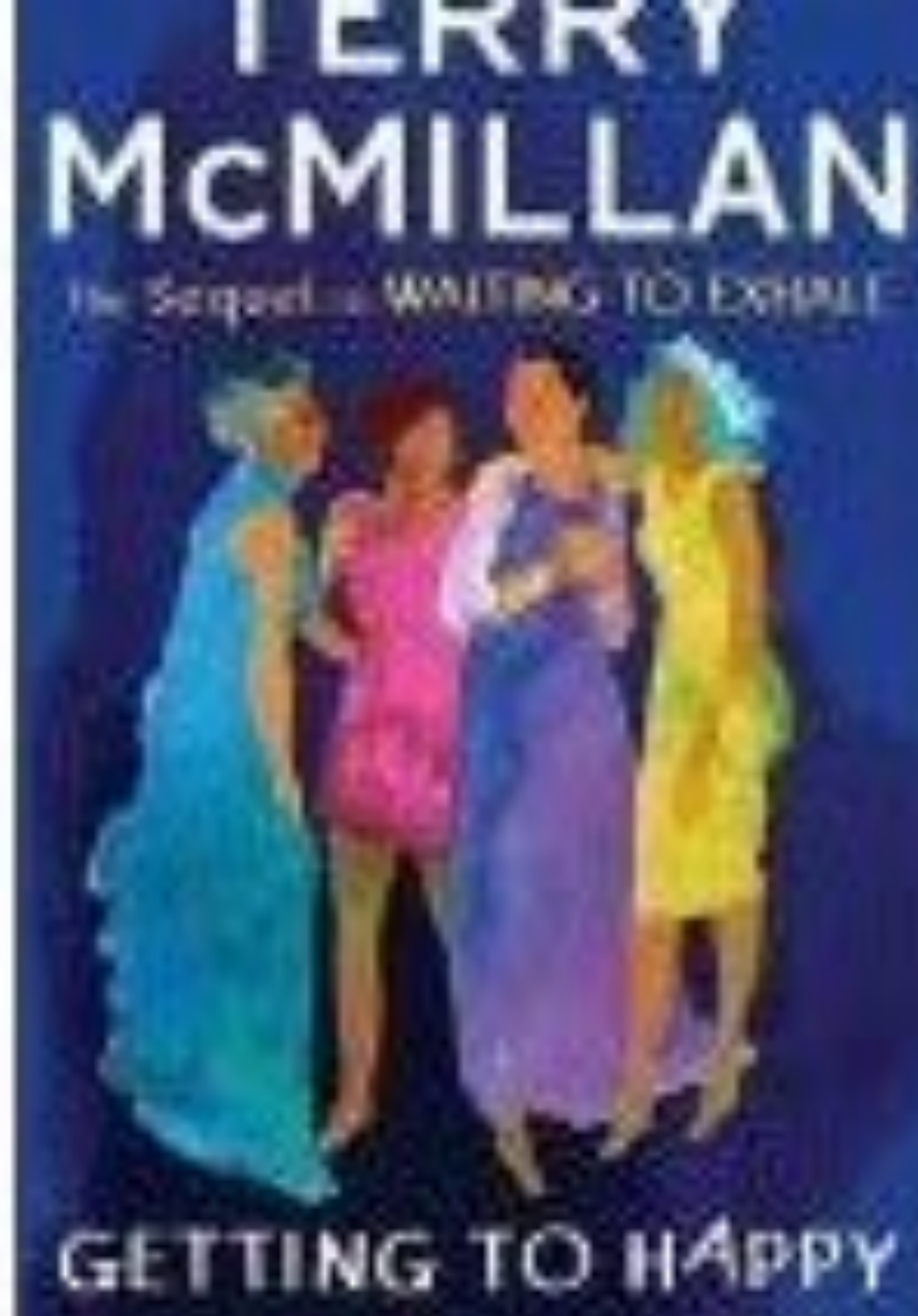
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The thrill of that evening with the book club was that the very questions I had posed for my characters, were the questions my readers were now posing for themselves. On the surface, my books are good reads because they entertain and provide escape—something we all need from time to time. But beneath the surface, these deeper issues swim patiently, waiting for a chance to surface.

At the end of the evening, I felt not only physically full, but emotionally and intellectually well-fed. The book we'd discussed that night happened to be one of mine, but the experience went far beyond the content available between the covers of the book. Indeed what had happened was the book had become a window into the heart.

Thanks so much, Mara! Reading groups love to extend their book discussions outward to their lives and the world.

Bonus for Reading Group Choices Fans!

A Milford-Haven Single

Read When Hummers Dream, Mara's prequel to the first novel in her series. This is your chance to read the story before the story. . . .

also includes the Prologue and Chapter One of What the Heart Knows.

Praise for The Milford-Haven Novels

"In Mara Purl's books the writing is crisp and clean, the dialogue realistic, the scenes well described. I salute her ingenuity."

—Bob Johnson, Former Managing Editor, *The Associated Press*

Mara Purl pioneered small-town fiction for women with her popular and critically acclaimed *Milford-Haven Novels*. Her beloved fictitious town has been delighting audiences since 1992, when it first appeared as Milford-Haven, U.S.A.©—the first American radio drama ever licensed and broadcast by the BBC. The show reached an audience of 4.5 million listeners throughout the U.K.

Early editions of Mara's novels have won fifteen gold and finalist literary awards including the Benjamin Franklin, the Indie Excellence, the USA Book News Best Book, and the ForeWord Book of the Year. Mara's other writing credits include plays, screenplays, scripts for Guiding Light, cover stories for *Rolling Stone*, staff writing with the *Financial Times* (of London), and the *Associated Press*. She is the co-author (with Erin Gray) of *Act Right*.

As an actress, Mara was "Darla Cook" on *Days Of Our Lives*. She was named one of twelve Women of the Year by the Los Angeles County Commission for Women.

Learn more about [Mara and Milford-Haven](#).

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