

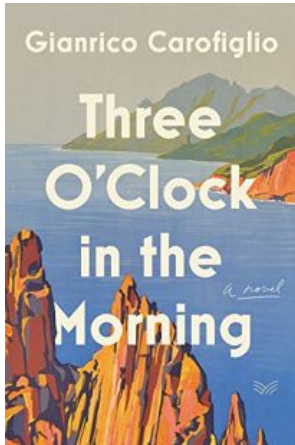
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★ Three O'Clock in the Morning

Gianrico Carofiglio. Harpervia, \$25.99 (192p) ISBN 978-0-06-302844-9

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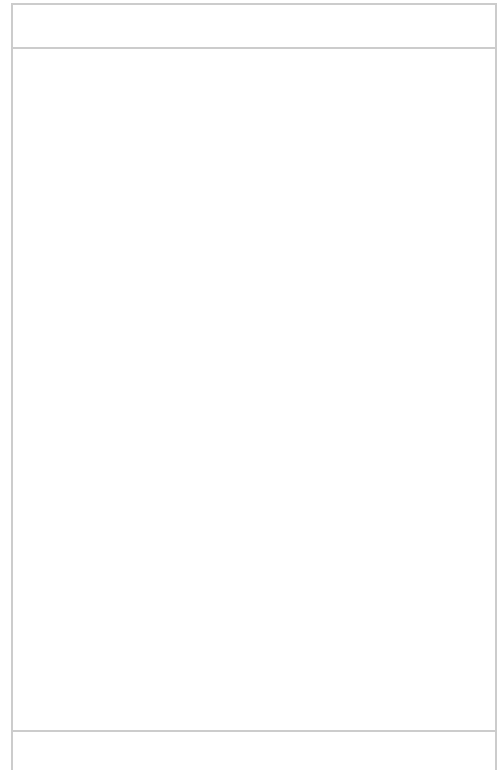
Former Italian senator and prosecutor Carofiglio (*A Fine Line*) takes a break from his Guido Guerrieri crime series with this poignant and moving father/son story. Antonio, an Italian 18-year-old whose parents are separated, is largely estranged from his father; he suffers bouts of epilepsy and, having endured years of failed treatments, is told by a specialist in Marseilles that he may be able to be cured. First, though, the doctor must test how Antonio's brain reacts to stress. To that end, Antonio is ordered to not sleep for two days, and he spends the 48 hours awake in the city, accompanied by his father. He asks his dad about a scar, which leads to a how-I-met-your-mother story, and a dazzling episode, set in a jazz club, has Antonio marveling at his father playing piano on stage. Then the pair talk about mathematics and magical thinking, and after they visit a porno shop his father recounts visiting a brothel. They eventually get invited to a party where Antonio has a transformative experience. The father and son's odyssey through the gritty streets of Marseilles is laced with many memorable details, such as the single-file pack of dogs that reminds Antonio of the *Abbey Road* cover, and Carofiglio shines with vivid descriptions of Antonio's epilepsy fits ("I had a bedspread that was light blue, almost sky blue. All at once that pale, relaxing colour grew threatening...and went right through me with a violence that was unreal"). Antonio's catalog of intimate experiences, whether painful, pleasurable, or bittersweet, make for an enchanting coming-of-age tale. *Agent: David Forrer, InkWell Management. (Mar.)*

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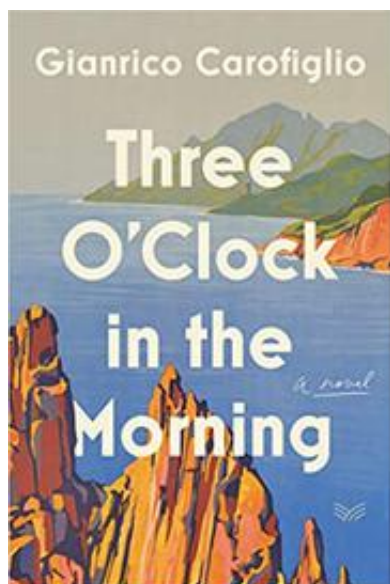
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THREE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING

by [Gianrico Carofiglio](#) ; translated by [Howard Curtis](#)

Pub Date: March 16th, 2021

Publisher: HarperVia/HarperCollins

A father and son explore Marseilles without sleep.

This is a novel of a specific time and place that makes you sorry and even a little melancholy to leave that time and place behind. The time is 1983. The place is the grimy but lovely French port city of Marseille. Here we find a father and his 18-year-old son, Antonio, passing, by doctor's orders, two

sleepless nights as they wait to see if Antonio's epilepsy has subsided. Like many fathers and sons, they have left much unsaid over the years: regrets, recriminations, affections, secrets. In language plain and graceful, presented in a svelte translation from the Italian by Curtis, Carofiglio quietly lays their souls bare in allowing them to see each other as human beings for the first time. They walk through sketchy neighborhoods, they indulge in wine and coffee, they see some jazz, they swim in the sea, and they visit a bohemian party. Their primary task is simple: Don't fall asleep. Instead they walk and they talk—about love, about mathematics (Dad's speciality), about food, about philosophy, about life. Slowly, without fanfare, they reveal themselves. Here's Antonio, near the end of their odyssey: "Two nights without sleep weaken you, slow down your reflexes, blur your vision, but they give you a very subtle, precise sense of what really matters." That subtle precision informs every page, as does a deceptive simplicity laden with all that happens when you're not paying attention. The novel takes place in a sort of eternal present, a time when all senses are awake. The title comes from a quote by F. Scott Fitzgerald: "In a real dark night of the soul it is always three o'clock in the morning." Here those dark nights arrive with shimmering, unforced beauty, filling the pages with jagged moonlight like the finest neorealist film.

A journey by foot: crisp, lean, yet quietly mournful.

Booklist

Advanced Review – Uncorrected Proof

Issue: November 1, 2020

Three O’Clock in the Morning.

By Gianrico Carofiglio

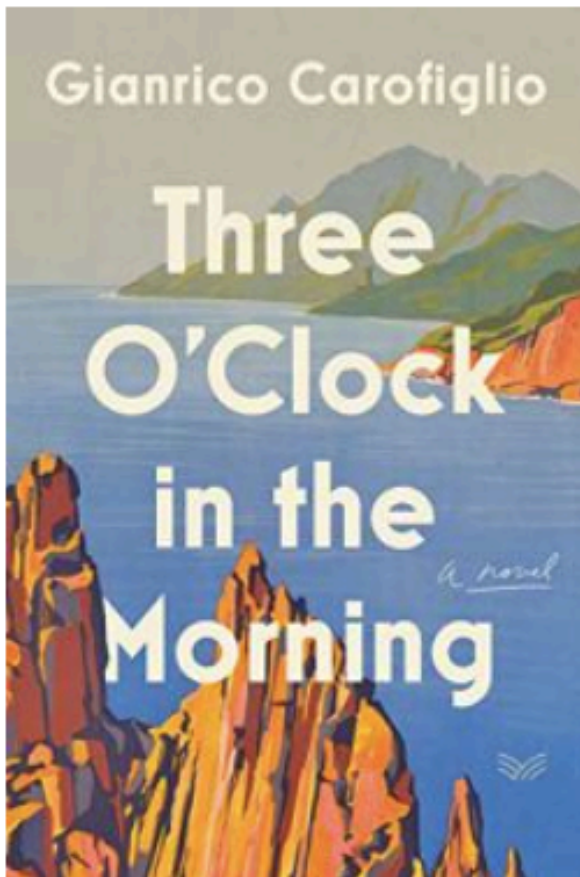
Mar. 2021. 192p. HarperVia, \$25.99 (9780063028449); e-book, \$12.99 (9780063028456)

Having been diagnosed with epilepsy, 18-year-old Antonio and his father travel from their Italian home to Marseille for a consultation with a specialist, who pronounces Antonio cured if he can pass a final test: he must stay awake for 48 hours. Despite Antonio’s demurrals, his father elects to stay awake with him, and together the two contrive a schedule of sorts that, among other things, will take them to a late-night jazz club, where—to Antonio’s delight—his father plays the piano. The two then go to a party where Antonio loses his virginity to his 37-year-old hostess. Despite the importance of these events, it is the conversations between son and father that are the real substance of this slender novel from Italy, for, as Antonio thinks, “I had never really talked to my father.” Happily, their subsequent conversations are enlightening for both of them. Antonio tells the story in his own unadorned first-person voice from his perspective as a 51-year-old adult, a fact that adds wisdom to this absorbing novel of filial bonding.

— *Michael Cart*

PW Picks: Books of the Week, March 15, 2021

Mar 12, 2021



Three O'Clock in the Morning

Gianrico Carofiglio. Harpervia, \$25.99 (192p) ISBN 978-0-06-302844-9

Former Italian senator and prosecutor Carofiglio (*A Fine Line*) takes a break from his Guido Guerrieri crime series with this poignant and moving father/son story. Antonio, an Italian 18-year-old whose parents are separated, is largely estranged from his father; he suffers bouts of epilepsy and, having endured years of failed treatments, is told by a specialist in Marseilles that he may be able to be cured. First, though, the doctor must test how Antonio's brain reacts to stress. To that end, Antonio is ordered to not sleep for two days, and he spends the 48 hours awake in the city, accompanied by his father. He asks his dad about a scar, which leads to a how-I-met-your-mother story, and a dazzling episode, set in a jazz club, has Antonio marveling at his father playing piano on stage. Then the pair talk about mathematics and magical

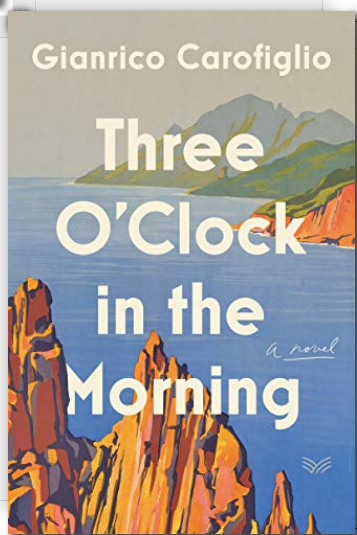
thinking, and after they visit a porno shop his father recounts visiting a brothel. They eventually get invited to a party where Antonio has a transformative experience. The father and son's odyssey through the gritty streets of Marseilles is laced with many memorable details, such as the single-file pack of dogs that reminds Antonio of the *Abbey Road* cover, and Carofiglio shines with vivid descriptions of Antonio's epilepsy fits ("I had a bedspread that was light blue, almost sky blue. All at once that pale, relaxing colour grew threatening...and went right through me with a violence that was unreal"). Antonio's catalog of intimate experiences, whether painful, pleasurable, or bittersweet, make for an enchanting coming-of-age tale.

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Three O'Clock in the Morning: A Novel



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Reviewed by: [Claire Fullerton](#)

"Gianrico Carofiglio's *Three O'Clock in the Morning* is profound in its simple delivery."

A compelling, compact story whose focus transpires in forty-eight hours, Gianrico Carofiglio's *Three O'Clock in the Morning* explores a father and son relationship as the pair explore the coastal town of Marseilles. Seventeen-year-old Antonio is the only son of divorced, Italian parents. In high school and living with his mother, his rapport with his 51-year-old father is distant and strained until fate inexplicably intervenes in a manner that throws father and son together.

There's no arguing with a specialist's orders, unconventional as they may be, and when Antonio's episodic dizzy spells come one too many, father and son travel from Italy to Marseilles for an expert opinion, and heed the instructions of one Dr. Gastaut, who suggests an unorthodox remedy. A "privation test," in which Antonia stays awake for two consecutive nights might be the key, and father and son accept the last-ditch effort as the means to Antonio's final diagnosis. It's a question of stressing Antonio's unpredictable epileptic symptoms, in the interest of determining if they're idiopathic. What the estranged mathematician father and diffident son have in common is unknown, until their enforced companionship positions them to find out.

Their relationship is a work in progress. When Antonio's father declares he'll stay awake for the duration as an act of solidarity, the wheels of change begin. In devising an agenda centered on whiling away 48 hours, they check into an unremarkable hotel, and take to Marseilles' streets with no objective beyond keeping awake. Antonio remarks, "Out on the street, we looked each other in the eyes, and I had the feeling that this was the first time we'd ever done that." He ponders the awkward silence, in play for years now, between himself and his unreadable father, "If anyone had asked him about his relationship with his only child, my father would certainly have spoken

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of a silent hostility that had grown with time, that he couldn't understand and toward which he didn't know how to behave."

Because Antonio has long assumed a remote stance toward his mathematics professor father, whom he thinks was the catalyst of his parents' divorce, his world shifts when his father confesses the divorce left him with a broken heart. "I'd always taken it for granted that it had been my father, but now many beliefs on which I'd based my own sense of identity—who I was, why I was the way I was, and whose fault it was—were losing their solidity, becoming elusive, suggesting other things." Antonio is caught off guard by his father's ready candor as they discover a new dynamic. "He seemed pleased to be able to tell me anecdotes and explain things. Above all, he seemed pleased by the fact that I was letting him. It hadn't happened since I was a child."

Gianrico Carofiglio's precise, economic language is insightful to the point that this poignant story's setting is secondary, save for the unfamiliar sense that dodgy parts of Marseilles are not intended for tourists, and therefore, father and son have the impression they're up against the secrets of this French, coastal town together.

In restaurants, a trip to the beach, and by invitation to a local's party, Antonio's carapace of resentment is incrementally cracked, and a bridge to intimacy becomes possible. In a seedy, after hours jazz club, where Antonio discovers his father's hidden talent, he witnesses the artistic side of his cerebral father and sees him in new light. Hour by hour, father and son come to know each other. They compare notes on coming of age, mathematics, and finding one's place in the world. When the two discuss the finer points of literature, the conversation turns to the writing of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Antonio's father remarks, "There's a sentence of his I often think about: 'In a real dark night of the soul it is always three o'clock in the morning.'"

Antonio would like the weekend to go on forever. Toward the end, he says to his father, "There isn't anything that's not been strange in the last two days." "You're right," his father says. "We'll have a few stories to tell." Antonio reflects upon the weekend and comes to the realization: "I didn't want it to be over, I wanted to stay suspended at the point where I was, on the borderline, the exact point between before and after."

Gianrico Carofiglio's *Three O'Clock in the Morning* is profound in its simple delivery. In 48 hours, a father and son come to know each other by talking and really listening.

Claire Fullerton's most recent novels are *Little Tea* and multiple award winner, *Mourning Dove*. Honors include the Independent Book Publishers Book Award Silver Medal for Regional Fiction, the Reader's Favorite for Southern Fiction Bronze Medal and various other literary awards.

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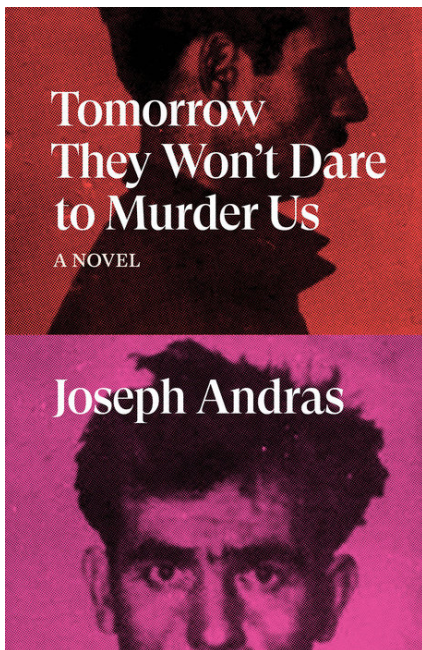


Rabbit Island

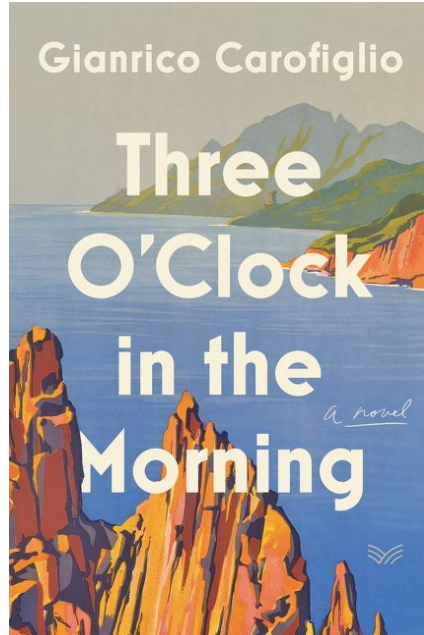
Stories set in dingy hotel rooms, shape-shifting cities and graveyards try to make sense of neglected interior lives, the failure of institutions and the death of God.

By Elvira Navarro. Translated from the Spanish by Christina MacSweeney. Available February 9 from Two Lines Press.

FRANCE



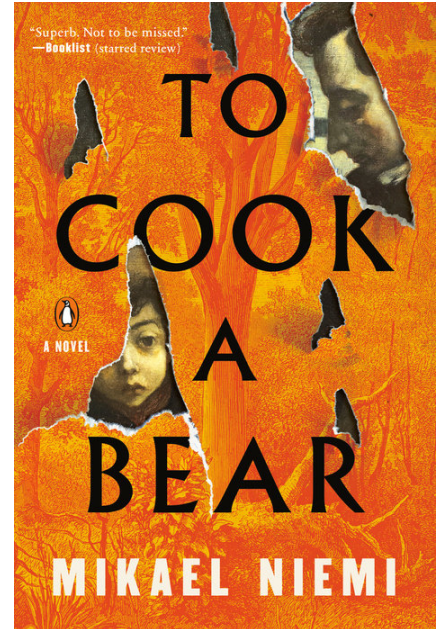
Tomorrow



Three O'Clock in the Morning

A father and son are forced to spend two sleepless nights exploring Marseilles, eventually reconnecting over poetry, death and redemption.

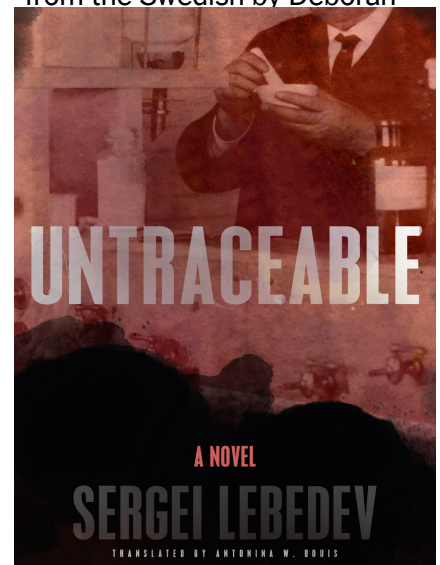
By Gianrico Carofiglio. Translated from the Italian by



To Cook a Bear

When a maid is found dead in the forest and another is severely injured, a runaway and a pastor try to track down the murderer.

By Mikael Niemi. Translated from the Swedish by Deborah



Untraceable

At the brink of the Soviet

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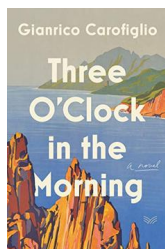
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Three O'Clock in the Morning

A Novel

by [Gianrico Carofiglio](#)



Critics' Opinion:

Published:

Mar 2021, 192 pages

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Book Reviewed by:
[Rebecca Foster](#)

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by Mary Choi

Mary H.K. Choi's young adult offering Yolk deftly maintains several plotlines running through the ...

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BookBrowse:

A father and his teenage son have a rare opportunity to get to know each other during a few days in France.

The quotation that gives Gianrico Carofiglio's tender novel its title is from F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Crack-Up*: "In a real dark night of the soul it is always three o'clock in the morning." It lends an appropriate sense of time suspended, of earnest seeking and extreme circumstances: The main action of the book takes place over just a few days in June of 1983, when teenage Antonio and his father are stranded in Marseilles. The gift of this time outside of time allows them to get to know each other better, such that the memory of the trip will be precious to Antonio even decades later.

Looking back from 2017, Antonio recalls that he first had episodes of sensory overload and fainting at age seven. After his parents separated when he was nine, he lived with his mother and rarely saw his father. He was eventually diagnosed with idiopathic generalized epilepsy. Doctors advised him to avoid all stimulation, from crowded places to soda. Seizures would occasionally land him in the hospital, but his mother had him tell his classmates that he had



Readers Recommend



The Funny Thing About Norman Foreman
by Julietta Henderson

A charming, uplifting debut about a mother and her 12-year-old son, an aspiring comedian.

[Reader Reviews](#)

fallen and gotten a concussion — epilepsy was surrounded by a whiff of stigma.

When in 1980 the chance arose for Antonio to be seen by an epilepsy specialist in Marseilles, his parents leapt to take advantage of it, accompanying him to the Centre Saint-Paul. After many tests, Professor Henri Gastaut cut Antonio down to one medication and said he would see him again in three years. He reassured the teenager that epilepsy seemed to be associated with creativity: Geniuses from Aristotle to Dostoevsky were said to have had it.

After the three years have passed, the family receives word that Professor Gastaut is due to retire soon and would like to reassess Antonio's condition. This time Antonio is accompanied by just his father. When they arrive in Marseilles, they are surprised to hear that the professor wants Antonio to go off his medication and stay awake for the next 40 hours or more to see what happens to his brain. So the father and son extend their short stay and go off to buy two days' clothing, wondering how they will pass so many hours in a strange city.

To start with, they seek out the usual tourist sights — visiting a famous church, taking a boat trip to the cliffs and having a picnic on the beach within sight of the island where *The Count of Monte Cristo* opens. They later bounce between restaurants, bars and a late-night jazz club. By the second evening, they've made acquaintances on the beach and are invited to a bohemian party replete with North African food and drug-taking. It's an eventful couple of days for Antonio, who is eager to have his first real sexual experience. I could imagine Woody Allen making a sparkling comedy like *Moonlight in Paris* with this material.

But it's in the quieter moments that Antonio and his father, a mathematics professor, make memories that will last a lifetime. Antonio realizes that he and his father have never really talked before. Now, with the hours stretching ahead of them, their conversations go deep and wide, ranging from their shared interest in numbers to how Antonio's parents met at college. Carofiglio often steps back in these moments, offering less in the way of narration and allowing the dialogue to shine, showing the characters' relationship building naturally through discussion and observation of body language.

While some readers probably prefer their fiction to cover a larger canvas, I appreciated how the limited time and place heightened this short novel's emotions. The focus on just a few days makes every incident stand out, authentically reproducing what it's like to spend time in a different country: When everything is new, your senses are intensified and it feels like time slows down. Carofiglio invites readers to peer between the leisurely progression of events to see the bond that is being formed.

I enjoyed discovering a new-to-me author in this translation by Howard Curtis thanks to HarperVia (see [Beyond the Book](#)), and I'd recommend *Three O'Clock in the Morning* for a weekend's armchair traveling or for pre-Father's Day reflection on the roles fathers play in their children's lives. As Antonio explains, "Two nights without sleep weaken you, slow down your reflexes, blur your vision, but they give you a very subtle, precise sense of what really matters." This offbeat, nostalgic work reminds us of the things that are most important in life.

Reviewed by [Rebecca Foster](#)



This review is from the *Three O'Clock in the Morning*. It will run in the April 21, 2021 issue of BookBrowse Recommends.

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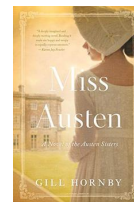
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The Widow Queen
by Elzbieta Cherezinska

The epic story of an 11th century Polish queen whose life and name were all but forgotten

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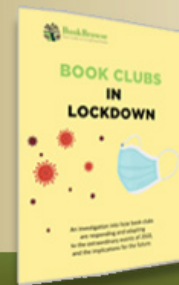
Miss Austen
by Gill Hornby

A witty, poignant novel about Cassandra Austen and her famous sister, Jane.

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