

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
J.T. ELLISON



Time to preorder, virtual bookstore tour, and a delicious sauce

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Hello GentleReader,

I've always loved February. Growing up in Colorado, it was the height of snow season, so there a lot of sledding and skiing and ice skating. After I moved to DC, those outdoor pursuits decreased rapidly, and by the time I was able to try ice skating again, whilst dating Mr. Ellison, I nearly broke an ankle. I fear, with the advent of crappy knees and a middle-age back, that my skiing days are behind me, too.

But February. Such a quirky little month, with its foreshortened fourth week and elusive day 29. From the Omen Days between Christmas and Epiphany to the ancient, now defunct leap month Mercedonius, calendars have been in our blood for millennia. I admit to having three physical calendars--one I build myself in my bullet journal and two wall calendars: one with scenes from Colorado, one from artist George Rodrigue featuring his muse Blue Dog. That's in addition to my online calendar. I'm a big fan of the minimalistic look of iCal on my Mac. I use emoji to denote events, and color code personal, business, and book dates. It's just as quirky as dear old February and I love it.

It's fitting that Mercedonius is Latin for Work Month, because that's what February is for me. The launch of *HER DARK LIES* March 9 means there's lots of work to be done, podcasts to be taped, essays to be written. I finished the short story that was due and turned it in--you'll be able to see that later this year in the anthology from *Suspense Magazine*. And I have a HUGE surprise for you that I can't WAIT to talk about. Not to tease, but stay tuned...

2021 is shaping up to be a good year. Though we're still sequestered in the house, the rhythms of our days are shaped, and the frantic, gnawing feeling of "must unpack more boxes" is gone. I read some great books in January, and have a stack hanging out on the library ladder stairs that is ready to be tackled. And of course, there's the next book to be finished. Always the next book to be finished.

HER DARK LIES Virtual Bookstore Tour

March 8

Parnassus Books

4 pm PST/6 pm CST/7 pm EST
in conversation with
Allison Brennan

March 9

Writer's Block Bookstore

4 pm PST/6 pm CST/7 pm EST
in conversation with
Lisa Gardner

March 10

Murder By The Book

5 pm PST/7 pm CST/8 pm EST
in conversation with
Helen Ellis

March 11

Mysterious Galaxy

7 pm PST/9 pm CST/10 pm EST
in conversation with
Lisa Unger

March 13

Page 158 Books

1 pm PST/3 pm CST/4pm EST



Mark your calendars! I'm coming to see you... in your living room! Look at how release week has shaped up! I can't wait to hang out with my brilliant friends Allison Brennan, Lisa Unger, Helen Ellis, and Lisa Gardner. These incredible women are going to shepherd me through release week and I could not be more grateful and excited. Many thanks to Parnassus Books, Writer's Block Bookstore, Murder By The Book, Mysterious Galaxy, and Page 158 Books for hosting us. It's going to be a blast! More details on my [Events page](#).

And it's time to get those pre-orders secured. This is a very important part of the release process and sends the signal to the publishers and libraries that you can't wait for the new book! I'd so appreciate you getting a copy ordered from wherever you like to shop, and I will be signing books for all the stores on tour, so be sure to call them first. MWUAH!

PREORDER, BABY!

ADD TO GOODREADS

□ What I'm Reading and Watching



[Before She Disappeared](#) by Lisa Gardner

A magnificent standalone from Lisa Gardner. If you haven't read her before, you can jump on the bandwagon here and trust me, you'll be delighted. Frankie is a fascinating character, an unofficial PI, a woman with a burning desire to find the missing that the rest of the world have given up on, at all cost. Totally worth your time.

[Do No Harm](#) by Christina McDonald

Christina McDonald has a real talent for bringing suburban domestic suspense to life, and showcases it to great effect in DO NO HARM. Tense, taut, and absolutely unmissable, you'll find yourself wondering how far YOU would go to save your child's life.

[The Mystery of Mrs. Christie](#) by Marie Benedict

A fun, insightful look into the mysterious disappearance of Agatha Christie, I admit I did get the sense that our lady Agatha was looking for myriad ways to murder her husband. You'd do well to make sure you've read Christie's first few novels to get the full effect of this glorious story of a writer finding herself and her art.

[Hidden Valley Road](#) by Robert Kolker

This was a tough but fascinating read about the Galvin family. Of their 12 children, six were diagnosed with schizophrenia. Kolker's compassionate storytelling and scientific accuracy make this a must read.

[Spinning Out](#) on Netflix

Thematically linked, this is the story of an Olympic-caliber figure skater who is struggling after a terrible fall. It deals with mental illness and PTSD and the sacrifices professional athletes have to make – plus, ice skating! A superb show.

□ Writers On Writing



This month's question – What are some good resources to begin plotting a novel?

JT: I love this question, because I guarantee we're going to get some very diverse answers. Which should be your first takeaway: there are no rules, only what works for you. So, I've been using several "tools" for plotting my books, especially because I don't like to plot, I'm more of a pantsers—flying by the seat of my pants. I've realized that I can skip an outline for a series book, but a standalone must have some kind of plan or I can get lost in the weeds. Instead of an outline, I start by writing up 40 scenes, and I've found [Story Planner](#) is a wonderful tool for this. I can do topline or granular as I need. It exports into [Scrivener](#), too, which is a big plus. I also use [Scapple](#) for simple brainstorming. This is a tool from the makers of Scrivener, Literature and Latte, and it's great for non-linear thinking. But how do you come up with 40 scenes, you ask? That's going to be different for everyone, but for me, I like to let the movie reel flow in my head. I'm a visual writer, and I like to hear my characters, see how they walk, move, dress. Sometimes it's as little as X and Y in the kitchen having a fight over breakfast. Sometimes it's more dialogue-driven, a line I've heard them say. Again, no rules. The "scenes" don't have to all look the same or be in any particular order. You can fix that in the mix. Ladies? How about you?

Patti: Such a huge question with so many paths, literally hundreds of paths to a plot. When I first started writing, I wanted one answer. I wanted the secret. THE secret. Well, there isn't one. I plot in a couple different ways, but I'll talk about my most recent because it's what I am writing now. When I write a historical novel about a very real person set in a very real time, their plot and life give me a beginning scaffolding. But only a scaffolding. All the rest – the plot – comes from the character's desires, emotional journey and transformation. Through the years, I've discovered that I need to know this, or as much as I can know, before I even set down the scenes. Everything in the plot will grow from this character's desires. There are a number of books I love about plotting but the two that I turn to again and again are [STORY GENIUS](#) by Lisa Cron and [THE ANATOMY OF STORY](#) by John Truby. Like, J. T. I have started writing in Scrivener

and this has helped tremendously in seeing the overall arc of the plot when I get lost in the weeds! Which I do and I will. Now plot on!

Ariel: I approach plotting a novel the way I once approached shopping for a wedding dress: I stopped looking when I found the one that worked for me. (Otherwise I'll go crazy trying to chase that mythical unicorn—a resource that will make the writing process sparkly and effortless). In my case the perfect plotting tool came in the form of John Truby's book, [THE ANATOMY OF STORY: 22 Steps to Becoming A Master Storyteller](#). I love it so much, in fact, that I buy a new copy every time I start a novel. That way my notes and ideas from the previous novel don't seep their way into the new one subconsciously. Truby does not provide a fill-in-the-blanks approach. Instead he teaches you how to build your unique story from the ground up, starting at Premise and moving all the way through Characters and Setting and Theme and Plot, right into Scenes and Dialogue. It's a holistic approach to storytelling and it works very well for me. Be warned, however, that it is not easy. You will feel as though you have melted your brain by the end. But the end result is worth every headache and drop of sweat. You'll have a story you're proud of. And that's no small thing.

I really do have brilliant friends. Interested in more from Ariel and Patti? Sign up for their newsletters!

ARIEL LAWHON

PATTI CALLAHAN HENRY

👩👩👩 February Recipe: Beurre Blanc



Let's talk about sauces. Growing up, I was enamored of the hollandaise sauce that came with my father's steak. It was a special occasion sauce, reserved for birthdays and anniversaries. It's no wonder I never even considered trying to make it—that glorious concoction was reserved for the chefs of fine restaurants. Fast forward to the pandemic, and no restaurants to enjoy

delightful sauces. I ventured out on my own, and here's my favorite so far, a simple, easy Beurre Blanc from Epicurious, with a few adjustments from me. I've been putting it over steak, fish, shrimp, veggies, anything I can drizzle it on to make a regular meal into something truly special.

SAUCE IT TO ME!

You can find all of my recipes [here](#). And if you want some wine to go with the meals, [The Wine Vixen](#) has you covered.

A reminder: Everyone who opens the newsletter is automatically entered to win a **\$30 gift card** to the bookstore of your choice. It's my way of saying thanks for being here. Congrats to last month's winner: Jami B!

That's all for now! I'll see you next month to celebrate the release of HER DARK LIES!

peace and hugs,



PS: Do you get my blog posts in your inbox? Sign up for as it releases (usually once or twice a week), as a weekly digest, or by RSS feed. You should also join my Facebook book group, **the Literati**.

DAILY

WEEKLY

RSS FEED



Are you still here?

Here are some kittens for your troubles.



Did you like this month's newsletter? Share it with a friend!



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