Books

6 New Books by Columbia Authors

From Jenny Slate ’04CC, Amanda Lee Koe ’17SOA, and other alumni and faculty.

By
Rebecca Shapiro
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LifeForm

By Jenny Slate ’04CC

The pandemic changed daily life for most people. But for comedian Jenny Slate, it brought another world-altering event: the birth of her daughter, Ida. In this zany essay collection — imbued with Slate’s offbeat humor — she writes about the surreality of new parenthood in an already surreal time. While there is plenty of focus on the new member of her family, Slate does not lose sight of herself, or of her life outside motherhood. Rather, she writes, it’s a story about “making a lifeform while being a lifeform.”

The Sun Won’t Come Out Tomorrow

By Kristen Martin ’16SOA

In American pop culture, the idea of orphanhood has long been romanticized. Orphans are plucky, adventurous, able to pull themselves up by their bootstraps (see *Little Orphan Annie* and *The Boxcar Children*). But for most orphans, the reality has been much darker. In her first book, Kristen Martin — herself a “full orphan,” meaning that both her parents died when she was a child — traces the history of American orphanhood from the 1800s to the present. Her impeccably researched account is eye-opening and tragic, illuminating how religious extremism and racism, among other factors, determined the welfare of generations of children.

Doctor, Will You Pray for Me?

By Robert L. Klitzman

Religion and medicine have always been linked, but that relationship has grown complicated as our society has become increasingly divided along religious lines. In his latest book, Columbia psychiatrist and bioethicist Robert L. Klitzman explores the role of the chaplaincy in modern medicine, using his experience as both a doctor and a grieving family member to explain how spirituality can be an important part of healing and end-of-life decision-making. It’s an important examination of an often overlooked aspect of the medical world.

Sister Snake

By Amanda Lee Koe ’17SOA

The ancient Chinese legend of the white snake tells of two snakes who vow to be sisters forever, so when one wants to transform into a human, the other reluctantly agrees to do the same. In her darkly comic third novel, Amanda Lee Koe imagines what life would be like for these women more than a thousand years into immortality. Emerald’s and Su’s twenty-first-century worlds couldn’t be more different: Su is the wealthy wife of a conservative politician in Singapore, while Emerald is partying her days away in Brooklyn. But an impulsive mistake brings the pair back together, and now Su has to keep Emerald from revealing their long-kept secret. Koe deftly weaves together centuries of Chinese history and mythology with contemporary themes about race, gender, and sexuality, resulting in a fun read with plenty of substance.

Havoc

By Christopher Bollen ’98CC

In a luxury hotel just a bit past its prime, on the banks of the Nile, “long-termer” Maggie Burkhardt is up to no good. Since the deaths of her husband and daughter six years ago, the eighty-one-year-old has been enjoying extended stays at various resorts, where she entertains herself by breaking up what she decides are bad marriages. But when a young American woman shows up in Egypt with her wily eight-year-old son, Maggie may have met her match. Christopher Bollen is a devotee of Agatha Christie, who spent a memorable period of her life writing psychological thrillers in a grand Egyptian hotel, and his latest page-turner is a perfect tribute to her.

American Oasis

By Kyle Paoletta ’16SOA

The cities of the American Southwest — Albuquerque, Phoenix, Tucson, El Paso, and Las Vegas — are improbable success stories, rising out of America’s hottest, driest desert region. Now populations are increasing across the area, but so are temperatures. What can we learn from these sun-soaked metropolises? In his impressive first book, journalist and Albuquerque native Kyle Paoletta offers a detailed history of the five cities, places with rich immigrant and Indigenous cultures, unique traditions, and stunning natural beauty. He also looks toward a future that will undoubtedly be affected by climate change. Both a love letter and a warning, it’s a fascinating look at a complicated corner of our country.

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