A new year means new books, and every literary magazine or website has a list of books to watch in 2020. These literary fiction titles stand out and appear on multiple lists. Except for debut author Kate Elizabeth Russell, all are experienced award-winning authors. The first five are already in the Ocean State Library catalog, so place those holds!

**Long Bright River** by Liz Moore – January 7, 2020
The only police procedural in this group, *Long Bright River* is the story of two sisters on opposite sides of the law. Mickey Fitzpatrick, a Philadelphia police officer, doesn’t see her addict sister Kacey often, but when young street women start turning up dead, Mickey begins breaking protocol to find her.

**A Long Petal of the Sea** by Isabel Allende – January 21, 2020
Allende is at her best in this historical novel about refugees escaping the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s. Roser Bruguera, a young pregnant widow, and Victor Dalmau, throw their fortunes together and board a sanctuary ship full of refugees bound for Chile. Decades later, they are again involved in upheaval when Salvador Allende’s government is overthrown.

**Apeirogon** by Colum McCann – February 25, 2020
An ambitious novel by National Book Award Winner McCann, *Apeirogon* tells the story of two fathers. One is an Israeli, one a Palestinian. They share grief for the young daughters they have lost to the constant violence in the region and join forces to promote peace. The story is based on real people and is considered a remarkable achievement by critics; possibly McCann’s best book so far.

**My Dark Vanessa** by Kate Elizabeth Russell – March 10, 2020
Vanessa Wye is a 15-year old student at Browick, a girl’s prep school, when she is drawn into a relationship with her 42-year old English teacher, Jacob Strane. Fifteen years later, another Browick student accuses Strane publicly of sexual abuse and needs Vanessa to expose her own relationship to lend credence to Birch’s case. Only then does Vanessa question whether her relationship with Strane was a love story, as she always told herself, or a tragedy.

**The Glass Hotel** by Emily St. Jean Mandel – March 24, 2020
Vincent works as a bartender at a hotel in British Columbia, while her brother Paul is employed as the night houseman. Vincent falls for Jonathan Alkaitis, hotel owner and investment manager. They relocate to Manhattan and live a wealthy lifestyle, until Jonathan’s Ponzi scheme collapses and he is imprisoned. Fending for herself, Vincent takes a job as a cook on a container ship, disappearing between ports of call. The story follows Paul and Vincent and the choices they make, and Jonathan, who is visited in prison by the ghosts of the people whose lives he destroyed.

**Red Dress in Black and White** by Elliot Ackerman – May 26, 2020
This story takes place over the course of a day when an American woman, Catherine, tries to leave Turkey with her son, leaving her Turkish husband, Murat, behind. Murat uses his influence to request help from an American diplomat to prevent Catherine from leaving. His request backfires, by inviting scrutiny into his own life, exposing deception and corruption, revealing the secrets of many businessmen, expats and spies, living in the shadowy depths of a corrupt society.

Mary Anne
BOOK OF THE MONTH:
My Sister, the Serial Killer [Fiction; Thriller; Murder] by Oyinkan Braithwaite

Onyinkan Braithwaite has provided everything I love in a book: short chapters, witty writing, wicked deeds, and deadpan humor.

Set in Lagos, Nigeria, My Sister, The Serial Killer, is about a young woman named Korede who keeps covering for her sister, Ayoola. Turns out, Ayoola has an “inconvenient habit” of murdering her boyfriends.

The story is narrated by Korede, the “sensible sister,” who is protective to the extreme and yearns for a life and romance of her own. She’s a passive observer, whose response to the news of another murder is to shrug and gather the cleaning supplies. She’s not trying to break free of this cycle, and there’s a chilling casualness about her behavior.

For a serial killer, Ayoola is surprisingly childlike. She really doesn’t seem to understand the consequences of her actions, nor does she want to. She’s impulsive and self-centered, and hides behind her striking beauty to get her way.

It’s an interesting tale of morals vs loyalty, where our “heroine” is deeply flawed and somehow you find yourself worrying about the sisters being caught. It’s a quick read, not as violent as you’d think from the title, and it’s fun in a dark & offbeat way.

Jen

All Staff Picks are available through the Ocean State Libraries system.

Colleen

- The Only Woman in the Room by Marie Benedict [Biographical Fiction; Hedy Lamarr; Women Scientists]
- The Real Wallis Simpson: A New History of the American Divorcee Who Became the Duchess of Windsor by Anna Pasternak [Biography; Marriages of Royalty and Nobility]

Jayne

- The Body: A Guide for Occupants by Bill Bryson [Non-fiction; Human Anatomy; Anecdotes]
- Buddhism: An Introduction to the Buddha’s Life, Teachings, and Practices by Joan Duncan Oliver [Buddhism; Fundamentals]

Kristin

- The Stonewall Riots: Coming Out in the Streets by Gayle E. Pitman [Non-fiction; LGBTQ+ History; 1969]
- Strange Planet by Nathan W. Pyle [Graphic Novel; Humor; Extraterrestrial Beings]

Niles

- The Drillmaster of Valley Forge: The Baron De Steuben, the Making of the American Army by Paul Lockhart [Military History; Prussians; Continental Army]
- Fatal Purity: Robespierre and the French Revolution by Ruth Scurr [Biography; Revolutionaries; Reign of Terror]