his journey home. With muscular elegance, Matar demonstrates that hope can be a form of agony. —Bridget Thoreson

**Riverine: A Memoir from Anywhere but Here.**

By Angela Palm.


Palm’s *Riverine* is aptly subtitled “a memoir from anywhere but here.” Growing up in rural Indiana on land that was once the Kankakee River, she feels disconnected. Even her home is between two towns—her parents pay taxes to one, but she goes to school in the other. Learning of this peculiar bifurcation, young Angela thinks, “Nobody wants us,” that notion informing the rest of the book. She has difficulty finding her place in the world, and the one person she feels connected to, Corey, the boy next door, ends up in prison yet continues to remain a constant for her. She obsesses over their unrequited love and wonders how she still sees him as a good man even after the things he has done. In deliberate yet beautiful prose, Palm recounts how her childhood, even the land itself, has affected her. The book feels disjointed at times, a collection of essays rather than a memoir, but the individual pieces deliver moving meditations on how memories continue to affect one’s ever-changing personality, however far away we may move. —Kathy Sexton

**Shanghai Grand: Forbidden Love and International Intrigue in a Doomed World.**

By Taras Grescoe.


In the mid-1930s, Shanghai served as a cosmopolitan crossroads for a world about to spin out of control. Attracting freewheeling citizens from around the globe, prewar Shanghai was the temporary home of a colorful variety of expats, adventurers, criminals, businessmen, dissidents, spies, and journalists. One such journalist, who delighted in Shanghai in 1935, was the intrepid Emily “Mickey” Hahn. Beautiful, fearless, and eccentric, Hahn immersed herself in the whirlwind revolving around the sumptuous Cathay Hotel, owned and operated by real-estate tycoon Victor Sassoon, while filing exotic stories for the *New Yorker*. Swept up into a tempestuous affair with Chinese poet and publisher Zau Simnay, who introduced her to Shanghai’s cultural elite and the addictive pleasures and perils of opium, Hahn was not only a witness to but also an active participant in the frenetic last gasp of a lifestyle on the cusp of extinction. Grescoe (*Straphanger*, 2012) interweaves a cast of intriguing international characters into this seductive biography of a time, a place, a poet, and a girl. —Margaret Flanagan

**Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life.**

By Ruth Franklin.


When Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery” was published in the *New Yorker* in 1948, the response was a pen-paper-postage equivalent of going viral. Although Jackson wrote many more works of arresting literary suspense concerned with “cruelty and alienation,” as well as improbably enough, best-selling true-life domestic comedy (the forlorn, as critic Franklin notes, of today’s “mommy blogs”), she is generally remembered only for that singular tale. In her engrossing and enlightening foundational biography, Franklin redresses this unjust diminishing of Jackson’s extraordinary accomplishments, the final insult in a too-brief life poisoned by the selfishness of those closest to her—her harshly critical mother and her philandering husband, the literary critic Stanley Hyman. Franklin seamlessly combines the bitterly ironic story of Jackson’s demanding, self-destructive life—in which she strived for literary breakthroughs while supporting herself, Hyman, and their four children and running their hectic households, primarily in Vermont—with astute analysis of Jackson’s disquieting, darkly funny, profoundly subversive writings. With unprecedented access to private papers, Franklin traces the evolution of Jackson’s sensibility as a writer, building toward an ever-more nuanced understanding of the covert ways she deftly paired “the horrific with the mundane” to both express her own anger and pain while also illuminating the fears, anxiety, anti-Semitism, racism, and sexism of the conformity-obsessed Cold War era. A precise, revelatory, and moving reclamation of an American literary master. —Donna Seaman

**Some Enchanted Evenings: The Glittering Life and Times of Mary Martin.**

By David Kaufman.


She was the girl whose “heart belonged to Daddy” and the boy who would “never grow up.” She played everyone from Peter Pan to Nellie Forbush, Annie Oakley to Maria von Trapp. No matter who would step into those roles in subsequent years, their iconic interpretations belong to Mary Martin, the spirited spitfire with a voice as big as she was small. From Cole Porter to Rodgers and Hammerstein, composers wrote with Martin in mind, channeling her natural charm into audience-pleasing hits and launching a career that went from the big screen during Hollywood’s golden era to television during the small screen’s heyday of bringing live theatrical performance into the home. The Great White Way, however, was where Martin shone, a success that eclipsed the failures in her personal life, as both wife of the Svengali-like Richard Halliday and estranged mother of actor Larry Hagman. Kaufman’s treatment of Martin is evenhanded as he exposes her weaknesses and strengths to shed important new light on one of American musical theater’s most revered stars. —Carol Haggas

The Strange Career of William Ellis: The Texas Slave Who Became a Mexican Millionaire.

By Karl Jacoby.


William Ellis was born into slavery in Victoria, Texas, near the U.S.-Mexico border. During his relatively short life, he rubbed elbows with the most powerful men of his generation, including those within Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz’s inner circle and men within President Theodore Roosevelt’s coterie. He also traveled from Mexico City to Wall Street to Alabama to Ethiopia. Ellis found it useful to create an alter-ego, Guillermo Eliseo, a persona with a life story that shifted according to circumstances, as he passed as Mexican, Cuban, even Hawaiian. Through this trickster’s story, historian Jacoby (*Shadows at Dawn*, 2008) brings a welcome and nuanced perspective to the racial history of the U.S. as well as a textured examination of the legacy of distrust between the United States and Mexico. He demonstrates that “we inhabit a mestizo, mulatto America,” and shines light on the feeble construct of race and the inadequacy of facile analyses that continue to plague this country. Ellis’ life is also a cracking good story, illustrated with intriguing photos and helpful maps torn off by an emotionally satisfying epilogue. —Sara Martinez

**Threading My Prayer Rug: One Woman’s Journey from Pakistani Muslim to American Muslim.**

By Sabeeha Rehman.


The immigrant’s dilemma of retaining one’s identity while assimilating into American society is always a fascinating story. In this autobiography, readers experience Rehman’s transformation from a young woman in Pakistan to a Pakistani American in New York. In the process we see how she navigates American society, retains her identity and passes it on to her children and community, accepts becoming an American, modifies some of her traditions while manufacturing new ones, and enriches her own life and the lives of those around her—thus weaving her contribution into the fabric of America, and enriching the American tapestry. The narrative is conversational, as stories blend into one another. The nuances of immigrant life show readers the various shades of assimilation and self-identity—all at the same time, and in various degrees, depending on one’s values. Rehman’s personal journey is her own, but speaks broadly to all immigrant journeys in contemporary America. With so much discussion about Muslim immigrants in the national conversation, it’s good to have a story with this unique perspective. —Muhammad Hasanalil