

ian turned photographer, is having an affair with the owner of his gallery. Will's brother, Mitchell, a long-distance swimmer with "a name as recognizable as that of, say, Lance Armstrong or Tiger Woods," is estranged from the family. And ever since Will's 12-year-old son died three years ago in a boating accident, his wife, Carole, has been emotionally and sexually distant. All these wounds pucker open when Will attends his college reunion and runs into a statuesque ex-girlfriend who left him 25 years ago when she may or may not have been pregnant with his child. That past betrayal becomes entangled with the others in Will's life and leads to further transgressions and revelations. Given the steamy, soap-operatic nature of this plot, it's remarkable how Harrison renders it emotionally plausible, in sinuous, sensitive and often funny prose, exposing the raunchiness of sex and the "obscene" nature of mortality. Will's profession as an analyst seems too convenient—allowing Harrison to analyze her own novel through the voice of her main character—but this is a pardonable flaw in a book so juicy and intelligent. *Agent, Amanda Urban.* (July)

Submission

MARTHE BLAU, TRANS. FROM THE FRENCH BY HOWARD CURTIS. Atria, \$22 (256p) ISBN 0-7432-7104-1

Even the most slavish Francophiles will long for something a bit more substantial than the string of garter belts, dildoes and illicit sexual encounters on offer in this debut novel of sexual obsession set in Paris, a knockoff of *The Story of O*. Elodie is a young mother and successful lawyer whose deviant affair with a dominating colleague is allegedly based on the author's own experience. Summoned one night to the rooms of this curiously magnetic man, Elodie is transformed when he announces, "Nobody will ever treat you as I'm going to treat you," then proceeds to blindfold her, sodomize her with a mysterious foreign object and bring her to an "incredible, overwhelming" orgasm that leaves her panting for more. Then the trouble really begins for poor Elodie—for all her obedience and humiliation, a "penetrating

silence" is as close as she ever gets to actual penetration by the sadistic man she refers to as "Him." And though readers, for better or worse, will feel "the torture of waiting" almost as acutely as does his plaything, some will surely long for a dose of Houellebecq-ian philosophy to give these bleak encounters a little soul. As erotica, it titillates. But as literature, it feels unconsummated. (July)

First Love

ADRIENNE SHARP. Riverhead, \$23.95 (352p) ISBN 1-57322-310-7

Former ballerina Sharp presents a sentimental portrait of two ballet dancers, Sandra Ellis and Adam LaSalle, in her debut novel (after her collection *White Swan, Black Swan*). Best friends since the age of 15, Sandra and Adam become lovers in their 20s, by which point Adam has left Balanchine's New York City Ballet for starring roles with Baryshnikov's American Ballet Theater, while Sandra remains a loyal member of the corps. Sharp frames the novel, set in the '80s, with the fairy tale of "Sleeping Beauty," a story that Balanchine had in reality always wanted to choreograph but never fully did. Here, though, Sandra serves as the inspiration for Balanchine's staging of the tale: she catches his eye because of the passion Adam has awoken, and Balanchine plucks her from the corps to transform her into a principal dancer in the epic. But Sandra struggles to choose between her relationship with Adam and the total commitment and sacrifice she believes Balanchine requires. The point of view shifts between each corner of this triangle, often dragging with Adam and Sandra's inner monologues but sparkling with Balanchine's richly reimagined story. Sharp offers a detailed insider view of the ballet world, but her love story, though intelligently written, can mire in the maudlin. (July)

Looking for Peyton Place

BARBARA DELINSKY. Scribner, \$24.95 (368p) ISBN 0-7432-4644-6

With her mother deceased and her older sister suffering similar symptoms, successful 30-

something novelist Annie Barnes turns detective—Erin Brokovich-style—when she reluctantly returns to her "stifling, stagnant, and cruel" New Hampshire hometown of Middle River in Delinsky's diverting latest (after *The Summer I Dared*). A company town dominated by Northbrook Paper Mill, owned by the powerful Meades, Middle River's real claim to fame, according to Annie and other townspeople, is that it was the model for the once notorious best-seller *Peyton Place* by Grace Metalious. Annie's neighbors are equally sure that she's returned to dig up their dirt, and, like Metalious, write about it. Though Annie is less concerned with gossip than possible mercury poisoning, Metalious speaks to her from beyond the grave, egging her on in her investigation. The plucky heroine also begins a flirty e-mail conversation with a Deep Throat who calls himself "TrueBlue" and hints at Northbrook Mill's dark doings. And against all odds, handsome Meadeson James seems to be an ally in her environmental crusade. Readers with an appetite for light fare will find all the right ingredients—romance, mystery, suspense, sisterly rivalry and a thoroughly happy ending. (July)

Dearly Devoted Dexter

JEFF LINDSAY. Doubleday, \$22.95 (304p) ISBN 0-385-51124-8

Dexter the Demon, Dexter the Avenger—whatever he chooses to call himself, the hero of this intelligent, darkly humorous series knows he's a monster who loves slicing people into little pieces. That Dexter limits his killing to "acceptable" victims—usually other serial killers—is designed to keep the reader from having to worry too much about the morality of his avocation. Dexter's just added his 40th victim, a homicidal pedophile, and is eagerly looking ahead to number 41 when he becomes involved in a case through his job as a blood spatter analyst at the Miami-Dade police forensics lab. A man is found with "everything on [his] body cut off, absolutely everything"—a piece of work that makes Dexter's own tidy killings look like child's play. This madman, nicknamed Danco, spends weeks surgically