

ordiva

found in his previous books. Occasionally, a character is overdrawn, but this is nonetheless a delightful return to Harmony. (July)

### The End of California

STEVE YARBROUGH. Knopf, \$23.95 (288p) ISBN 1-4000-4438-3

Yarbrough returns to Loring, Miss. (setting of his acclaimed *Prisoners of War* and *Visible Spirits*), to examine the intersecting lives of two contemporary family men in this sensitive but powerful smalltown portrait of sex, religion and other human passions. Following an explosive sex scandal, successful physician Pete Barrington flees California, with wife Angela and their teenage daughter in tow, for the Southern town he left 25 years before. There he encounters Alan Depoyster, another native son, now managing a Piggly Wiggly and caring for a wife and teenager of his own. Alan, a devout Christian, holds a grudge from their high school days, when Alan's mother carried on an affair with Pete. Shortly thereafter, Alan's dad deserted them, and Pete escaped Loring on a Fresno State football scholarship. As circumstances bring the Barringtons and Depoysters closer, and evidence of Pete and Angela's continuing sexual indiscretions come to light, rage and jealousy lead Alan to shocking measures, setting up the book's suspenseful, shattering second half. Yarbrough gives each character in his slow-burning drama the complex emotional scars of broken marriage and, more importantly, the space and voice with which to explore them. (June)

### ★ Sufficient Grace

DARNELL ARNOULT. Free Press, \$23 (320p) ISBN 0-7432-8447-X

In her moving debut novel, Arnoult chronicles a Southern middle-aged wife and mother's descent into schizophrenia and the two families—one white, one black—transformed by her. When Gracie Hollaman goes missing, her husband, Ed, is convinced she's left him—but in fact, Gracie has left herself, at the behest of disembodied voices, for a hallucinatory world

“[i]n the narrow space between what is real and what is not.” Gracie wanders into the small African-American town of Rock-run and is taken into the bustling household of Mama Toot and Mattie, a mother and her widowed daughter-in-law beset by grief. Compulsive and adamant, Gracie clings to painting rituals and the voices in her head, defying her family's attempts to reclaim her after Toot tracks them down: “‘My circle's closing. I need to be the ex-wife.’” The circle Gracie refers to finds expression throughout the book—one circle must be closed before another can begin—as each character learns how to say good-bye to her old life and begin anew. In brisk scenes, Arnoult's rhythmic prose beautifully reveals the human potential for unconditional love and faith, and wholly convinces us—despite the heartache her mental illness causes—of Gracie's essential wisdom and worthiness. (June)

### The Wrong Hostage

ELIZABETH LOWELL. Morrow, \$24.95 (320p) ISBN 0-06-082981-8

A mother's worst nightmare of an endangered child is just one breathless element of Lowell's latest romantic thriller (after *Always Time to Die*). Newly divorced California judge Grace Silva discovers her billionaire ex-husband, Ted Franklin, is missing, after she's summoned to the exclusive Mexican prep school where her 15-year-old computer whiz son, Lane, is being held hostage. Ted has crossed Hector Rivas Osuna, the ruthless kingpin of the most violent crime family in Tijuana, and Grace learns that Lane will be killed if she doesn't turn over the millions Ted has stolen from Osuna. She seeks the help of Joe Faroe, an ex who predated Ted and who may be Lane's biological father; Joe works for an elite private investigation firm. Lowell's convincing depiction of the Mexican drug trade illuminates the dangerous intersection of her characters' personal lives with international politics and organized crime. Events unfold in a maze of talk and double-talk, but the payoff is solid as the family reunites, finding that both love and the price of freedom are nonnegotiable. (June)

### The Last Assassin

BARRY EISLER. Putnam, \$24.95 (352p) ISBN 0-399-15359-4

Japanese-American assassin John Rain would like to get out of the killing business in his fifth action-filled outing (after 2005's *Killing Rain*), see the son he's only just learned of and perhaps try to reconnect with Midori, the child's mother. But first there's the little matter of the Japanese gangster Yamaoto and Yamaoto's Chinese triad allies, who are watching over Rain's son in New York City, not to mention Delilah, the beautiful Mossad agent who shares Rain's occupation and his bed. Seizing the initiative, Rain enlists the aid of his super-sniper friend, Dox, in a campaign to remove Yamaoto. Rain and allies clash with their many powerful foes in combat scenes full of lovingly detailed descriptions of knives, guns and other martial paraphernalia. Amid the threats to life, limb and loved ones, Rain finds time to enjoy good food, better whiskey and even better sex. While most of the action takes place in Japan, Eisler handles all the story's locales, including Manhattan and Barcelona, with considerable aplomb. 30-city author tour. (June)

### Shadow Man

CODY MCFADYEN. Bantam, \$24 (384p) ISBN 0-553-80465-0

This disturbing serial killer drama set in California marks a promising debut for McFadyen, who combines many conventions of the genre but with far more exquisite, intricate results than the norm. FBI agent Smoky Barrett, a haunted, complicated woman, leads a team of investigators assigned to a serial killer task force. Barrett, who escaped the clutches of a different serial killer a year earlier but lost her husband and daughter in the attack, is now tracking a madman known as “Jack Jr.,” who believes he's a descendant of Jack the Ripper. He mauls women, mostly prostitutes with Web sites, then sends the videotapes of the killings to Barrett and her crew. The plot follows a typical arc, complete with some nauseating details and predictable twists. There's also a romance between Barrett and a bodyguard