

# The Bookshelf

## “Cage’s Bend”

By Carter Coleman

Warner Books, \$14.95

*Reviewed by Holly Jones*

“Every good southern family has a manic-depressive ... Fine old families often have more. They all learn to get by. They often distinguish themselves.”

In Carter Coleman’s novel “Cage’s Bend,” the Cage and Rutledge families are certainly “good southern families,” with roots tracing to before the Civil War.

Bishop Franklin Rutledge and Margaret Cage Rutledge are blessed with three sons. Cage Malone Rutledge is the oldest, the golden charmer who can get away with anything. Nicholas Morgan Rutledge is the middle son. Born 11 months after Cage, Nick is intelligent and sensitive. He is his older brother’s best friend and his mother’s heart.

Harper Henley Rutledge, the youngest, is nine years younger than Cage. Margaret thought Harper would be perfect, for with him she would correct earlier mistakes. But Harper is brooding and angry, not at all what Margaret hoped.

In 1987, Nick is killed in a car crash. Two years to the day of Nick’s death, Cage is arrested for drunkenness and disturbing the peace. He ends up in a combination institution and maximum

security prison.

Cage is certainly manic, but he is far from “getting by.” Because of a confession he makes to Nick the night of the crash, Cage blames himself for his brother’s death. And from 1989 until 2001,

Cage is in and out of mental institutions, jails and detox centers.

But Cage shouldn’t be judged too harshly.

Unlike Cage, Harper appears successful in the eyes of the world. He runs computers for an up-and-coming stockbroker. He has an apartment in New York, an office in the World Trade Center, and plenty of women and money. Still, Harper has his own problems, among them alcohol, drugs and women. At the root of these problems is his family. While he loves his parents and worships Cage, he resents his role as “his brother’s keeper.”

“Cage’s Bend” is a roller-coaster ride of family emotions. Each member of the family — Franklin, Margaret, Cage and Harper — is given a voice to deal with Cage’s illness in his own way. Interspersed among these points-of-view are flashbacks telling how this family grew up, how they moved, made friends and girlfriends and, ultimately, what happened the night Nick died.

By the end of “Cage’s Bend,” this “good southern family” has learned about depression. They have “gotten by” in their own way. And to the readers who fall in love with them, they certainly distinguish themselves.

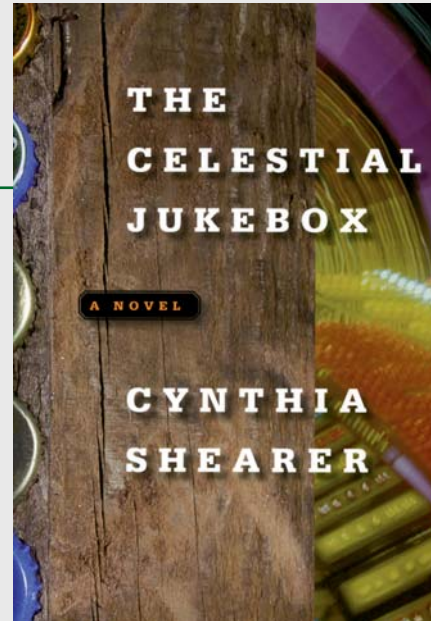
## “The Celestial Jukebox”

By Cynthia Shearer

Shoemaker and Hoard, \$25

*Reviewed by Holly Jones*

A 15-year-old boy with a musical obsession “straight off the boat” from Africa. A soccer mom whose husband openly cheats on her, whose kids hate her and who has a phobia of driving over bridges. A farmer whose wife has abandoned him to take care of his daughter and granddaughter. An eccentric woman prone to wearing Mexican pony blankets and black bowlers who makes birdhouses out of bottle caps and books. An elderly Chinese man who runs the local grocery in the heart of a small town.



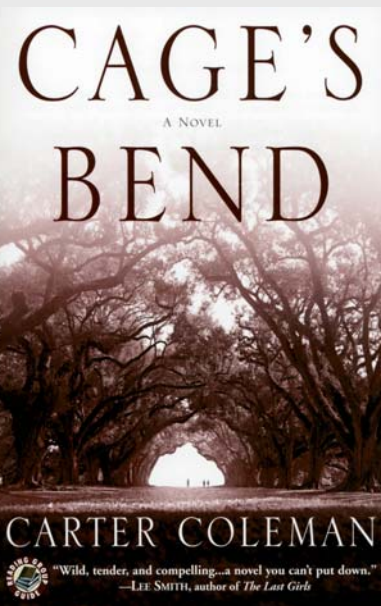
These are just some of the characters in Cynthia Shearer’s “The Celestial Jukebox.”

At first the sheer number of characters in this book is overwhelming. They seem to have completely separate storylines with absolutely nothing in common. By the end of her book, though, if Shearer hasn’t intersected her characters’ lives, she has managed to intertwine them enough to illustrate what a small world we live in.

At the hub of the stories is the Celestial Grocery, owned and operated by Angus Chien. In the Mississippi town of Madagascar, a town too small for a police force but with the constant threat of being invaded by casinos, Angus presides from the security of his front porch and his binoculars.

People come to the grocery under the pretense of buying a cup of coffee or breakfast or whatever supplies they need for their busy lives. They stay for the advice, the assistance, a job, or just the music, because at the Celestial stands a large “Rock-ola” jukebox. Customers could choose almost anything they wanted if it had been released before April 1968. Although, Shearer writes, “choosing a song did not mean that you’d actually get to hear it ... Sometimes it played the flip side of what you asked for. Sometimes it played the same song over and over for months, and Angus had to keep it unplugged. Sometimes it played nothing.”

The jukebox is the one thing all the characters in this book have in common. At the heart of this book are two themes, love and music, and it isn’t always roman-



tic love. Primarily it is love between friends, a simple love of humanity, or even a love of music, but it is a love these characters need to share.

**“A Killer Collection”**

By J.B. Stanley

Berkley Prime Crime, \$6.99

*Reviewed by Angela Webster*

If you're a collector who's also a fan of mass market paperbacks, there's a new mystery series that will make for some fun summertime reading.

In “A Killer Collection,” the first in the new “Collectible Mystery” series, J.B. Stanley enters the world of potters and pottery collectors through the character of Molly Appleby, a sometime collector who is also a writer for Collector's Weekly magazine. Covering a kiln opening in her home state of North Carolina, Molly witnesses the demise of the famous — and famously despised — pottery collector George-Bradley Staunton, and she is convinced the man's death was no accident.

Staunton, who is diabetic, is busy elbowing fellow pottery lovers out of his way early one Saturday morning when he suddenly dies from an insulin overdose. Appleby investigates and finds plenty of people who had reasons to want Staunton dead, and a few of them had access to insulin. Was it the wife he was cheating on? His former mistress? A fellow pottery collector with a score to settle? One of the many potters he's ripped off over the years?

The plot may center around a murder investigation, but the back story of this book is the real pleasure to read. You don't even have to be a fan of face jugs and art pottery to

appreciate the tales of Seagrove area potters and their wares.

The author is a former middle school English teacher who now dabbles in the antiques and collectibles world, and she includes just the right details to make her characters seem knowledgeable about their pottery passion. Georgia pottery fans will appreciate references to the famous Meaders family of potters. Photos of some Meaders face jugs appear at the end of the book.

Stanley obviously knows what it's like to be a collector, for she captures perfectly the desire to build a great collection or to find a rare piece on eBay. In describing one pre-auction scene, she writes of customers who “did their best to appear disinterested in the piece they examined, setting their faces into ambivalent masks as they ran their fervent fingers over the curves of clay. It was always the hands that gave their desire away.”

This first novel in the new series was a good one, and it ought to be fun to see which collectibles will star in Stanley's future mysteries. **NCM**

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