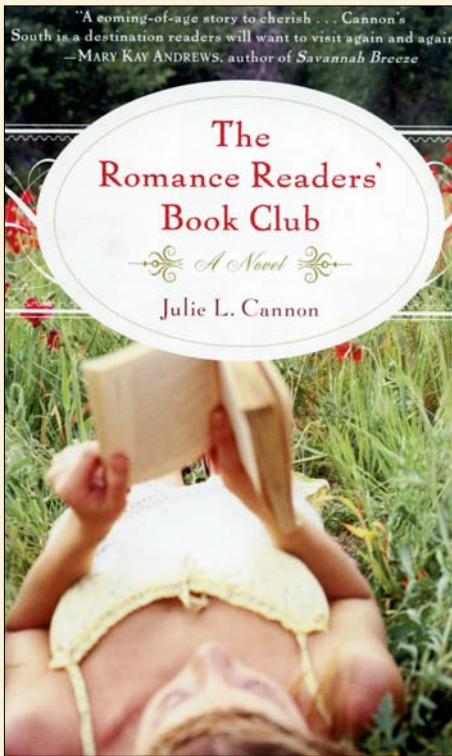




THE BOOKSHELF



The Romance Readers' Book Club

By Julie L. Cannon
Plume Books, \$13
Reviewed by Holly Jones

Tammi Lynn Elco wants passion, love and excitement.

The problem is she's not likely to find those things in tiny, rural Rigby, Ga. — especially not in a drought. But water is not what 15-year-old Tammi needs to sustain her life. And when she can't find what she's looking for in her sheltered world, she goes looking in other worlds.

Julie L. Cannon's novel, *The Romance Readers' Book Club*, starts on Halloween 1974. After prayer meeting, Tammi decides she and her Uncle Orr must go trick-or-treating. "Orr is in his late 30s, but according to the doctor his mind is stuck at around seven years old."

Trick-or-treating is sinful according to Tammi's grandmother. Granny is Orr's mother, Tammi's guardian and an extremely religious person. So Tammi and Orr have never trick-or-treated, and neither knows how. They visit just one house and instead of candy, end up with a stack of romance novels.

In them, Tammi finds the world she's

always wanted. She knows Granny will be horrified, but Tammi can't help it. Within those paperback pages are her excitement, her passion, and her idea of love.

So Tammi starts the Romance Readers' Book Club. At first she and Orr are the only members, and she reads the books aloud. Soon, she decides Orr is not getting the same thing from the stories. He hears tales of cowboys and death-defying situations. She hears star-crossed lovers, secret rendezvous and heartbreak. Trying to explain things to Orr just gets too complicated.

So the club is opened to other members: her aunt Minna; LaDonna, a girl Tammi knows from school; and LaDonna's cousin Parks. LaDonna is a shy girl who thinks the novels are over-dramatic and offensive. Parks is older, wilder and thinks the books are works of art. And Minna is her own person. Her decorating style lends itself to hot pink and leopard print, but she is also Granny's daughter. And she is realizing how hard it is for Tammi to live with her grandmother.

Through the club, Tammi learns about love, though not necessarily the way she'd hoped. She learns about friendship, and how to love your friends. She learns about her family, and how to be loved by them. But most importantly she learns to love herself — a strange lesson to learn from romance novels, but a great one to learn from *The Romance Readers' Book Club*.

A Yellow Watermelon

By Ted M. Dunagan
Junebug Books, \$21.95
Reviewed by Holly Jones

Ted Dillon doesn't understand why everyone looks at him so strangely. All he did was help a few people. What's strange about that?

While playing in the sawmill one Saturday afternoon — something he's not supposed to do — Ted meets a black man named Jake. It is Jake's job to keep the fire going at the sawmill and watch over the place when the workers aren't there. He lives in the back room and cooks over

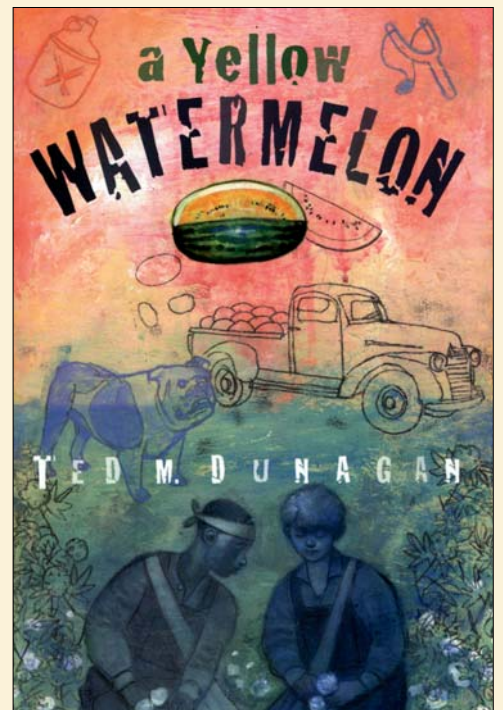
the fire.

Jake doesn't have much to eat, and Ted discovers his new friend loves scrambled eggs. So Ted brings Jake some eggs.

Ted later learns, through Jake, about Poudlum's family. They were swindled out of their cow and have no milk. So Ted buys them milk with his paper route money.

And when Poudlum's family help Ted's uncle pick his cotton, Ted decides to pick in the row beside Poudlum. They are the youngest in the field, and the slowest, why shouldn't they keep each other company? Ted certainly doesn't care if Poudlum's skin is black and his is white.

So why is everyone looking at Ted like he's crazy?



On the last page of Ted M. Dunagan's *A Yellow Watermelon*, the main character Ted Dillon says, "My mother was standing in the yard at the edge of the porch with her big butcher knife facing the ripe melon in front of her. When she cut into it, it made a popping sound like it just couldn't wait to burst open.

"When the two halves fell apart, I was stunned to see that instead of being red inside, it was yellow."

Poudlum tells Ted, "Dat melon is

like people — it may be a different color, but it still be a watermelon.”

To Ted, a watermelon is a watermelon, just like help is help — it doesn't matter what the person looks like. However, it does matter how that person acts towards others. And when Ted discovers one of the richest men in town is not only trying to swindle Poudlum's family out of their land, but he's bootlegging whiskey, Ted decides he's going to help the law, by putting this man in prison.

Through an elaborate scheme, Ted also helps an innocent man gain freedom, a family secure their home, and helps his mother stop worrying. He doesn't want credit, but he sure wishes folks would stop staring like that. He's just trying to help.

Miscarriage of Justice

By Kip Gayden

Center Street, \$22.99

Reviewed by Angela McRae

It was “ripped from the headlines,” as we like to say, one of those stories that has it all: wealth, greed, deception, a scandalous love affair, a mystery or two ... and murder.

And it happened in 1913.

Miscarriage of Justice, the debut novel by Nashville circuit court judge Kip Gayden, was inspired by Nashville newspaper accounts of the March 1913 gunning down of Charlie Cobb by his former lover, Anna Dotson, wife of a prominent doctor and mother of two.

A sweet romance formed at summer camp results in marriage for Dr. and Mrs. Walter Dotson. When children come along, however, Anna finds her husband's affection and attention have all but disappeared. She amuses herself with social functions and shopping, but what she's desperately craving is the husband who, when he's not at work, stays over-busy

with various church and civic activities.

She is, in other words, ripe for an affair.

A candidate appears in the form of newcomer-to-town Charlie Cobb, a charming fellow with wit, style, and a plan to steal Anna from her boring, inattentive husband. While Charlie Cobb is by no means her husband's social equal, what he lacks in class he makes up for with exciting daytime dalliances and nighttime trysts.

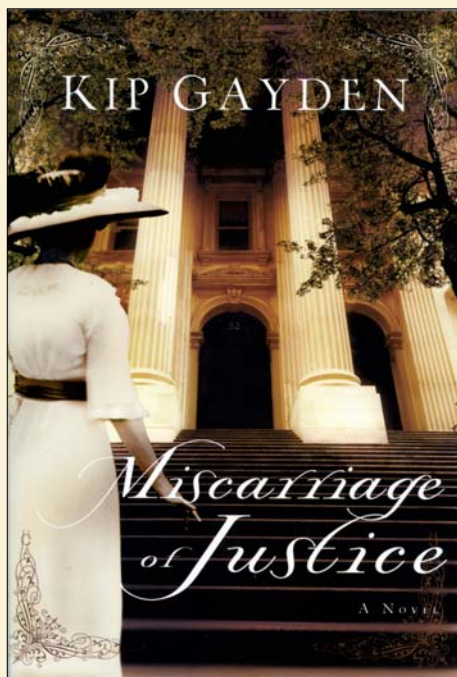
Gayden does a great job of showing the slow, steady seduction of Anna Dotson in all its passion and glory, followed by the subsequent horror of the psychological meltdown of a woman exposed.

Though rumors of adultery don't always raise eyebrows when discussed today, back in the day such rumors were shocking and shameful. If Gayden's readers are slightly sympathetic to Anna's affair at its outset, they will certainly join her on the emotional freefall that results from her sin.

But the author makes sure this fallen woman does not fall alone. Charlie is certainly credited with his role in the affair, and Gayden also persuades the reader to ask whether a negligent husband didn't play a great role in this tragedy.

A subplot of the book involves Anna's partic-

ipation in the women's suffrage movement, perhaps the only scenes in the book that don't quite ring true. That said, it is indeed possible that the larger woman's suffrage movement — and public perception of it — did play some role in the outcome of Anna's murder trial. It gives the reader much to think about in the judge's first book. **NCM**



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