



The Secret Handshake

"Besides the noble art of getting things done, there is the noble art of leaving things undone. The wisdom of life consists in the elimination of non-essentials."

—Lin Yutang

September 2022

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Dear ones,

We've had a hard week. The death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II this afternoon was simply the capper on an extraordinarily rough few days. A dear friend's mother passed. A friend of a friend's daughter was murdered. An entire city, mourning her passing, was taken hostage for hours by an active shooter. And just when things felt calmer, word came down from Balmoral. Grave word.

The fabric that connects us is our love of story. I'm sure these happenings, and the feelings they've evoked, will find their way onto the page. Oddly, I am writing a book right now that explores the hashtag frenzy aftermath of a high-profile murder, so perhaps this is why the emotions of this particular week have struck me so keenly. It's always so strange when life imitates art. Strange, but inevitable.

Below you will find the usual newsletter, which was written several days ago and has been in the queue since. You can stop here, or move on, your choice. But it would have been remiss of me not to touch base with you first. To make sure you're okay, and to send you a virtual hug if you're not. ♥

Fall is my favorite time of year, and not only because of the gorgeous scenery. September is when I look back on how I'm doing with my annual goals and make whatever adjustments I need. Am I on track? Where have I faltered?

Those questions go to an overarching theme I've been contemplating recently. What does success mean? What does it look like for me?

My [goals for this year](#) were quite specific and easily distilled into the following: **Do Less. Write More.** Do less equates to fewer appearances: I decided to forgo conferences and limit events, and I've done a good job with that. Write more is obvious...but also what led me to the realization that FINISHING is what matters.

Finishing is the key to success. It is the key to longevity. It is the key to financial freedom. It is the one component of a creative career that is within your control.

After a frustrating and fallow couple of years, the ideas have been coming fast and furious. I attribute this to two main things: adding fantasy stories to my repertoire and less time away from my office. (I should be honest and say that brain fog from the change of life contributed to the fallow times, something I'm hearing of more and more from friends. Don't despair, ladies, there is a creative life waiting for you on the other side...)

Point is, by sticking to these two simple goals, I have finished multiple projects this year. As of this writing, in early September, five projects are complete and in the pipeline to be published: two JT novels, two JT short stories, and one Joss short. Two more novels are well underway, one for each pen name, as well as a JT short. That doesn't count innumerable treatments for more stories. My word count isn't off the charts, not like it has been in past years, but that's okay. The more I type ###, the more content I feel.

Oddly, my reading life has shriveled up. The reading part is a conundrum I am tackling by putting into action some deliberate practice this fall: one non-distracted hour a day of reading, whether I'm enjoying it or not. The paradox of choice has affected my reading, without a doubt, but I just haven't found a lot that's really turning my crank. I have left a trail of half-read books all over. It's been GREAT BOOK! bored bored bored GREAT BOOK! bored bored bored. I fear I'm distracted, or maybe my brain is broken from Insta Reels. (Only half joking there.)

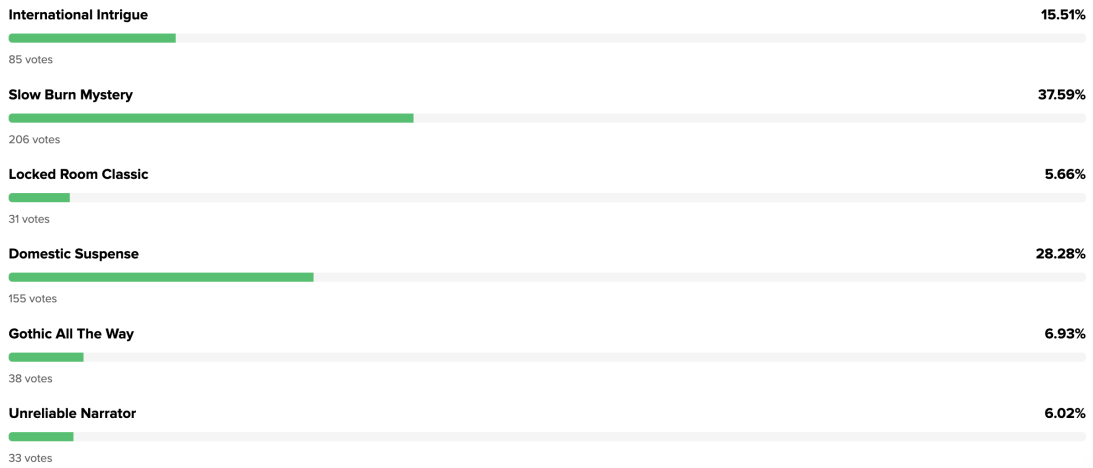
Anyway, the takeaway is: the rest of the year looks to be a bit insane, with sports ball and show tapings and trying to finish one novel and edit another before the end of December, so if I'm quiet, know that I'm off finishing something. The more I finish, the more work you get, right?

□ Poll

OK, y'all are giving me so much to work with! Here are the results of last month's poll: most of you prefer a classic Slow Burn Mystery! Second place was Domestic Suspense, followed closely by International Intrigue.

What's your favorite kind of thriller?

548 out of 548 people answered this question.



Here is September's survey...

Your favorite type of lead character is...?

Private Eye

Detective/Cop

Spy

Assassin

Lawyer

Amateur Sleuth

Neighbor Next Door

Regular Joe/Josephine



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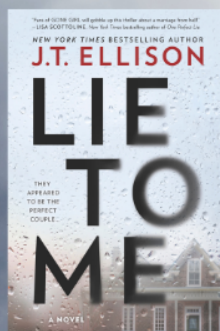
Some exciting news about [IT'S ONE OF US](#), which releases February 23...

Barnes & Noble is offering 25% off the hardcover if you preorder now! Use the [coupon code PREORDER25](#) between September 7 - 9 to take advantage of the sale.

IT'S ONE OF US is the story of a couple suffering from infertility who discover a terrible truth—the husband's son from an undisclosed sperm donation years earlier is the prime suspect in a local murder. What other dark secrets are they keeping from one another?

This is a great bookclub pick, full of moral quandaries that will have you asking yourself again and again—what would I do in this situation? I can't wait for you to read it!

PRE-ORDER IT'S ONE OF US



**eBook only
\$2.99!**

[LIE TO ME](#) is celebrating its five year anniversary with a series of sales! Grab the eBook for only \$2.99 from September 10-18!



New release
from R.L. Perez!



And for my fantasy crossovers, co-writer extraordinaire [R.L. Perez](#) has a brilliant solo effort out called [IVY & BONE](#), which is a Hades/Persephone retelling. Highly recommended!

☐ This Month's Reads



[SAVAGE CITY](#) by L. Penelope

A truly inventive fantasy that captured me from page one from a new to me author - I will be going back for more immediately.

[SO GOOD THEY CAN'T IGNORE YOU](#) by Cal Newport

Yes, here I am with *another* Newport recommendation. I'm more than a Newport fangirl, though, I swear. I genuinely think much of what he has to say can be life-changing, and while I don't agree with everything, naturally, this book talks about a cool concept, career capital, that can help you find happiness in your work/life balance.

[SWEET WATER AND THE WITCH](#) by Jayne Castle

Another brilliant book from a creative powerhouse, this new release gives fans of the series easter eggs galore and another dust bunny. I swear, Jayne's brain is wondrous to behold.

[VERITY](#) by Colleen Hoover

I had to jump on the Hoover bandwagon, and I wasn't disappointed. There were sections of this one that I skipped over, simply because they were a bit too

spicy (and repetitive) for my taste, but the overall story is very gothic and very Rebecca-ish.

[DAISY DARKER](#) by Alice Feeney

I have mixed emotions about this book, but not for the reasons you might think. Feeney has such a lyrical voice, I could feel the mist from the waves breaking against the rocks when the tide came in. The story was over the top, which is exactly why the book works. Loads of reimagined fun!

☐☐ September Recipe: Peach Upside Down Cake



When I saw this recipe in the [NYT Cooking newsletter](#), I happened to be in Colorado for my father's birthday, and we're a family of upside-down cake lovers, so I gave it a shot, using almond flour to make it GF. And WOW!!!!!! It was incredible...

[GIMME THOSE PEACHES!](#)

You can find all of my recipes [here](#), on the bright and shiny new Recipes website. And if you want some wine to go with the meals, [The Wine Vixen](#) has you covered.

☐ Contest

Every month, I draw a name from those of you who open the newsletter and send that lovely person a \$30 gift card to the bookstore of their choice. It's my

way of saying thanks for being here. Congrats to last month's winner: Susan !!

And don't forget to enter this month's drawing below!

[I WANT THAT GIFT CARD!](#)

That's it for now. I wish you the very best of the cooler months ahead, with loads of fall vibes—crunchy leaves, warm fires, and great books!

Peace and hugs,



Are you still here?

Here's a kitten for your troubles! And speaking of kittens, a quick Jameson update. She is doing SO WELL! She's starting to play again, and is a snuggly love bug. I've found some (hideous) duck liver treats that she adores and it's so lovely to be able to give her something she really likes. Thank you for all your blessings and good thoughts!



Did you like this newsletter? Share it with a friend!



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