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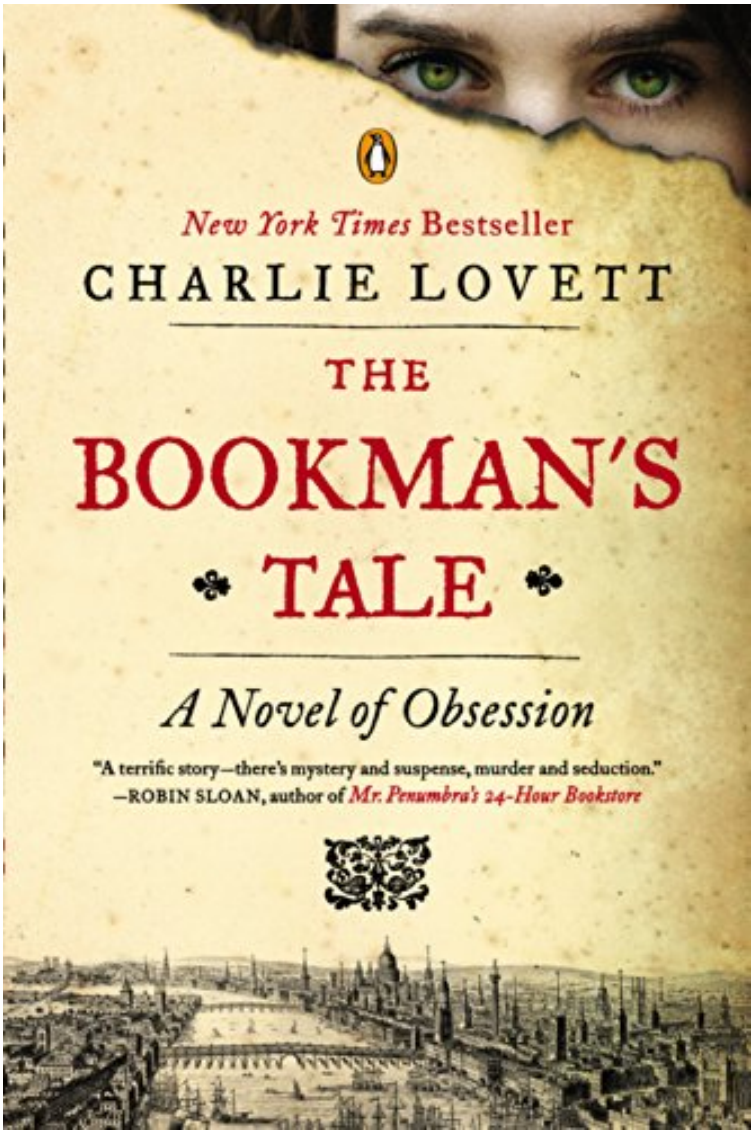
The Bookman's Tale: A Novel of Obsession



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[Free pdf] The Bookman's Tale: A Novel of Obsession

Par Charlie Lovett : The Bookman's Tale: A Novel of Obsession before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Bookman's Tale: A Novel of Obsession:

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA mysterious portrait ignites an antiquarian booksellers search through time and the works of Shakespeare for his lost love.Charlie Lovetts new book,The Lost Book of the Grail, is now available. Guaranteed to capture the hearts of everyone who truly loves books, The Bookmans Tale is a former booksellers sparkling novel and a delightful exploration of one of literatures most tantalizing mysteries with echoes of Shadow of the Wind and A.S. Byatt's Possession. Nine months after the death of his beloved wife Amanda left him shattered, Peter Byerly, a young antiquarian bookseller, relocates from North Carolina to the English countryside, hoping to outrun his grief and rediscover the joy he once took in collecting and restoring rare books. But upon opening an eighteenth-century study of Shakespeare forgeries, he discovers a Victorian watercolor of a woman who bears an uncanny resemblance to Amanda. Peter

becomes obsessed with learning the pictures origins and braves a host of dangers to follow a trail of clues back across the centuriesall the way to Shakespeares time and a priceless literary artifact that could prove, once and for all, the truth about the Bards real identity.ExtraitPraise for The Bookmans TalePENGUIN BOOKSCharlie Lovett is a writer, teacher, and playwright whose plays for children have been seen in more than three thousand productions worldwide. He served for more than a decade as writer in residence at Summit School in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He is a former antiquarian bookseller, and he has collected rare books and other materials related to Lewis Carroll for more than twenty-five years. He and his wife, Janice, split their time between Winston-Salem and Kingham, Oxfordshire.Praise for 'The Bookman's Tale'About the AuthorTitle PageCopyrightDedicationEpigraphHay-on-Wye, Wales, Wednesday, February 15, 1995Ridgefield, North Carolina, 1983Southwark, London, 1592Kingham, Friday, February 17, 1995Ridgefield, 1984Southwark, London, 1609London, Friday, February 17, 1995Ridgefield, 1985Kingham, Saturday, February 18, 1995Westminster, London, 1612Ridgefield, 1985Kingham, Saturday, February 18, 1995Ridgefield, 1985Kingham, Saturday, February 18, 1995Wakefield, Yorkshire, Northern England, 1720Ridgefield, 1985Kingham, Sunday, February 19, 1995London, 1856Hay-on-Wye, Wales, Sunday, February 19, 1995Ridgefield, 1985London, 1875Hounslow, England, Monday, February 20, 1995London, 1875Ridgefield, 1985Cornwall, Southwestern England, Monday, February 20, 1995Ridgefield, 1985London, 1875Cornwall, Southwestern England, Tuesday, February 21, 1995Ridgefield, 1986London, 1876London, Tuesday, February 21, 1995Ridgefield, 1986Kingham, 1876London, Tuesday, February 21, 1995Ridgefield, 1986Kingham, 1876Ridgefield, 1986London, Tuesday, February 21, 1995London, 1877Ridgefield, 1987Oxfordshire, England, Tuesday, February 21, 1995Cambridgeshire, England, 1878Ridgefield, 1988Kingham, Tuesday, February 21, 1995Kingham, 1878Ridgefield, 1988Kingham, Tuesday, February 21, 1995Kingham, 1879Ridgefield, 1994Kingham, Tuesday, February 21, 1995Kingham, 1879Ridgefield, 1994Kingham, 1879Kingham, Wednesday, February 22, 1995Kingham, Friday, June 23, 1995AcknowledgmentsAuthors Note An Excerpt from 'First Impressions'Hay-on-Wye, Wales, Wednesday, February 15, 1995Wales could be cold in February. Even without snow or wind the damp winter air permeated Peters topcoat and settled in his bones as he stood outside one of the dozens of bookshops that crowded the narrow streets of Hay. Despite the warm glow in the window that illuminated a tantalizing display of Victorian novels, Peter was in no hurry to open the door. It had been nine months since he had entered a bookshop; another few minutes wouldnt make a difference. There had been a time when this was all so familiar, so safe; when stepping into a rare bookshop had been a moment of excitement, meeting a fellow book lover a part of a grand adventure.Peter Byerly was, after all, a bookseller. It was the profession that had brought him to England again and again, and the profession that brought him to Hay-on-Wye, the famous town of books just over the border in Wales, on this dreary afternoon. He had visited Hay many times before, but today was the first time he had ever come alone.Now, as the cold ache in his extremities crept toward his core, he saw not a grand adventure but only an uncomfortable setting, a stranger, and the potential for shyness and unease to descend into anxiety and panic. Anticipation brought cold sweat to the back of his neck. Why had he come? He could be safe in his sitting room with a cup of tea right now instead of standing on a cold street corner with a sense of dread settling into the pit of his stomach.Before he could change his mind, he forced himself to grasp the door handle and in another second he was stepping into what should have been welcoming warmth.Afternoon, said a crisp voice through a haze of pipe smoke that hovered over a wide desk. Peter mumbled a few syllables, then slipped through an open doorway into the back room, where books lined every wall. He closed his eyes for a moment, imagining the cocoon of books shielding him from all danger, inhaling deeply that familiar scent of cloth and leather and dust and words. His rushing pulse began to slow, and when he opened his eyes he scanned the shelves for something familiara title, an author, a well-remembered dust jacket designanything that might ground him in the world of the known.Just above eye level, he spotted a binding of beautiful blue leather that reminded him of the calf he had used to bind another bookcould it have been nearly ten years ago? He pulled the book from the shelf, reveling in the smooth, luxurious feel of the leather. Taking a closer look at the gold stamping on the spine, Peter smiled. He knew this book. If not an old friend, it was certainly an acquaintance, and the prospect of spending a few minutes between its covers calmed his nerves.An Inquiry into the Authenticity of Certain Miscellaneous Papers, by Edmond Malone, was a monument of analysis that unmasked one of the great forgers of all time, William Henry Ireland. Ireland had forged documents and letters purporting to be written by William Shakespeare, and even the original manuscripts of Hamlet and King Lear. Peter turned past the marbled endpapers to the title page: it was a copy of the first

edition of 1796. He loved the feel of heavy eighteenth-century paper between his fingers, the texture of the indentations made on the page by the letterpress. He flipped a few pages and read:It has been said that every individual of this country, whose mind has been at all cultivated, feels a pride in being able to boast of our own great dramatick poet, Shakespeare, as his countryman: and proportionate to our respect and veneration for that extraordinary man ought to be our care of his fame, and of those valuable writings he left us.Peter smiled as he recalled reading those valuable writings from an actual copy of the First Folio, that weighty 1623 volume of Shakespeares works in which many of his plays were printed for the first time. He was calm nowall sense of dread and panic banished by the simple act of losing himself in an old book. Remembering how that First Folio, given the opportunity, always fell open to the third act of Hamlet, he spread the covers of the Malone and let the pages fall where they would. The book opened to page 289, revealing a piece of paper about four inches square. The brown foxing on the pages between which the paper had been pressed told Peter it had been there for at least a century. Out of habit more than curiosity he turned the paper over.The sharp pain that stabbed his chest almost made him drop the book onto the dusty floor. He thought he had outrun that pain, that he could escape it with distance and distraction, but even in the corner of a bookshop in Hay-on-Wye it had found him. Knees suddenly weak, he slumped against a bookcase and watched, as if in a dream, as the paper fluttered to the floor. The face was still there; he closed his eyes, willing the face and all that went with it to retreat, willing his pulse to slow once more and his hands to stop shaking. He took a deep breath and opened his eyes. She lay there calmly, serenely, looking up at him, waiting. It was his wife. It was Amanda.But Amanda was deadburied nine months ago in the red earth of North Carolina, an ocean away. A heartbeat away. And this painting, so much older than Amanda or her mother or her grandmother, could not possibly portray her. But it did.Peter leaned over to retrieve the paper from the floor and examine it more closely. It was an expert watercolor, almost imperceptibly signed with the initials B.B. He looked again at the book from which it had fallen, hoping for a clue to the watercolors origin. On the front endpaper was a penciled interlocking EH, the monogram of some long-forgotten owner. The description printed on a card inside the cover made no mention of a watercolor, only the price: 400. He had seen copies cataloged for half that. Copies that didnt hide a century-old painting of his dead wife.On the shelf in front of him was a shabby copy of Dickenss unfinished final novel, The Mystery of Edwin Drood. The original cloth binding was worn at the corners and spine, the hinges were broken, and a few pages were loose, but nothing was missing. He could easily restore it to be worth two or three times the asking price.Glancing around, he found himself still alone in the room. His hand trembling, Peter slipped the watercolor into Edwin Drood. He could not leave Amanda here, so far from home. He reshelved the Malone and tucked Drood under his arm. Twenty minutes later he had purchased a stack of books, including the Dickens, and was walking toward the car park on the outskirts of town, two heavy bags hanging at his sides.The drive from the Welsh border to Peters cottage in the Oxfordshire village of Kingham took just over two hours. Peters cottage was down a narrow lane from the village green and, like the rest of the village, built of golden Cotswold limestone. It was in the middle of a row of terraced cottages, but in five months of residence, Peter had yet to meet either of the neighbors with whom he shared the thick stone walls.By seven, he had a fire in the grate, a cup of tea in his hand, and the watercolor propped up on the coffee table. Despite Dr. Strayers advice, he had boxed all his pictures of Amanda and left them in the attic of the house in Ridgefield. So how could she be here, in what suddenly seemed like her cottage? She had, after all, picked out the William Morris fabric on the sofa and curtains. She had overseen the renovation of the kitchen and the addition of the conservatory. She had spent weekends in Portobello Road buying the Pilkington vases that stood on every windowsill and the Burne-Jones prints that hung in the upstairs hall. She had gone to country auctions to buy the furniture and had found the carpenter who installed the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves in the sitting room. The shelves had been her gift to Peter, the outward and visible sign of her passion for his passion; but everything else in the cottage was pure Amanda. She had never spent a night here, but that Peter could have lived here for five months and actually come to think of it as his cottage seemed silly now that she stood on the coffee table staring at him.The painting showed a woman seated in front of a mirror, combing a long tress of dark hair. Her shoulders were bare, and her hair just covered her breasts. The dark hair and the pale skin were Amandas as were the straight shoulders, and even the insistent way that she gripped the brush, but the most remarkable similarity was in the countenance that stared out from the mirrorteasing and challenging at once. The resemblance was uncannythe narrow face, the high, pale forehead; and above all the deep green eyes that could laugh and demand to be taken seriously simultaneously. Amanda could do that. Of course the face couldnt be hers. She had been born in 1966; the

watercolor was definitely Victorian. Still, Peter sat staring into Amandas eyes, wondering where she had come from and wishing she had never left.He lost himself in those eyes, and in the past, for a few minutes, then roused himself, stood up, and began pacing the room. Here was a mystery that demanded a solution. During his years as an antiquarian bookseller, Peter had solved his share of bibliographical puzzles, but he had done so with the same emotional detachment with which he solved crosswords. This was different. The mystery of the watercolors origins felt deeply personal and Peter could already feel curiosity and grief melding into obsession. He had to know where this painting came fromhow a hundred-year-old portrait of his wife, who had been born only twenty-nine years ago, had come to be tucked into an eighteenth-century book on Shakespeare forgeries.The problem was how to begin. Peter had never worked with paintings before. It took him another hour of staring and pacing to remember what was in the bookcase in the spare room upstairs. He had not set foot in that room since he moved to Kingham. It had been intended as Amandas sanctum sanctorum, and though she would never spend afternoons sitting there in the armchair reading her books, it still seemed an inviolable space. Now he opened the door slowly and looked into the stale silence. In the distance he heard the church bell toll nine and he waited until the last chime had died in the wet winter air before turning on the light.In the bookcase by the window were sixty-five nearly identical volumesPeters wedding gift to Amanda. Because it had been a Royal Academy exhibition catalog that brought them together, and because Amanda so loved her Victorian paintings, Peter had resolved to give her a copy of the catalog for every year of Victorias reignan illustrated journey through seven decades of English art. It had taken him a year to track down all the volumes, but it had taken Amanda almost that long to plan the wedding. Now the books stood patiently on the shelves of the room she would never use.Peter stood in the doorway for several minutes wrestling with the eerie sense of Amandas presence. It wasnt just that this was Amandas room furnished with her books and her favorite chair and the lamp shed picked out from the antique shop in Stow-on-the-Wold. Peter was used to living with Amandas taste. This was different. This was a feeling that Amanda might return at any momentnot the evanescent Amanda who sometimes spoke to him, but the real flesh-and-blood Amanda. It was a feeling Peter longed to embrace, but which he knew he must fight. He felt the same nausea and dizziness he had felt when they first met, and he had to lean against the doorway to steady himself.Its okay, said Amanda. You can go in. She stood at the end of the hall and Peter looked up just in time to see her fade away. Her words gave him the courage he needed, though, and he entered the room, crossed to the bookshelf, pulled out the volume labeled 1837, and sat gingerly on the edge of the chair. These are just books; these are just things; this is just a room; and that was just my imagination, he told himself. And although he didnt really believe it, he opened the book and began looking at paintings.Before Peter had left for England, Dr. Strayer had given him a typed list of things he needed to do in order to move on with life. The second item was: Establish Regular Eating and Sleeping Habits. He had been making progress on thisgoing to bed by eleven, sometimes falling asleep as early as one, and sleeping until about ten. It wasnt ideal, but it had become regular.Peter had opened the first Royal Academy volume at nine oclock P.M. He closed the last one at seven oclock the next evening. He had not eaten or slept. Now he sat, bleary-eyed and exhausted, amid piles of books on Amandas floor. He had looked at thousands of paintings, read thousands of captions. He had not seen Amandas face; he had not seen the initials B.B. or discovered any artist with those initials.It wasnt until he was standing in the doorway looking back at the books he had left heaped on the floor that he realized that Amandas presence, which he had felt so strongly when he entered the room, was gone. After twenty-two sleep-deprived hours he honestly felt that this was nothing more than a room. He listened for Amandas voice telling him not to leave her books on the floor, but he heard nothing. He turned out the light, left the door open, and staggered downstairs.For the first two months, Peter had left the cottage only to buy food at the local shop. He had ventured into nearby Chipping Norton on a couple of errands before Christmas, but had avoided the bookshop, where he might be recognized by the proprietor. The excursion to Hay had been the beginning of his attempt to address the fourth item on Dr. Strayers list: Re-establish Your Career, and he had to admit it wasnt a wholly unpleasant experience to discover that the world of books still existed, that he could escape what Dr. Strayer called his secret lair.What do you mean by that? Peter had asked.Youve spent most of your life in hiding, said Dr. Strayer. Your secret lair is the only place you feel truly safe. When you were a child it was your room where youd hide so you didnt have to interact with your parents. In college it was the rare-books room; once you married Amanda, it was your basement book room. You bury yourself in these places, Peter. You avoid life there.I left my lair plenty with Amanda, Peter retorted.Yes, with Amanda. She was your trusty sidekick, the person who made the world safe for you. Be honest, Peter, the only places you ever really went without her

were bookstores and librariesand there you didnt need Amanda to run interference because you could interpose the books between yourself and any meaningful human contact.And so he had started the process of emerging from his secret lair in Kingham with an excursion to bookstores. And just as Dr. Strayer had predicted, he had done everything he could to avoid any conversation.Still, wouldnt Dr. Strayer be pleased that Peter had taken some small step toward restarting his career? He hadnt looked at his own booksthe bibliographical reference library he had built over the past several yearssince he lost Amanda. Even when he had boxed them up to be shipped to England, they had been only rectangular solids to be fit into empty boxesboxes now stacked in the stone shed in the garden.He thought he might have one or two books on Victorian illustrators so he turned on the lights in the tiny back garden, shoved open the door of the shed, and began carrying the boxes into the sitting room. Two hours later, he had opened them all and emptied the contents haphazardly onto the floor-to-ceiling shelves. On the coffee table he left two books: A Treasury of the Great Childrens Illustrators and Percy Muirs landmark study Victorian Illustrated Books. Not sure he could bear another dead end without at least some sleep, Peter left the books where they were, picked up the watercolor, and went upstairs to bed. He slept soundly for the next twelve hours, dreaming of those Royal Academy catalogs and the building where he first encountered them.Ridgefield, North Carolina, 1983When it opened in 1957, the Robert Ridgefield Library had been the tallest building in Ridgefielda nine-story neoclassical behemoth of granite and glass, columns and cornices, with an incongruous cupola perched uncomfortably on top.The Ridgefields had come to North Carolina from Scotland just after the revolution and had spent the next two centuries going from success to success. A moderately wealthy nineteenth-century merchant family, they had become impressively wealthy in tobacco, then excessively wealthy in textiles, and now obscenely wealthy in banking. Along the way, they had turned a backwater two-year Bible college into the nationally recognized Ridgefield University.The library had been built atop Ridgefields highest pointa hill on the edge of campus previously favored by students for late-night trysts. From the upper floors one could view the countryside around Ridgefield for milesa patchwork of corn and tobacco, clouds of dust rising from the horizon as pickup trucks sped down gravel roads. In the Georgia granite above the librarys main entrance were carved the words, Let those who enter here seek not only knowledge but wisdom.The moment Peter walked into the library for the first time, passing from the blazing sun of a North Carolina August into the cool dimness of its narrow corridors, its miles of shelving, its million and a half books, he felt at home. He was eighteen and had lived his life on that very farmland that was visible from the top of the librarya world in which he had always felt awkwardly out of place. His family had run a general store in a small town eight miles from Ridgefield, until his fathers neglect of the business sent it into bankruptcy. After that his parents seemed more interested in drinking and fighting than in spending time with their son. He had often gazed at the strange white building on the horizon and dreamed of a different life, a life free from the encumbrances of family and the daily interactions at school with people who understood him no better than he understood them. He dreamed of a life protected from everything outside of himself, but protected by what he could not imagine.He had tried various ways of insulating himself over the years. As a youngster he spent most of his free time in his room with his stamp collection, meticulously mounting stamps and trying not to think of the wider world that those little rectangles of paper represented. During high school, he had taken to sequestering himself in the basement with a pair of headphones and a stack of classical records. But however carefully he mounted the stamps, however loudly he played the music, he could never quite escape. A part of him always knew that the world still existed outside his door and that, ultimately, he could not avoid it.Peter had won a scholarship to Ridgefield, and freshman orientation had been a harrowing experience, focused on getting to know people. Peter did not want to know people. What he wanted was to find that world-within-the-world where he could be himself by himself. Following his tour guide through the foyer of the library into the stacks, he suspected he may have found that place. Lagging behind the tour and slipping into the rows of stacks that disappeared into darkness, Peter discovered exactly what would protect him: books.It took him only a few weeks to secure a work-study position in the library. It was nirvana. Peter spent four hours a day reshelving books. Technically, he was part of the Circulation department, but he worked alone, wheeling his cart down the narrow aisles between towers of books, easily avoiding contact with anyone who might be browsing.Even on those occasions when he had to push his cart through the main reading room, with its wide oak tables and banks of card catalog drawers, Peter remained invisible to his fellow students. The cart would glide almost silently across the smooth marble floor and heads would remain bent over books, his passing no more remarkable than a change in the light streaming in from the high clerestory windows as a cloud moved across the sun.On a dark

and rainy October day in his sophomore yearhe would later tell her the exact date, October 14Peter Byerly wheeled his cart into the reading room and first laid eyes on the woman he would marry. She was sitting alone at a table, poring over a biography of William Morris. She sat ramrod straight, with her book propped on the table in front of her, her posture almost daring the work to get the better of her, while all around her students slumped with the weight of impending midterms. She wore, in place of the unofficial uniform of jeans and a T-shirt, an impeccably tailored black suit, with pleated trousers and a crisp white blouse. Not a strand of her shoulder-length black hair was out of place.She was slim, though not as slim as most college girls aspired to be. She was tall, though not as tall as those girls whose height inspired envy among their peers. Both her figure and her stature were enhanced by the one quality completely lacking in most coeds but which she possessed in abundancepoise.He did not at first see that she was beautifulthough it would not take him long to notice. What he saw was that she was different, that she seemed, like himself, to inhabit a world on the margins of Ridgefield University. She did not fit in, and this intrigued him, made him want to shout, Comrade!Peter slid quietly into a chair at the edge of the room and pulled a book from his cart. For the next thirty minutes, he pretended to read, while watching her. Except to turn a page, which she did frequently, she did not move. At six oclock she closed the book, put it on a pile of others, picked up the books and her red leather purse, and headed toward the exit. Peter followed. When she returned several of the books at the circulation desk, he swept them off the counter as soon as they had been processed.Ten minutes later he was sequestered in the stacks perusing her books. In addition to the William Morris biography there was a book on the Pre-Raphaelite painter Holman Hunt, a volume of Edward Burne-Jones prints, and two volumes of the catalog of the annual exhibit at Londons Royal Academy of Arts1852 and 1853. He glanced through the volumes of artwork and the Holman Hunt biography before reshelving them. The Morris biography he slipped into his bag without checking it out. He wasnt sure what made him do it; for some reason he felt a need to illicitly possess a book she had read. He returned it to its shelf a week later, afraid that if she was as complex and multifaceted as Morris, she was way out of his league.Over the next month he watched her for at least half an hour every afternoon. Her schedule was preciseshe arrived at the library every day at two, spent fifteen minutes in the stacks, and read at the same spot in the reading room until six. She never varied her posture; she always wore smart clothes; she took notes with a fine pen in a black journal.She read voraciouslybiographies of Victorian artists along with poetry of the period and a smattering of history. She worked her way through the Royal Academy catalogs at the rate of one every two or three days. It was three weeks after he first saw her that he noticed, while shelving the volume for 1863, that the front cover of the 1865 volume was completely detached. He couldnt abide the idea that she should find it in such condition, so he carefully removed the book and its detached cover from the shelf and trekked up six flights of stairs to a sturdy wooden door marked CONSERVATION.The brightly lit room into which Peter stepped looked as he imagined an autopsy room mightbut, instead of human cadavers, books lay on the counters in various states of disassembly next to neat lines of knives and piles of various kinds of paper. On a shelf to his left were a dozen or so beautifully restored books, some in leather bindings with gold decoration. The room was not a morgue, thought Peter, so much as an intensive care unit, from which all patients would one day be discharged, if not fully cured, at least substantially improved. A man in a white lab coat leaned over a strange sort of vise that held a disbound book. He was spreading something that looked like cold oatmeal on the exposed spine.Can I help you? he asked, standing up. The man looked at Peter through round gold-rimmed glasses. He looked to be about thirty and had blond, almost white, perfectly straight and groomed hair hanging to his shoulders and an equally pale beard sticking several inches straight out from his face. He smiled through his beard and Peters first thought was that he looked like a Muppet. Peter couldnt help but smile back.I have a book that needs repair, said Peter.It has to be referred by library personnel, said the man, his smile fading and his tone of voice indicating that Peter was not the first person to come barging into the Conservation department uninvited.I am library personnel, said Peter. I work in circulation.Put it over there, said the man with a sigh, nodding to a high pile of damaged books on a table near the door and turning his attention back to his work.When do you think it will be done? asked Peter.Were running about six months right now, assuming nothing major comes down from Special Collections.Six months, said Peter. But I have... I mean, we have a client... That is, a student who needs this book in a couple of days. It just needs the cover attached. Peter held up the book in one hand and its wayward front cover in the other. The man in the lab coat turned back toward him and considered both the book and Peter for a moment. His face softened and his smile returned.Ill tell you what, he said. Ill put it in the girlfriend pile. He took the book and cover from Peter.The girlfriend pile?Usually when a guy comes in here in a rush to get something repaired its

because his girlfriend needs it. What can I say, Im a sucker for love and chivalry and all that. How about I have it for you Monday afternoon?Monday would be great, said Peter, and he backed slowly out of the room, watching the young man return to his oatmeal paste.Back in the stacks Peter could not get the Conservation department out of his mind. Suddenly he was seeing damaged books everywhere he looked: a frayed spine here, a torn endpaper there. He had thought of books before only as his shield, but now they seemed to be taking on lives of their own, not so much as works of literature or history or poetry, but as objects, collections of paper and thread and cloth and glue and leather and ink.When he returned to the Conservation department on Monday afternoon, the book was waiting for him on the counter near the door. Peter inspected the front cover, the spine, and the front endpapers. I cant even tell it was ever detached, he said.What can I say, I do good work, said the man in the lab coat.I dont suppose you ever let students work in here, said Peter.We sometimes have a student intern, said the man, but they usually come from Special Collections.Special Collections?Yeah, you know, the top floor. The Devereaux Room.Whats the Devereaux Room?Youve never been to Special Collections?No, said Peter.Youre a book lover, right?Absolutely, said Peter, who had never thought of himself as a book lover before this moment.Well, if you love books, youre going to adore the Devereaux Room, said the man. Listen, I think theres a work-study position available up there right now. I could put in a good word for you with Francis.Francis?Francis Leland, the head of Special Collections. Ill tell him weve got a budding bibliophile on our hands and maybe hell take you on.That would be great, said Peter, wondering what exactly one did in Special Collections.Im Hank, by the way, said the man, holding out a hand. Hank Christiansen.Peter Byerly, said Peter, returning Hanks firm handshake. Thanks for the... the recommendation.Sure thing, said Hank.Peter turned to go, but stopped in the doorway. And thanks for this, he said, holding up the repaired volume of Royal Academy pictures.I hope she likes it, said Hank.Peter returned the book to its place in the stacks. The next day, she checked it out.On November 15, 1984, a pair of books in the Ridgefield Library transformed Peters life. He had gone to the library after his ten oclock class, hoping to finish his shift before his three-thirty interview with Francis Leland in Special Collections. At three he picked up a cart of books to shelve and scanned it for anything that might have been returned by his mystery woman. In a matter of seconds he found the repaired Royal Academy catalog. Smiling, he wheeled his cart toward the elevator.Not until he pulled the book out and was about to place it in its proper spot did he notice a crisp piece of ivory paper sticking out of it. She had never left a bookmark in a book before. He gently pulled the paper out of the book. At the top, printed in royal blue, was the initial A. Below that, in a neat script, was a note addressed To my admirer.First of all, thank you for having this book repaired. I so hate having to handle damaged booksIm always afraid Ill cause further injury. I have noticed you watching me, you know. I even followed you in the stacks one day. Ive been hoping you would say hello, but since its been a month and you havent done it yet, I suppose Ill have to be the one to get things started. Meet me tonight at 10:30 in the snack bar at the Student Center.The letter was signed simply, Amanda. Peter leaned against the steel bookcase and felt the cold metal through the fabric of his shirt. He had held his breath as he read the letter and now he exhaled heavily as books seemed to swirl around him. After a minute, feeling somewhat steadier, he read the letter again to be sure he hadnt misunderstood. She wanted to meet him, to speak to him. She had noticed him and her name was Amanda. Where had he heard that name before? Suddenly he remembered his appointment. He had only five minutes to get himself to the top floor of the library. He carefully folded the letter and slipped it into his shirt pocket, then set off at a brisk pace for the Amanda Devereaux Rare Books Room.The Devereaux family was as old in Louisiana as the Ridgefields were in North Carolina, and the familys great maverick was Amanda. Wealthy almost beyond equal by the time she was twenty, due to the early death of both her parents, she began to collect books just after World War I. She started by assembling one of the finest collections of eighteenth-century literature in the world. Then she began on the seventeenth century, and eventually expanded to cover literature in English from all eras.In 1939 she stunned her family when, at the age of forty and apparently confirmed in her spinsterhood, she became the second wife of sixty-year-old Robert Ridgefield, widower and patriarch of the Ridgefield clan. There were those who suspected she married him because his up-and-coming university would make a perfect repository for her books, but by all outward signs they had a close and loving relationship. Their only child, a daughter, had been born a year after the wedding.A lifelong smoker, Amanda Devereaux, who kept her maiden name, died of lung cancer at the age of fifty-seven, two weeks before the groundbreaking ceremony for the library. Robert Ridgefield never fully recovered from her death, but he did build a magnificent home for her collection, as he had promised her he would. At the center of the Special Collections department was the Amanda Devereaux Rare Books Room, a monument to the

late bibliophile in which her greatest treasures were permanently displayed.At three-thirty, still slightly light-headed from reading a different Amandas letter, Peter sat at a massive oak table in the center of the Devereaux Room, waiting to meet Dr. Francis Leland. The carved wooden chair in which he sat was a fine antique, underfoot was a huge oriental rug, and facing him, a large glass case displayed several medieval illuminated manuscripts. Above this case hung an imposing portrait of Amanda Devereaux. Around the room were fourteen mahogany cases, each surmounted by a carved bust. From where he sat, Peter could read the names of Julius Caesar, Augustus, Cleopatra, and Caligula. Each of the fourteen cases was filled with ancient-looking books.In front of him lay a slim volume bound in worn, dark brown leather with no markings on the cover. Next to it lay a pair of white cotton gloves. After a few minutes of waiting in a silence not punctuated even by the ticking of a clock, Peter decided this must be a test. He pulled on the gloves and carefully opened the book. The pages within were worn at the edges and looked as soft as flannel. Peter turned to the title page and read: The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet Prince of Denmarke. At the bottom of the page was the publication date: 1603. Shakespeare had still been alive, Peter thought, and for the second time that day, the simple combination of ink and paper literally took his breath away. He felt thrilled, awed, privileged. How many people ever had the chance to hold a copy of Hamlet printed when Shakespeare was still alive? Fingers trembling he turned to the first page of text.He had read Hamlet in high school and again in freshman English, but this text was different. He had turned the page and read almost to the arrival of the ghost when he heard a soft voice behind him.Interesting reading?Its not quite the way I remember it, said Peter, gently closing the book and laying it reverently on the table. He turned to see a short man with curly gray hair and horn-rimmed glasses. He wore not the tweed jacket that Peter had expected, but a pair of blue jeans and a red polo shirt.Its called a bad quarto, said the man. Its the first printing of Hamlet, but the text is inferior to later editions. Some scholars think it was plagiarized from memory by someone who saw a performance.Still, its the first printing of Hamlet, said Peter.Yes, quite a find, said the man.I didnt mean to touch it, its just...Quite all right, said the man. There is no point in having these things if we dont ever have the pleasure of looking at them. What do you think of it?Its... its... Peter struggled to find the words to describe the experience of holding that book, turning those pages, reading those words printed while the author still lived and breathed and walked the streets of London. Until recently books had been only something to hide behind, then he had begun to see them as carefully crafted objects, but this was completely different. This was a revelation. This book was filled with history and mystery. Just being near it made Peter flush with emotion. Its amazing, he said at last. He placed one cotton-gloved hand lightly on the book. He could almost feel its life pouring into his fingertips. I mean, the person who first owned this book, who first read these pages, might have seen the original production of Hamlet. He might have even known Shakespeare personally.Its our latest acquisition, said the man. A newly discovered copy. Miss Devereaux would have been thrilled.Did you know her? asked Peter, nodding toward Amanda Devereauxs portrait.Only briefly, said the man. She was already quite ill when her husband hired me to oversee Special Collections here at Ridgefield. Im Francis Leland. He held out his hand and Peter shook it.Peter Byerly, he said. Its a pleasure to meet you, sir.Two things you should know about life here in Special Collections, Peter. The first is you are welcome to handle anything, as long as you handle it properly. The second is that I am not called sir, Im called Francis.Okay. Thank you... uhm... Francis, said Peter, feeling awkward at the sudden familiarity. He turned his eyes away from the librarian and back to the book on the table. So how could something as old as the first edition of Hamlet be newly discovered? he asked.People are finding lost books all the time, said Francis. Scholars didnt even know the bad quarto existed until eighteen twenty-three. We thought there were only two copies until this one turned up in a theological library in Switzerland. No one had taken it off the shelf in a couple of centuries, so no one knew it was there. We bought it privately last month.That must be something to discover a book that nobodys ever heard of or that everybody thought was lost.Its every bibliophiles dream, said Francis, and Peter knew in a second that it was his own. He could imagine nothing more glorious than finding some lost literary treasurethe manuscript of some unknown Shakespearean play or perhaps an edition of Hamlet earlier than the one he had just heldand preserving it for the world. Even the remote possibility that such a thing could happen brought a surge of adrenaline to Peters veins.Now, said Francis, how soon can you extricate yourself from circulation and begin work here?You mean I got the job? asked Peter.Francis pulled a pair of white cotton gloves from his pocket and slipped them on as he spoke. Peter, you either are or you are not a rare bookman. I cant change that. You felt the power of this. He picked up the Hamlet quarto. Most students just see an old book, but you felt its deeper significance. You dont choose this career; it chooses you. Now, I can help you and I can teach you, but know

thisafter today you will never look at books the same way again. Nothing I do or dont do will change that.Peter sat quietly for a moment gazing at case after case filled with books and considering the fact that each of those books might provide him with the sort of emotional jolt he had received from the Hamlet. He felt like an addict who has just discovered an endless supply of the perfect drug. Francis slipped the Hamlet onto a shelf in a case surmounted by a bust of Cleopatra.All the Elizabethan imprints are here in the Cleopatra case, he said. It was Miss Devereauxs favorite part of the collection. This is her First Folio. He indicated a tall, thick volume lying on its side on the top shelf of the case. Youll enjoy it, I think.Why are there busts on all the cases? asked Peter.Ah, you noticed that, did you, said Francis, smiling. A tribute by Miss Devereaux to her most admired collector. You see, Miss Devereaux also dreamed of finding an unknown treasure, and she had great respect for those collectors who had saved a piece of culture for future generations. Did you know, Peter, that it was because of a book collector that you were able to read Beowulf in your freshman English class? One man saved the only known manuscript of the first great English poem. And he saved a lot more than that. Gawain and the Green Knight, the Lindisfarne Gospels, some of the greatest treasures of the book world. His library in London was divided into fourteen bookcases, each with the bust of a Roman emperor or imperial lady above. Miss Devereaux asked me to organize this room the same way.Who was this collector? asked Peter.He was one of those who, as you say, might have known Shakespeare personally. His name was Robert Cotton.Southwark, London, 1592Bartholomew Harbottle strode down Borough High Street, burst through the door of the George and Dragon, and shook the dust of the highway off his new doublet. From the back bar he could hear the familiar sounds of carousingand it had barely gone four oclock. He stomped across the floorboards, threw open a door, and revealed himself to his friends.Barty! cried Lyly. We thought you were in Winchester.And I thought you were sober, said Bartholomew, taking both a seat at the table and a mug of ale proffered by Peele.Theres no point in staying so, said Peele. Theres no work.But its the high season, said Bartholomew, I should think the theaters would be filled every day in such weather.He hasnt heard, said Lyly. The theaters have been closed these two months. First a riot and now the plague.I could do without the plague, said Bartholomew. But Im sorry to have missed the riot. And what of you, Lyly? Not Master of the Queens Revels yet?Edmond Tylney absolutely refuses to die. I shall petition the queen again in the spring. Perhaps fifteen ninty-three will be my lucky year.Well, tell her that riots are good for business, will you, said Peele with a booming laugh.But whos this I see returning from the bar laden like a packhorse? said Bartholomew. Can that be the face of Christopher Marlowe behind all those mugs?None other, said Marlowe, sloshing ale onto Bartholomew as he set the next round on the table.Im surprised to find you here, with the plague in town.My visit will be brief, I assure you, said Marlowe.If it were me, said Peele, it would be just long enough for a good drink and a better whore.It wouldnt be long at all then, said Bartholomew, for yours is never long for long. The table erupted in laughter and Bartholomew took a long draught of ale and looked around at the sparkling faces of the educated wits, the very sort of men he had hoped to have as friends when he entered the book business only three years ago. And now here he was, welcomed into the bosom of Londons finesturbane and talented, they made up perhaps the greatest collection of writers who ever drank together.There was Thomas Nashe sitting quietly in the corner. Bartholomew had sold hundreds of copies of Nashes pamphlets at his bookshop in Paternoster Row. Then there was George Peele, whose Arraignment of Paris had been presented before the queen. Peeles wild antics dated back to his days at Oxford, and he could drink, gamble, and whore as heavily as Bartholomew himself, and that was saying something. Patient John Lyly was as fine a writer as any of them, Bartholomew thought, excepting of course Kit Marlowe. For Marlowe there was no match.That he, Bartholomew Harbottle, who had been born and raised in a village void of literacy, could be sitting here, at the age of twenty-six, drinking and laughing with the greatest playwright of the age seemed unfathomable. But then Bartholomew always had a talent for improving his lot, first attaching himself to the household of one of the local gentry, then forcing that gentleman to recognize his intellect and send him off to Cambridge, and finally making his way to London where his success in the book business had brought him to such lofty literary circles. He had won money off Marlowe cheating at cards. He had even won whores off Marlowe cheating at cards. He, whose long-forgotten family scraped out a living on a scrap of farmland, had cheerfully romped with bawds paid for by the greatest English writer who ever lived.So all the poets are out of work, said Bartholomew. Even the glove-makers son?Will Shakespeare? said Peele. Not out of work exactly. That is, hes not writing plays.What is he writing? asked Bartholomew, knowing that bashing the upstart Shakespeare, who had come not from Oxford or Cambridge but from a grammar school in someplace called Stratford, was a favorite pastime of the wits.Peele looked around the table, waiting until every eye

was on him before delivering his punch line. The glove-makers son is writing sonnets! A wave of laughter swept the room. Sonnets, can you imagine. See how many of those you can sell, Barty.But you must tell us of Winchester, said Lyly. I judge by the fineness of your new doublet that your trip was not without its rewards.Gentlemen, said Bartholomew, leaning back in his seat. I have today made more money as a bookseller than in all the past twelve months. I have made enough that not only shall I buy the next round of ale while I tell you the tale, but for anyone who wishes to adjourn upstairs afterward, I shall buy a round of fleshly entertainment as well. He soaked in the cheers of his friends, blew the froth off another mug of ale, and began his story.He told of how he had met Robert Cotton, a young collector of books and manuscripts, at a meeting of the Elizabethan Society of Antiquaries. Barely a week later he had been drinking with a canon from Winchester when the reverend let slip a local legend that sent Bartholomew packing for Hampshire.It took me nearly two months to lay my plan, but one cant rush these sorts of things. I needed, after all, a brawny imbecile and a senile verger and they both needed an affection for drink. The verger proved an easy matter. I had only to drink a few nights in the taverns near the cathedral. The imbecile was more of a challenge. I finally found a farmhand who fit my requirements perfectly. He wasnt too trusting at first, but after a week or two of my paying for his ale every night, and a couple of visits to a brothel, he was ready to follow me anywhere. I chose a Tuesday night when everything in the precincts was quiet. Bartholomew took two greedy gulps of ale and continued.As you know, my family is from Wickham.Theyre from no such place, said Peele.Yes, but thats hardly common knowledge in Winchester. When I knocked on the door of my old verger, whom I had gotten good and drunk earlier in the evening, I was a poor pilgrim from Wickham come to pray for my fathers health at the tomb of our towns most famous bishop.William of Wykeham, said Lyly.None other. You see, according to the canon I entertained here in this very inn, a little-known legend in Winchester holds that Wykeham was buried with an ancient book in his arms.The sort of book that might appeal to young Robert Cotton? asked Nashe.Exactly, said Bartholomew, smiling. The verger didnt seem concerned that, despite the warmth of the summer night, both my brother and myself were clad in heavy cloaks. He let us in the south transept and tottered back to his lodgings.And under the cloaks? asked Marlowe.Well, I had prayed to Bishop William before, you see. Id spent long afternoons in his chantry chapel sizing up his tomb, measuring every dimension. It took some time to find a good carpenter who could be trusted, but eventually I found one who made me something resembling the trestle of a large table. It was in parts so the imbecile and I could assemble it next to the bishops tomb. Then it took all our combined strengths, along with a couple of iron bars, to prize the bishops effigy and its marble slab from the top of the tomb and slide it onto the wooden support.And what did you find? said Lyly.Dust, the smell of a few centuries of decay, and the good bishop. It was unnerving the way he stared up at me with those empty eye sockets, and I swear I heard moaning echoing through the cathedral when I first looked on him.The wind? said Peele.Thats what I told myself, said Harbottle.And what about the book? said Marlowe.Clasped in his hands right where it had been for nearly two hundred years. It took me a minute to prize it loose, and Im afraid I broke a few of the episcopal fingers in the process, but when I had it free and blew the dust off, well... it was as beautiful an illuminated Psalter as you could ever hope to see. Eleventh century, Id say, maybe even earlier. Once I had that in my bag, it was just a matter of pushing the top back on the tomb, slipping out of the cathedral, and giving my companion enough to drink that hed remember nothing in the morning.And what did this Robert Cotton think of your find? asked Peele.He had only two things to say, said Bartholomew. That he didnt want to know where it came from, and would twenty pounds be sufficient.Twenty pounds! cried Peele, sputtering ale all over the table. For one book?Twenty pounds should keep us all in ale until the plague is long gone, said Marlowe, pounding his empty mug on the table. What say you buy us another round and we drink a toast to the late bishop of Winchester.When the next round was served, Bartholomew, blushing with the triumph of his story and with his third mug of ale, turned to the great playwright.Now, Marlowe, he said. Youve not yet told me what brings you to London when the plague is abroad.I came to bid farewell to our dear friend Robert Greene, said Marlowe.Greene? Why, wheres he going?As good a question as any, said Lyly. For he lies this day on his deathbed.Bartholomew set down his mug and felt the blood drain from his face. Among them all, there had been no better drinker, no better whorer, none more prone to lose half a crown in a card game and laugh at the loss while pissing into the Thames than the poet Robert Greene. Bartholomew had the unusual good fortune never to have lost a close friend, and despite his lifestyle he was capable of affection. That Greene should be no longer there for a friendly night of debauchery hit him harder than he would have expected.Plague? he whispered.Hard living, said Marlowe. He reckons it was a dinner of pickled herring that did him in, but I think we all know it took

more than one dinner to push Robert Greene to the edge of this world.Where is he? asked Bartholomew.Lodging with a shoemaker in Dowgate, said Marlowe. A Mr. Isam. The wife looks after him. Seems a bit smitten, Id say. Greene hasnt a halfpenny to his name to repay her.I should like to see him, said Bartholomew.Youre not the only one, said Peele, laughing. Emma Ball was here not an hour ago looking for him.His mistress? asked Bartholomew.More than that, to judge by the crying bundle in her arms, said Peele.Ill show you the way, said Marlowe, draining his mug and pushing back his chair.Bartholomew had no wish to betray the tenderness of his feelings to his drunken companions and so banged his mug on the table with false enthusiasm. Lead on, he said to Marlowe. For though you say he dies in poverty, a bookseller can often find profit on a deathbed.Bartholomew parted with Marlowe in front of the narrow house in Dowgate where Robert Greene lay dying. Mrs. Isam let him in.Quite a lot of company hes aving today, she said. Though none as can pay off his debts.He was just about to knock on the door at the top of the stairs, when he heard a shrill voice from within.Course hes yours, you barnacle. Youd think lying there dying youd be willing to admit it. Not like he can do you any harm now. Just want the poor bastard to be able to say he ad a father once.Bartholomew pressed his ear to the door but could not quite hear Greenes low reply to this outburst. Soon the womans voice erupted again. It could only be Emma Ball.Fie on you, then, fie. Youve only give me two things in me whole lifeour son and this useless wad of paper. He heard a thud as she apparently threw something against the wall. Well, you can keep that, though much good as itll do you where youre going. Burn up fast there it will. And Ill choose a more decent corpse for my sons father.Bartholomew heard angry steps coming toward the door and barely had time to throw himself against the wall before the door flung open and a wild-looking woman in filthy clothes, clutching a mewling wad of rags, flew from the room and down the stairs. Waiting until he heard her pass through the outer door, Bartholomew stepped into the room.Your mother, I presume, he said to his old friend.Barty! said Greene, bursting into something between a fit of coughing and a laugh. How good to see you.Robert Greenes usually florid face was pale and drawn. It was hard to believe that this was the same man who had produced great romances like Mamillia and Pandosto and written those marvelous pamphlets about life in the underbelly of London. This was the man who had lived with vigor all those rakish adventures he had written about; but now his signature pointed hair was nothing but a wispy tangle, his beard was matted and unkempt, and he wore only a borrowed nightshirt, having sold, he told Bartholomew, his beloved doublet of goose-turd green to offset some of his many debts.Still writing I see, said Bartholomew, noticing the pen and paper on the crude table by Greenes bedside.My deathbed confessions, said Greene. You shall enjoy this bit, I believe. Its about the glove-makers son. Greene reached for the papers beside his bed and read in a weak echo of his formerly robust voice.There is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tigers hart wrapped in a Players hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country. Greenes voice again dissolved into coughing and laughter.It will be a shame to see you go, said Bartholomew, for no one laughs more heartily at your humor than you do yourself.True, true, said Greene, falling back against the pillow. I doubt Mr. Shakespeare will laugh at this.And what of your other visitor? asked Bartholomew.Marlowe?The one with the shrill voice and the bundle in her arms.Ah, be careful whom you bed, good Barty, for in bedding there is oft breeding.Well said, sir, said Bartholomew. And that bundle that smelled of shite and sour milkIm betting that was your breeding?So says his whore of a mother. Fortunatus, she calls him, though shes no cause to. As unfortunate a wretch as was ever brought into this world, and Ill not claim him when Im on my way out. Greene burst into another coughing fit, this one more prolonged than the others. For the first time, Bartholomew truly felt his friend was about to die. He again felt an unexpected surge of emotionnot for the lost debauchery but, surprisingly, for the lost soul. Surely after the life he had led, Robert Greene could expect no heavenly reward.Do me a final favor, Barty, said Greene when his coughing had subsided.Anything, old friend, said Bartholomew.Theres a book on the floor there. He pointed to the other side of the bed and Bartholomew retrieved a thin quarto volume.Pandosto. One of your romances.Indeed, said Greene. In a moment of foolishness I gave it to that sister of a scoundrel and she returned it to me here on my deathbed. Sell it for me, will you, Barty? Its not worth much, but sell it and give the money to Mrs. Isam. Without her, I should die in the street, and hers is a debt I shant be able to repay in this world.Consider it done, said Bartholomew, tucking the volume under his arm.Now, off with you, said Greene. There are women in Southwark who will miss me tonight, and someone must tend to them. He laughed again and Bartholomew found that he could not answer, so he only bowed low at the foot of the bed and backed out of the room, gently closing the door behind him. In the dim stairwell he looked at the book Greene had given him. It would bring a few shillings,

maybe more with the death of its author. As he stepped out into the late-afternoon light, he suddenly thought that he should like to keep this volume himself, as a memento of his soon-to-be departed friend. Digging into his doublet, he pulled out half a crown and tossed it to Mrs. Isam, who sat in front of the house plucking a chicken.For the debts of your lodger, he said.Bless you, sir, said Mrs. Isam. Its a start at least.Bartholomew tucked the book back under his arm and strode off toward St. Pauls, the afternoon sun blurred by the tears in his eyes.Kingham, Friday, February 17, 1995Peter wiped the sleep from his eyes as he waited for the bread to toast and the kettle to boil. He had looked through the indexes of his books on illustrators, but neither helped him identify B.B. Now he stared at Dr. Strayers list pinned to the message board in the kitchen. His original typed instructions were now almost obscured by the notes Peter had scrawled in the margins over the past several months. Underneath a circular stain of tea and a smudge of marmalade he could still read the list:Grieve for Amanda; Acknowledge Your FeelingsEstablish Regular Eating and Sleeping HabitsMeet New PeopleRe-establish Your CareerUse Career to Bring People Closer, Not to Keep Them AwayDevelop a Passion in Addition to BooksLearn Something NewGet in Touch with Old FriendsRe-establish Relationship with Amandas FamilyDont Run Away, Run TowardBeside Develop a Passion he had written and then crossed out poetry and painting. He had almost forgotten that he had purchased a watercolor set in Chipping Norton two months ago. He had given up after trying one painting. Next to Get in Touch with Old Friends was Francis Lelands phone number, though Peter had not dialed it since arriving in Kingham. Beside Meet New People, he had scrawled the service schedule for the local parish church, but he had no intention of attending. Peter hadnt done a very good job with his assignments.Revue de presseWith THE BOOKMANS TALE, Charlie Lovett tells us a terrific storytheres mystery and suspense, murder and seductionbut more important, he shows us how its all connected, all of this: the reading and the keeping and the sharing of books. It forms a chain long and strange enough to tie a heartbroken young scholar from North Carolina back to the Bard himself, who might or might not have been William Shakespeare. Every link along the way is a bookmans tale all its own, and Lovett tells them all, except the very last, of course: because thats you, about to read this book right now.Robin Sloan, New York Times bestselling author of Mr. Penumbras 24-Hour BookstoreLovetts novel, THE BOOKMANS TALE, is a marvelous new Shakespearean mystery: an intelligent thriller that is also a love song for books and the people who relish them. Lovett knows his stuff about Shakespeare, rare books, and the passions that both inspire, and he weaves from these a delicious tale of love, loss, and the thrill of discovery. It kept me turning pages till the wee hours for days. The only disappointment was that it came to an end.Jennifer Lee Carrell, author of Interred with Their Bones. . .A gripping literary mystery that is compulsively readable until the thrilling end. For fans of Geraldine Brookss People of the Book, Shakespeare aficionados, and bibliophiles.Library Journal (Starred)A pleasurably escapist trans-Atlantic mystery is intricately layered with plots, murders, feuds, romances, forgeriesand antiquarian book dealing.KirkusFans of mysteries, of love stories, and of rare books will all find moments in Lovetts novel to treasure.BooklistI don't read much fiction. I'm picky. But I loved racing through Charlie Lovett's The Bookman's Tale, a richly rewarding thriller filled with real-world details about the discovery of a rare book that may or may not be a priceless Shakespearean artifact. Fun for everyone who's ever fondled a soft leather binding!DANIEL SINGER, founder, Reduced Shakespeare Company and co-author of The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)[A] suspenseful romp spanning centuries and continents and peppered with romance, skulduggery, forgery and murder, all driven by one of the enduring questions of literary scholarship.Washington PostThe Bard is back in this rollicking literary mystery.This novel has something for everyone: William Shakespeare, a love story, murder and even a secret tunnel.Star TribuneA Bookmans Tale has plenty of richness to offer.Daring intricacy.The Atlanta Journal-ConstitutionDa Vinci Codelike sleuthing into the works of Shakespeare and sliding back to the bards time.Library JournalA treat.New York Journal of BooksBegin this book in the evening only if youre willing to pull an all-nighterThe novel will appeal not only to bookworms and mystery hounds but to anyone who smiles at abiding love or simply enjoys a good read. Winston-Salem MonthlyAll too good to resist.The Bookmans Tale is a book about books, written for lovers of books.The Fayetteville ObserverRoguish booksellers, feuding nobles and unexpected plot twists.The Asheville Citizen-Times[A] charismatic tale about the rare book world and history come to life.Like a gigantic hug to all book lovers.MinnesotaReads.com"[A]n immensely satisfying and plesurable read that combines a range of genres and above all else, celebrates the beauty and wonder of the literary word."SeattlePI.com"Lovett's tale

sparkles with seasoned storytelling."The Mountain Times