



“Entertaining, heartfelt, and suspenseful: a superb addition to a beloved series.”
—*Kirkus*, starred review

Dear Editor/Producer:



Good news for mystery lovers and [Stevie Bell](#) fans: #1 *New York Times* bestselling author [Maureen Johnson](#) returns this fall with **THE VELVET KNIFE**, a new Stevie Bell mystery to be published by HarperCollins in hardcover on September 29, 2026.

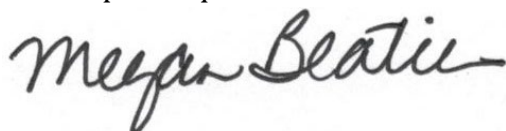
In signature Maureen Johnson fashion, **THE VELVET KNIFE** braids together a present-day murder investigation and a decades-old mystery, sending Stevie into investigating the shadowy world of an immersive cult. With its exploration of belief, charisma, manipulation, and the longing to belong, the novel taps directly into readers’ ongoing fascination with true crime, cult psychology, and the stories we tell ourselves in order to feel safe.

The action picks up where *Nine Liars* left off. Stevie may be the greatest teenage detective Ellingham Academy—and perhaps the world—has ever seen, but even she cannot solve the mystery of what happened with her boyfriend, David, in London. What she needs is a distraction, preferably a good old-fashioned murder. Stevie has always found dead people far less confusing than living ones: they do not send cryptic texts, break hearts, or kiss other girls in British pubs. When Stevie spends winter break with her friend Nate in the Manhattan apartment where he is holed up to finish his novel, a body turns up in the building—and Stevie is instantly on the case.

A love letter to New York City, **THE VELVET KNIFE** captures the city in all its wintertime texture: the smell of pizza on a cold night, the glow of skyscrapers and countless windows, the glimpses of lives unfolding behind them, and the strange beauty of the East Village, with its boutiques, bodegas, skate shops, coffee places, art, and unmistakable neighborhood energy. It is also, in part, a love letter to New Yorkers and their dogs—especially rescue dogs, a subject close to Maureen Johnson’s heart. Boris & Horton, the real East Village dog café featured in the book, was one of the places where Johnson worked on edits and, fittingly, where she adopted her own dog, Dexy.

THE VELVET KNIFE will delight longtime Stevie Bell fans, true crime devotees, and mystery readers of all ages. And at the same time, it offers a timely angle on the pull of cults, the danger of charismatic control, and the question of how much we can ever really trust what connects us to other people.

I urge you to make plans for coverage this fall; review copies, interviews, and additional materials are available upon request.

Best regards, 

Megan Beatie, [MB Communications](#)

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About Maureen Johnson

Maureen Johnson is the #1 *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of nineteen young adult novels, including the *Truly Devious* series, the *Shades of London* series, *Suite Scarlett*, and *13 Little Blue Envelopes*. Her collaborative books include *Ghosts of the Shadow Market* (with Cassandra Clare), *Your Guide to Not Getting Murdered in a Quaint English Village* (illustrated by Jay Cooper), as well as *Let It Snow* (with John Green and Lauren Myracle), which was also a hit feature film on Netflix. Her books have sold more than three million copies worldwide and have been published in more than thirty countries. She has been nominated for two Edgar Awards, a Bram Stoker Award, a Nebula Award, was a World Book Day author in the UK in 2014, and has been nominated for or won dozens of YALSA, state library, media and readers' choice awards.



The bestselling author is also active in social justice issues and politics both online and IRL. She initiated [an open letter in support of trans and nonbinary communities](#) that was signed by more than 2000 North American writers, including Margaret Atwood, Stephen King, and Roxane Gay, as well as publishers and other members of the literary world. She co-hosts the podcast, [Says Who?](#) with *Punk Planet* creator Dan Sinker and edited the collection *How I Resist*, the entire advance of which was donated to the ACLU. She is a leader of the New York chapter of Authors Against Book Banning and actively works on legislative efforts for the Freedom to Read.

She has written for media outlets including *The New York Times*, *Buzzfeed*, *The Guardian* and CrimeReads. Her CrimeReads essay, ["Your Guide to Not Getting Murdered in a Quaint English Village"](#) was turned into a bestselling book.

Maureen Johnson grew up in Philadelphia and has an MFA in Writing from Columbia University. She lives in New York City with her husband and dog.

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Additional social media tags

Facebook: @meganbeatiecommunications, @EpicReads

Instagram: @mbc_books, @epicreads

Select Critical Praise and Accolades for Maureen Johnson's Stevie Bell mysteries

NINE LIARS

January/February 2023 Kids' IndieNext List Pick
An Indie and *Publishers Weekly* bestseller

"The exploration of the importance of friendship (with parallels between the Nine and Stevie's group) adds emotional vulnerability to this book, which has a well-developed sense of place and features the series' signature humor and layered mystery elements. The cast includes diversity in race, gender identity, and sexual orientation."

— *Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

"Johnson delivers another satisfying mystery, with diverse characters, authentic depictions of mental health, and friends holding one another accountable for their actions in loving, supportive ways." — *School Library Journal*

"Johnson delivers a meticulously crafted fair-play mystery that gratifies as a standalone while also forwarding the richly textured characters' arcs, a treat for fans of the series."

— *Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"Johnson's stressed-out, singular teen detective won hearts—and spots on best-seller lists—with the Truly Devious series and in the standalone adventure that followed; readers will happily follow Stevie to this second location." — *Booklist*

"In *Nine Liars*, bestselling author Maureen Johnson employs the hallmarks of classical Agatha Christie-style mysteries, such as frontispiece maps and a (metaphorical) locked room, while cleverly subverting others. Stevie still gathers the suspects together to reveal the solution, but she does so in a fresh and unexpected way, and Johnson replaces Christie's stock characters with Stevie's diverse and emotionally nuanced friends." — *BookPage*

"*Nine Liars* is an ingenious continuation of one of the all-time best YA mystery series ever... *Nine Liars* is essential reading for anyone who enjoys a good old-fashioned mystery, but with a distinctively modern twist. Prepare for Johnson to fool you all over again."

— *The Nerd Daily*

"'When everybody lies, somebody dies.'" Which is exactly what happens in the bestselling YA author's latest twist-filled tale that will have your pulse pounding." — *E! News*

"Johnson once again works her magic with a mystery set in the past that Stevie unravels in the present." — *Forbes.com*

"*Nine Liars* is a thrilling new story featuring Stevie, a cold case, and a gripping mystery. Highly recommend for fans of suspense, detective work, and a clever and intrepid heroine!"

— *Young Adult Books Central* (Five-star Review)

"... the journey is fun, twisty, and full of heart. Highly recommended. I love the Stevie Bell series for so many reasons, high among them is the very diverse cast of characters and the

way that Stevie's character richly and accurately portrays mental illness. And who doesn't love a good mystery?" — **Teen Librarian Toolbox**

"As always, Maureen Johnson offers humor, suspense, vivid characters and a well-crafted plot in this intriguing tale, a worthy entry in the tradition of the British country manor murder mystery." — ***The Buffalo News***

"Once again, it is such fun to get into Stevie Bell's world. Like the previous books in the series, she is navigating school and trying to understand her peers, all while investigating a mystery from the past... It's a treat that they are [Stevie's friend group] so diverse in race, gender and sexuality... Although the mystery is wrapped up by the end, Stevie's relationship with David ends with a cliff-hanger, so I expect that we'll be treated to another *Truly Devious* mystery." — ***Youth Services Book Review***

"Maureen Johnson is the type of writer that knows how to showcase a sense of mystery in her stories. She writes characters that have an intense curiosity and interest in finding out, at all costs, the secrets that surround them. Her books are relatable not only to teens, but also to adults, who will gravitate toward her colorful, engaging and fun storytelling."
— ***BookTrib***

"I can confidently say that after reading this, I am now an avid follower of the Stevie Bell mysteries. *Nine Liars* by Maureen Johnson is an altogether great read that will keep you on your toes, while also allowing for the frequent laugh."
— **Michelle Carpenter, Criminal Element**

THE BOX IN THE WOODS

"*The Box in the Woods* is a gripping and complex mystery bolstered by its commentary on the popular fascination with true crime—and its empathetic reminder to consider the perspectives of those whom such crimes leave behind." — ***BookPage***

"Sardonic sleuth Stevie Bell returns in this engaging stand-alone sleepaway camp thriller, a follow-up to Johnson's *Truly Devious* trilogy. Johnson's kinetic descriptions join towering cliffhangers as chapters switch between 1978 and the present day, and Stevie's search turns deadly. Johnson includes a winning crew of returning characters . . . the friend group sustains entertaining rapport as Stevie navigates personal and public histories."
— ***Publishers Weekly***

"It's always a pleasure to watch smart, resourceful Stevie piece together a puzzle. Mystery fans will relish this standalone novel in the 'Truly Devious' universe." — ***School Library Journal***

"*The Box in the Woods* is an utterly addictive read that adds a wonderful new dimension to the world of *Truly Devious* and yet another fiendish twist in Stevie's story."
— **The Nerd Daily**

TRULY DEVIOUS

"*Truly Devious* is filled with twists and turns—plus Maureen Johnson is very, very funny."
— **Harlan Coben, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author**

“An intricately plotted, compulsively readable novel that explores not only fascinating crimes but also the mysteries of anxiety, the creative process, contemporary fame, and so much else.” —**John Green, author of *The Fault in Our Stars***

“Maureen Johnson’s love and deep knowledge of crime fiction shows through in every scene of the book, and her heroine, the crime-obsessed, detective-in-the-making Stevie Bell, is someone I will follow everywhere on her quest to uncover the present and long-ago secrets of Ellingham Academy. What a fantastic start to what I know will be a wonderful series.” —**Sarah Weinman, editor of *Women Crime Writers: Eight Suspense Novels of the 1940s & 50s***

“The Agatha Christie-like ecosystem pairs with lacerating contemporary wit and alternating past and present scenes makes for a multilayered, modern detective story.” —***New York Times Book Review***

“Johnson builds her most original and elaborately plotted book yet, a novel with overlapping mysteries from the 1930s and present-day that she carefully unspools chapter by chapter.” —**The A.V. Club**

“Through alternating chapters, we learn about Ellingham’s haunted history, one that amateur detective Stevie Bell hopes to solve in Johnson’s web of mystery, which is on par with Agatha Christie’s most riveting whodunits, complete with a totally unexpected ending.” —**W magazine**

“Remember the first time reading *Harry Potter* and knowing it was something special? There’s that same sense of magic with *Truly Devious*, (featuring) a young sleuth as captivating as Hercule Poirot or Nancy Drew.” —**USA Today (four stars)**

“Johnson’s novel is deliciously atmospheric, with a sprawling cast of complex suspects/potential victims, surprising twists, and a dash of romance. As in her *Shades of London* books, Johnson remains a master at combining jittery tension with sharp, laugh-out-loud observations.” —***Publishers Weekly* (starred review)**

THE VANISHING STAIR

“Take it from the world’s most impatient reader: If the *Truly Devious* series is basically one long mystery book, *The Vanishing Stair* is a middle part so enjoyable you won’t even want to skip to the end.” —***Entertainment Weekly***

“In this second installment of her marvelous *Truly Devious* series, Maureen Johnson offers thrilling suspense, sly wit, a memorable cast of characters and more pieces of her deliciously intricate puzzle, shifting between a 1936 unsolved kidnapping and triple murder at the elite Ellingham Academy and present-day Vermont where that cold case crime continues to reverberate in disturbing ways.”
—***Buffalo News***

“In this second trilogy installment, Johnson gives and she takes away: a few major mysteries are satisfyingly solved, but other long-standing riddles remain tantalizingly indecipherable, and several new ones come into play by the enigmatic end. That Johnson handles all these plots without stalling her tale or relying on shock value to hook her

audience is a testament to her skills as a storyteller. Readers, hang tight: there's one more round to come, and if the signs are right, it'll be to die for." —**Booklist**

"Johnson's follow-up to *Truly Devious* is even better than the first. The action moves swiftly, the characters are engaging and realistic, the solutions are satisfying, and readers will have a hard time waiting to see what happens next. VERDICT: A must-have where the previous volume is popular and where mysteries circulate well." —**School Library Journal**

"The cleverly plotted, page-turning sequel to Maureen Johnson's hit bestseller *Truly Devious* (2018) manages to outshine its predecessor...Suspense and intrigue abound in *The Vanishing Stair* as Johnson illuminates suspects and teases out clues that will flummox even the most adept murder mystery aficionado." —**BookPage**

THE HAND ON THE WALL

"The final, riveting chapter of the Truly Devious murder series. Throughout this intricately woven, fast-paced whodunit, Johnson demonstrates how proximity to wealth and power can mold and bend one's behavior, whether with good or—here largely—devious intent.

The brainy secondary characters' quirky talents and interests complement Stevie's sleuthing skills; . . . they include diversity in socioeconomic background, mental health challenges, physical disability, and sexual orientation. A richly satisfying, Poirot-like ending for Johnson's inspired and inspiring teen sleuth." —**Kirkus Reviews (starred review)**

"In this hotly anticipated trilogy finale, Johnson pulls out all the stops, filling the thrillingly nimble narrative with classic mystery conventions. A striking foray into an examination of what mysteries can ever truly be solved, and a satisfying send-off for a series that will be missed." —**Booklist**

"This hip mystery trilogy finale is an addictive page-turner that piles on the murder plots and intrigue in two time periods." —**Common Sense Media**

"This was an absolutely perfect finale to an engaging series." —**Young Adult Books Central**

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