

thisweek

Readings & signings on LI

Monday

Author **Judith Grisel** discusses her book, "Never Enough: The Neuroscience and Experience of Addiction." Registration required. Donations accepted and will benefit SJJCC's ACT Program. At 7 p.m., Sid Jacobson JCC, 300 Forest Dr., East Hills; 516-484-1545, sjjcc.org/neverenough



Tuesday

Authors **Phil Keith** and **Tom Clavin** talk about and sign copies of their book, "All Blood Runs Red: The Legendary Life of Eugene Bullard — Boxer, Pilot, Soldier, Spy." At 7 p.m., Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com

Saturday

New York Times contributor **Robert Simonson** ("The Martini Cocktail: A Meditation on the World's Greatest Drink, with Recipes") and restaurant owner **Thad Vogler** ("By the Smoke & the Smell: My Search for the Rare and Sublime on the Spirits Trail") talk about and sign copies of their books. At 4 p.m., BookHampton, 41 Main St., East Hampton; 631-324-4939, bookhampton.com

Next Sunday

Oscar winner **Julie Andrews** and her daughter, **Emma Walton Hamilton**, discuss their book "Home Work: A Memoir of My Hollywood Years" with Sag Harbor Arts Center artistic director Giulia D'Agnolo Vallan. Tickets start at \$85 and include a screening of Andrews' 1986 movie "That's Life!" and a pre-signed book. For \$150, you can get your book signed in person. Books must be picked up day of event. At 3 p.m., Bay Street Theater & Sag Harbor Center for the Arts, 1 Bay St., Sag Harbor; 631-725-9500, baystreet.org
Compiled by Nyasia Draper



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reviews

This comic novel is hot stuff

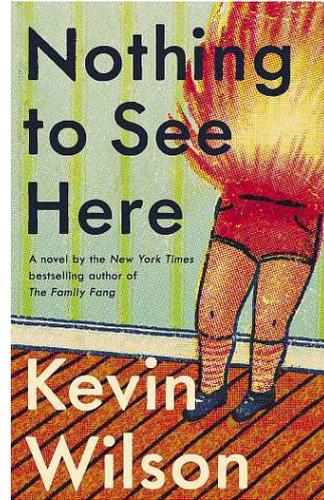
NOTHING TO SEE HERE, by Kevin Wilson. Ecco, 254 pp., \$26.99.

BY MARION WINIK
Special to Newsday

One of the most important functions of literature is to cheer you up when life is hard. Not every good book does that. Many excellent ones are sad or harsh. When you need an escape from the *tsuris*, pick up "Nothing to See Here," Kevin Wilson's deadpan, hilarious modern fairy tale complete with impoverished heroine, cruel princess and neglected children with magical powers.

The story is told by Lillian Breaker, and it begins in the late spring of 1995. Just turned 28, she is living in her dreadful hometown with her mean mother and working two menial jobs. When her high school friend Madison Billings, a rich girl from Tennessee now married to a senator, calls and asks her to come down and consider a job offer, Lillian has nothing to lose.

As she's being driven from the bus station to Madison's estate by Carl, a minion who will come to play a major role, she decides not to go into her history with his employer. "Carl didn't want to hear any of that, so we just



rode in silence the rest of the way, the radio playing easy listening that made me want to slip into a hot bath and dream about killing everyone I knew." (Lillian seems a close cousin of Marcy Dermansky's unapologetically imperfect heroines.)

What Lillian doesn't want to explain is that she met Madison as a scholarship student at a fancy girls' school, where they were bosom buddies until a treacherous act we will not disclose here. Unexpectedly, the two have stayed in touch: it seems neither ever found any other friends.

At the mansion, her exquisitely beautiful former basketball teammate Madison is waiting with finger sandwiches, sweet tea and a propo-



Kevin Wilson's new novel, "Nothing to See Here," is a deadpan, hilarious modern fairy tale.

LEIGH ANNE COUCH

sition. It seems her husband has two children, Bessie and Roland, from a previous marriage; their mother has died. They are being kept in seclusion because they have a strange affliction: they catch fire when they are upset. The flames don't harm the kids themselves, but burn their clothes and anything they touch.

Of all the possible things to worry about in this situation, Madison and her husband are primarily concerned with keeping them out of the way of his political career. She wants Lillian to be their governess for the summer, taking care of them in a guesthouse on the property.

Lillian can barely think of the last time she interacted with a child, but the comforts

of Madison's life are sucking her in fast. Not until she meets the children and comes away bleeding does she realize what she has gotten herself into: "It was going to be like teaching a wild raccoon to wear a little coat and play the piano." Only it's going to be much, much more than that, because love and trust will be involved. And yoga. And basketball.

When Lillian defuses a situation by dragging the kids out to the basketball court for the first time, she wonders why it took her so long. "Maybe raising children was just giving them the things you loved most in the world and hoping that they loved them, too."

Much about parenting is revealed in Lillian's developing relationship with her charges. The possibility of children bursting into flames doesn't seem all that distant from the terrors of real-life parenting. Kids' chaotic, unbounded emotions, their ability to hurt themselves and others, their propensity for wrecking the house — it's a metaphor with legs.

As in his bestseller "The Family Fang," Wilson interweaves the bizarre and the mundane to tell a story about the damage parents do to their children. This one, with fire at its center, has the warmer trajectory. You'll close the covers with a smile.

A new heroine makes a thrilling escape

WHAT ROSE FORGOT, by Nevada Barr. Minotaur, 304 pp., \$28.99.

BY KIM ODE
Star Tribune (Minneapolis) (TNS)

In this stand-alone novel, Nevada Barr departs from her long-beleaguered heroine, park ranger Anna Pigeon, and introduces us to Rose Dennis, a resident of an Alzheimer's unit in Longwood, a senior care facility. To a certain demographic, this setting holds just as

much frightfulness as Barr's 19 previous murder-mysteries. We meet Rose in mid-escape into some nearby woods, and in the overnight hours without medication, her mind clears enough to know that something is wrong, that this sudden diagnosis is suspect.

Once found and returned to Longwood, she slyly spits out her next doses and sets about trying to learn why she's here. Barr seems inspired by her new protagonist, writing with particular style and savvy. She describes Rose waking up this way:

"Out of a coil of snaking dreams an answer rises, floating into a window as small and dark as that of a Magic 8-Ball."

Barr has always worked in brief asides that draw a smile, as when Rose "cries for the dogs they raised, the cats they served."

The plot itself explores the idea of a profit motive in hastening old people to their deaths. "What with the baby boomers beginning to lose their collective marbles, dementia care is a seller's market."

The action is classic Barr.

Family connections are delved — yes, there is a sister. A hit man pursuing Rose through a bedroom window and onto a rooftop ends up losing the tip of his finger. Yes, she will take a print from that digit to discover his identity.

In short, Rose is every bit as feisty and fearless as Anna Pigeon — and ends up just about as badly mauled as Barr's usual foil. The ultimate villain is unexpected, and the larger scheme a chilling vision of how aging people can lose control over their lives. Will we see more of Rose? Fine by me.