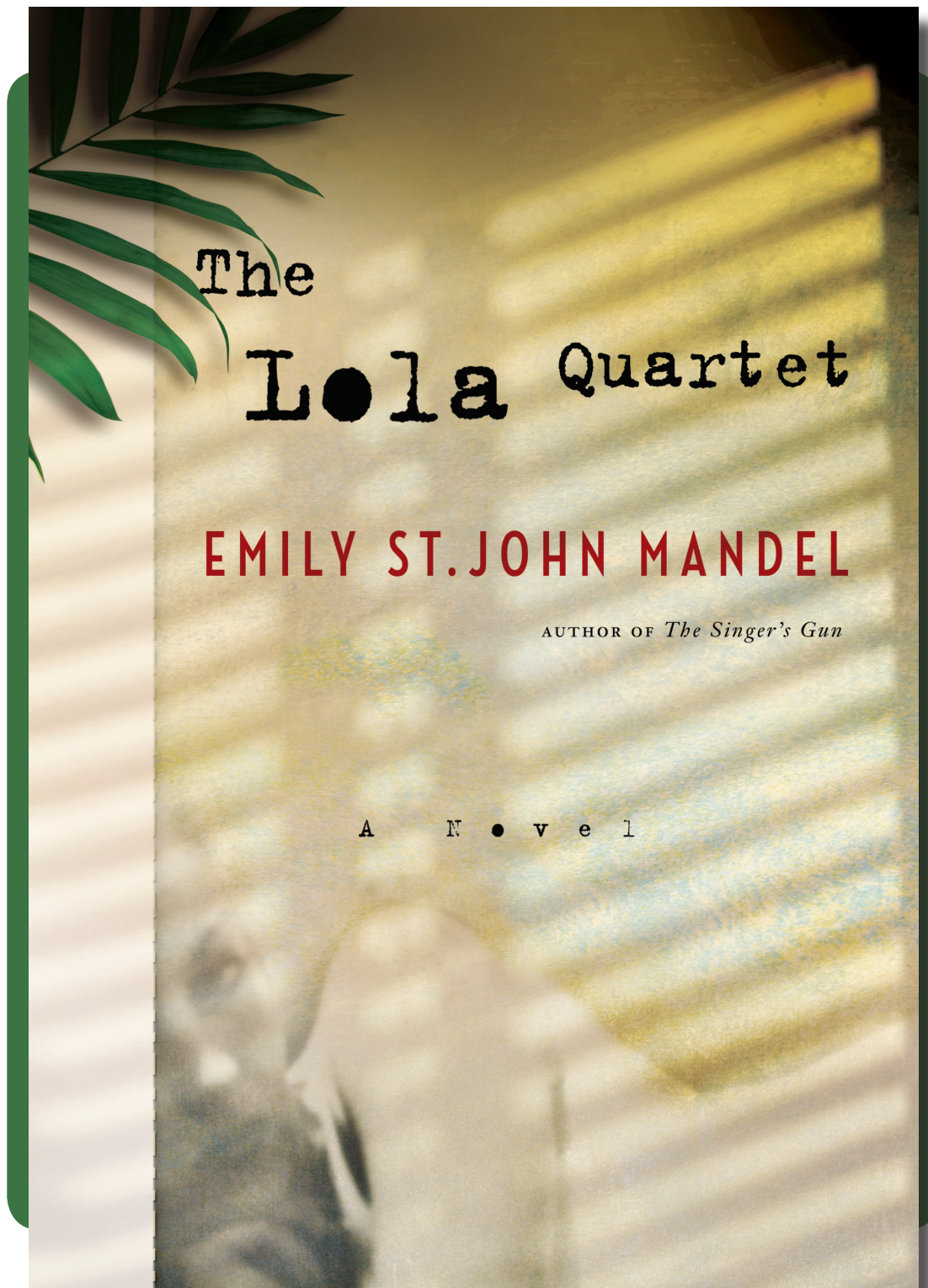


DISGRACED AND FIRED FROM HIS NEWSPAPER JOB, A YOUNG MAN RETURNS TO THE FLORIDA TOWN OF HIS BIRTH TO BEGIN SEARCHING FOR A DAUGHTER HE HAS ONLY RECENTLY LEARNED MAY EXIST AND WHO COULD BE AT CONSIDERABLE RISK.



FICTION

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The Lola Quartet

BY EMILY ST. JOHN MANDEL

MIRIAM BERKLEY



Emily St. John Mandel was born on the west coast of British Columbia, Canada. She studied at The School of Toronto Dance Theatre and lived briefly in Montreal before relocating to New York. Her first novel, *Last Night in Montreal*, was a finalist for *Foreword Magazine's* 2009 Book of the Year. Her second novel, *The Singer's Gun*, recently released in paperback, won the Indie Bookseller's Choice Award and was the #1 Indie Next Pick for May 2010. Currently a staff writer for *The Millions*, she is married and lives in Brooklyn.

Gavin Sasaki is a promising young journalist in New York City, until he's fired in disgrace following a series of unforgivable lapses in his work. It's early 2009, and the world has gone dark very quickly. The economic collapse has turned an era that magazine headlines once heralded as the second gilded age into something that more closely resembles the Great Depression. The last thing Gavin wants to do is return to his hometown of Sebastian, Florida, but he's in no position to refuse when he's offered a job by his sister, Eilo, a real estate broker who deals in foreclosed homes.

Also, Eilo has shown him a photo of a ten-year-old girl who could be homeless and in trouble. The little girl looks strikingly like Gavin and has the same last name as his high school girlfriend, Anna, from a decade ago. Gavin—a former jazz musician, a reluctant broker of foreclosed properties, obsessed with film noir and private detectives and otherwise at loose ends—begins his own private investigation in an effort to track down Anna and their apparent daughter who, it turns out, have been on the run all these years.

In this transcendent third novel, Emily Mandel combines her most compelling characters with a breath-taking, tension-filled story as she examines again questions of identity, the surprising pull of family, the difficulties of being the person one wants to be, guilt, and the unforeseen ways in which a small and innocent action can have disastrous consequences. *The Lola Quartet* is a work that pays homage to literary noir and jazz, Django Reinhardt, economic collapse, love and loss, Florida's exotic wildlife problem, crushing tropical heat, the leavening of the contemporary world, compulsive gambling, and the unreliability of memory.

Anna had fallen into a routine, or as much of a routine as a seventeen-year-old can reasonably fall into when she's transient and living in hiding with an infant. She was staying at her sister's friend's house in a small town in Virginia.

The baby always woke up crying at four thirty or five a.m. Anna got up and changed Chloe's diaper, prepared a bottle and bundled her into the stroller and then they left the basement where they were living, walked three blocks to the twenty-four-hour doughnut shop for coffee and across the wide empty street to the park. Anna sat on a swing with her first coffee of the morning and Chloe lay in the stroller staring up at the clouds. They listened to the birds in the trees at the edges of the park, the sounds of traffic in the distance. The climbing equipment cast a complicated silhouette against the pale morning sky.

There was a plastic shopping bag duct-taped to the underside of the stroller. It held a little under one hundred eighteen thousand dollars in cash.

That morning at a music school in South Carolina a pianist was sitting alone in a practice room. Jack had been playing the piano for four and a half hours and under normal circumstances his hands would be aching by now, but he was high on painkillers and he couldn't feel it. There was an east-facing window in the practice room and the morning light had long since entered. The piano was illuminated, sun caught in the varnish and gleaming in the keys, the whole room shining, he was dizzy, his skin itched and he hadn't slept all night. His roommate had gone to Virginia to rescue a girl whom Jack had imperiled and everything was coming apart around him, but so long as he kept playing he didn't have to think about any of this, so he closed his eyes against the shine and launched once more into Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue.

excerpt