# A ‘LITTLE TEEN MURDER BOOK’ AND A RADICAL FEAT OF PHOTOJOURNALISM JOIN THE COOP BOOKSHELF

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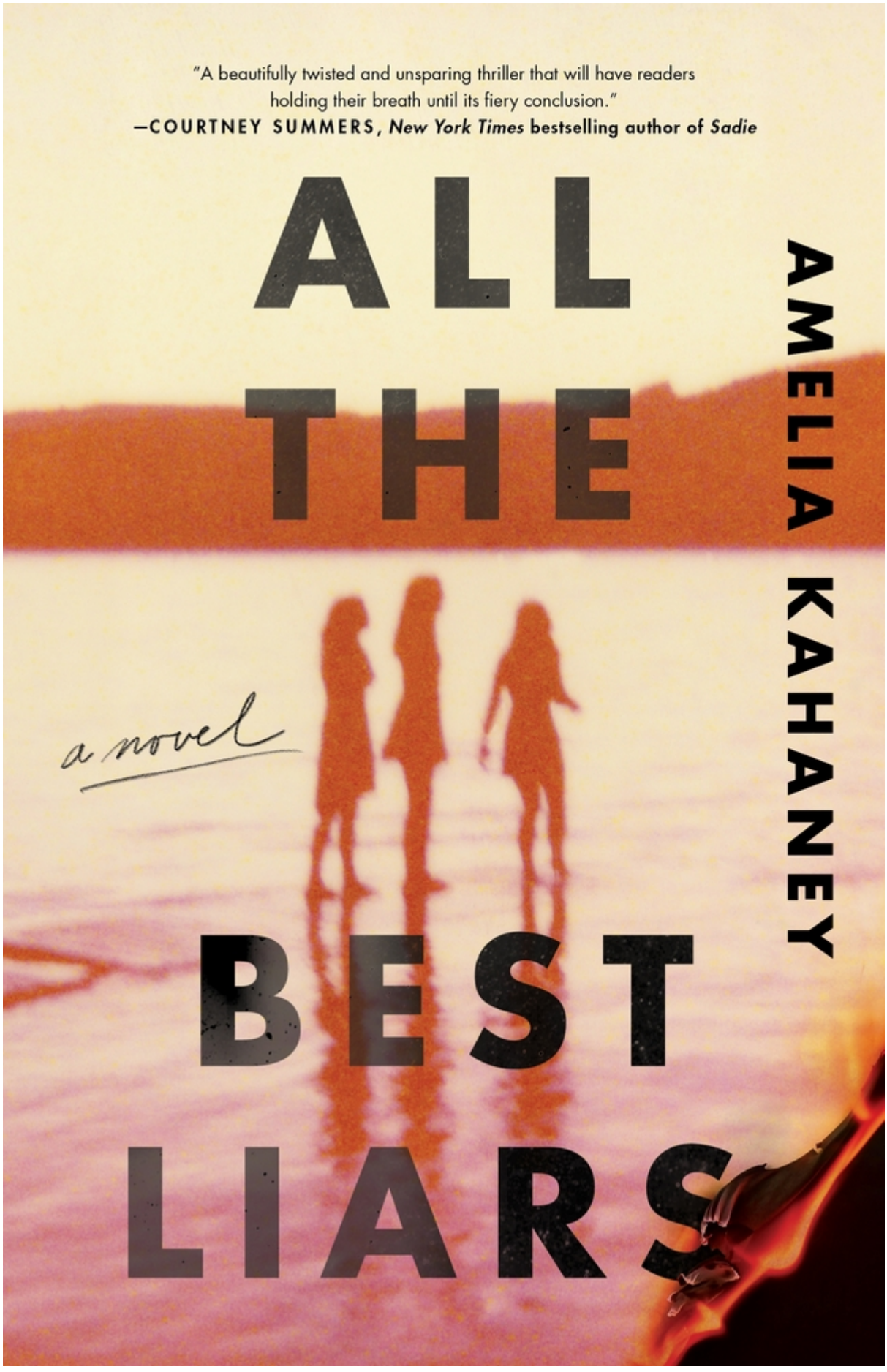

*By Sara Ivry*

Who are the people paging for help at the CBD case or standing next to you utterly vexed by which new olive to buy? What fuels their imagination? What kind of art consumes them or what kind do they themselves create?

Amongst its thousands of members, the Coop has poets, artists, filmmakers, and more. Amelia Kahaney, a novelist, and Bev Grant, an activist, photographer, and musician, are but two of the Coop’s roster of creatives, and both have new books. Though they are very different works—Kahaney’s is a young adult novel, and Grant’s is a book of photographs—they both engage with questions of class and social marginalization.

*All the Best Liars* came out in early April from Flatiron Press. It's a propulsive young adult mystery thriller about three high school girls, once besties and now quite the opposite. Why their relationship fractured makes up the heart of this story, which adults and adolescents alike will find riveting. Kahaney, 44, has been a Coop member since 2004.

From 1968 to 1972, Bev Grant photographed trailblazing activists and social protest movements as part of Newsreel, a collective of photographers and filmmakers supporting progressive causes. Her first book, *Bev Grant Photography 1968 to 1972*, came out in 2021 from OSMOS Books and is available at Community Bookstore and online. A 20-year member of the Coop, Grant is also an accomplished musician and the founder of the Brooklyn Women's Chorus. You can find out more about her photography at bevgrantphotography.com and about her music and other projects at bevgrant.com. An exhibition of her work will be on view at the American Labor Museum in New Jersey in May.


"A beautifully twisted and unsparing thriller that will have readers holding their breath until its fiery conclusion."
—COURTNEY SUMMERS, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Sadie*
ALL THE BEST LIARS
a novel
AMELIA KAHANEY

## AMELIA KAHANEY'S YA INTRIGUE

**Gazette:**

You're at a cocktail party and someone asks you what the book's about. What do you answer?

**Amelia Kahaney**:

I usually say it's my little teen murder book. But then I go into more detail, I describe it as a coming of age book that's wrapped in a thriller. Or sometimes I say that it's a thriller wrapped inside of a coming of age novel. It's narrated by three best friends about to graduate from high school. Actually, they're not best friends. They were once and they're estranged for various reasons at the start of the book, and we quickly learn that one has died. Then we learn that one has disappeared and the third one who remains might be in some trouble. And so the clock is ticking to figure out what happened.

**Gazette:**

How did you come up with the idea for this?

**Kahaney:**

I was in California visiting my parents, feeling very uninspired by all of the beauty and calmness and peace in San Diego. It wasn't feeling dark enough, and I took a trip to the Salton Sea, outside of Palm Springs. I didn't really understand what it was until I actually got there. I knew it was a giant lake in the middle of the desert. It was August, viciously hot at 120 degrees, and we drove out there, and everything was dead or dying. When you approach it, it looks very beautiful until your eyes adjust and then what you see when you walk toward the sea is that it is filled with dead fish, dead bloated birds and half eaten things. The houses around it are full of rats and

snakes—boarded up houses, nobody can live there anymore. And the runoff is affecting the communities around it.

In the mid-20th century, it had more visitors than Yosemite, but now the Salton Sea is an environmental catastrophe. It's the side of the desert that people don't usually see, the non-touristy, really struggling part. And that led me to figure out where I wanted some of my characters to live, and gave me an idea of what could be going on for them behind the central mystery of the story.

I wrote a scene in the Salton Sea that never made it into the final draft of the book. So you won't find evidence of this trip if you read it, but it was there when I was thinking about this fictional town I called Termico, where the girls end up living.

**Gazette:**

The book is very much about the relationship between these three adolescent girls—tell us what compels you about this age and demographic?

**Kahaney:**

I look at my earliest friendships with girls as the first great romances of my life. I still feel that way about those early friendships today. They were foundational for me in every possible way. I have two sisters, but my sisters are a lot older than me. And by the time I got to an age, where I would have had something like friendship with my sisters, they were out of the house. So in that way, I was an only child, starting from age eight, or nine. I was home alone a lot, and boys didn't figure into my life whatsoever. Really, not until college. Girls were everything. They were the great heartbreaks and the great role models of my life.

**Gazette:**

Besides tapping into a younger version of yourself, how do you tap into the mindset

of a teenage girl nowadays?

**Kahaney:**

I try to stay up to date. I read some young adult books. I watch shows, I look at Tik-Tok, social media. But I've been working with 18 year olds, as a teacher, for maybe 15 years. And I think that has been my avenue toward understanding young people. My students are tender-hearted and kind and dear and vicious under their sometimes blasé exteriors. Like all of us, they're total messes and totally put together all at the same time.

**Gazette:**

This is your third book. And they've all been in the so-called Young Adult genre. Is that a genre you always sort of envisioned or wanted to write for? To what extent generally do you even think about genre as you're writing?

**Kahaney:**

It is not the genre that I initially envisioned, but it's the genre that I fell into first through ghostwriting and then through my first book series, which was called the *Brokenhearted*. What can be nice about the young adult genre is like nonfiction, you can sell a book on just a partial draft. If your book is high concept enough, you can write 100 pages and have a detailed outline you might find a way to sell it. So that's a nice thing for any authors who might be reading this. The young adult publishing world is a very warm, welcoming place.

I do have a few unfinished adult novels under my belt at this point and I have a first draft of a new novel I'm excited about, which is a mystery that is almost done.

THE YOUNG ADULT PUBLISHING WORLD IS A VERY WARM, WELCOMING PLACE.

**Gazette:**

When you’re not busy writing or teaching, but doing a shift at the Coop, what do you do?

**Kahaney:**

My job has changed many times over the years. And now tragically, there’s this new system where you have to sign up each time, I can never get what I want anymore. But my beloved shift is always food processing. I worked with the same crew for several years. When I lived near the Coop I would stumble over at 6 a.m., and one of us did a coffee run the second the coffee shop opened at seven, and we would just do the dried mango and gossip and it was an absolute joy.

**Gazette:**

Do you ever use what you observe at the Coop in your fiction?

**Kahaney:**

The book I’m writing now is set in a Brooklyn brownstone quite near the Coop. The Coop is mentioned just in dialogue. But the more we’re talking about it, the more I think I have to get one of my characters at least inside. That would be a fantasy for me. It would be the dream.

WHEN I LIVED NEAR THE COOP I WOULD STUMBLE OVER AT 6 A.M., AND ONE OF US DID A COFFEE RUN THE SECOND THE COFFEE SHOP OPENED AT SEVEN, AND WE WOULD JUST DO THE DRIED MANGO AND GOSSIP AND IT WAS AN ABSOLUTE JOY.

**Gazette:**

When did you start working on *Liars*?

**Kahaney:**

Although this is a book for teens that can be read fairly quickly, it took a really, really long time to write. I started way back in 2014. And I gave up on it. I had a crisis of confidence for a few years. And I went and got a full-time teaching job and was not writing much. And then I kind of looked through it, years later. And I was like, "This is kind of good. This is okay. Why did I hate this so much?" So I dove back into it. I turned in the third and final major revision after the pandemic had already started. I finished it in October 2020. I think that the fear and terror of the early pandemic probably does feature in the mood of the book. It's kind of dark.

**Gazette:**

What particular snacks or Coop products fueled you through your work?

**Kahaney:**

The Sodastream was a Coop purchase. Seltzer is very important to my process. I really like those Chinese rice crackers that are in the bulk bin. I don't know if we still carry them. When writing is going really badly that's my special go-to treat. Love the seaweed snacks. Love Barbara's cheese doodle things. Anything I can kind of steal from my son's snacks area.

THE SODASTREAM WAS A COOP PURCHASE. SELTZER IS VERY IMPORTANT TO MY PROCESS.



# Bev Grant
# Photography 1968 - 1972

Summer 1969: Bev Grant and Juan Gonzalez, Minister of Defense, of the Young Lords in their office in East Harlem, located at 1678 Madison Avenue. New York, NY. Photographer unknown.

## BEV GRANT'S STUNNING PHOTOJOURNALISM

**Gazette:**

How did you get your start in photography in the 1960s?

**Bev Grant:**

A long time ago, I had come out of a rather abusive relationship. One of the things I came out with was a camera given to me by my former partner. I moved into an apartment on the Lower East Side, this is 1967, and my next door neighbor and I became close. We started going to demonstrations together, and he had a camera. I had a twin lens reflex camera that was very bulky, so I traded it in at a pawn shop for a 35-millimeter Pentax and a light meter, and then I started taking pictures in earnest. I had no training other than what I got on the street.

**Gazette:**

Your images capture most pivotal events and groups at the end of the 60s and early 70s. You've got the Black Panthers, the Young Lords Party, the Jeanette Rankin Brigade. Were these images you took for yourself as a personal record of the era?




November 22, 1969, Women from the Black Panther Party protesting the trial of Black Panther leaders, Erika Huggins and Bobbie Seale. New Haven, Connecticut.

**Grant:**

This woman came up to me at a peace demonstration and invited me to Newsreel, which was a collective of photographers and filmmakers that were supportive of progressive causes and radical causes. I started going to their meetings and began taking photos in earnest, learning from different photographers. We were a very interesting organization, we had access to all parts of the movement that were going on because we were like their propagandists. We were open about our politics. Our philosophy was there's no such thing as objective journalism, so we're just gonna be upfront about who we were.




October 1968, People on stage during the occupation of the Fillmore East. New York, NY.

I was taking photographs and developing the film myself, but not printing a lot. There was a group called Liberation News Service, sort of an underground Associated Press for the movement. They would send out packets of materials, including photos and articles to the various underground press throughout the country; some of my photos were submitted there. I made a couple of films, one of them was about the Miss America Beauty Pageant protest in ‘68 that I was part of the planning. I was a participant photographer. It was my activism.

> OUR PHILOSOPHY WAS THERE’S NO SUCH THING AS OBJECTIVE JOURNALISM, SO WE’RE JUST GONNA BE UPFRONT ABOUT WHO WE WERE.

I stayed for four years.

**Gazette:**

Why just four years?

**Grant:**

I started writing music, and around ‘69, I started writing and performing first with a women’s trio and then I founded a band called the Human Condition, around 1971. Music, I decided, was the direction I wanted to go. By 1972, I got pregnant, ’cause I thought if I was serious about making a revolution, I should bring life into the world. And I did. And I had the band for 19 years. We started out as a folk rock band. Most of the time, at least for the first 10 years or so, I was the only woman, and three or four other guys; they supported the songs I wrote, which were very feminist. By the early ‘80s, we took on more members and it became more diverse, multicultural and multiracial, and the music became reflective of that. We were singing in Spanish, Haitian Creole, Zulu. So photography became pictures of my family.

**Gazette:**

How did it happen, then, that 50 years later you have a book of photographs come out?

**Grant:**

I’ve been living in the same place for 44 years. I had a shoebox that I kept on this shelf all these years full of glassine envelopes with negatives. In 2017, this couple asked to interview me about Newsreel, and in the process of that I mentioned the photos. And this guy just lit up and said he’d like to see them. He said he had a scanner that was rather professional and he would be willing to show me how to digitize my negatives, which was this gift. I had already been retired for a while, and I spent a summer digitizing about 2500 negatives. After that, I started posting them on my social media. I got lots of responses. People really liked them, and I ended up register-

ing them with Getty, started getting paid for some of them, and people were calling me about using them in books.

In 2018, I met a woman [Cay Sophie Rabinowitz] who was interested in exhibiting them, so we had a little exhibit at her Lower East Side gallery, OSMOS. We did the exhibit on September 7, 2018, which was the 50th anniversary of that Miss America Beauty pageant.




September 7, 1968, Protestors throwing symbols of women's oppression in the Freedom Trash Can at the Miss America Beauty Pageant protest in Atlantic City. Atlantic City, NJ.

> I JUST TURNED 80 YEARS OLD, SO I WAS FEELING LIKE, ALRIGHT, I STILL GOT SOME POWER, I STILL GOT SOME JAZZ THAT KINDA FEEDS MY ENERGY.

Cay Sophie is also a publisher, and proposed doing a book. During the pandemic, we kind of pulled it together. And now, I'm having a bit of a renaissance. I'm originally from Portland, Oregon, and Cay Sophie had graduated from Reed College, in Portland. She knew the head of the museum there, the Cooley Gallery, and they put together this exhibit of my work.

I just turned 80 years old, so I was feeling like, alright, I still got some power, I still got some jazz that kinda feeds my energy.

**Gazette:**

How did having a camera as a woman back then in these critical moments help you fully realize yourself as an activist?

**Grant:**

Having a camera made me feel special. What I was doing was more than just being there. That I had a function, and that was important to me, that there was a reason for me being there beyond just being another body, not to put that down because that's important, but I was intimidated by some of the people that were among the leaders in the movement. I didn't have a college education, a lot of these people in leadership did and it took me a while to realize that my class background, which was not dirt poor, but certainly not privileged, was something to be proud of. And I had that. I was part of a class that had a history of struggle.

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**Gazette:**

In terms of your upbringing, did your passion for social justice come from your family?

**Grant:**

It came from my parents, who were liberal Democrats. I grew up in Portland, Oregon. Oregon was very racist. Oregon had Jim Crow laws on their books until 1953. We were two blocks away from the ghetto, we walked through there to get to the library, and there were Black kids in my class, and both of my elementary school and my high school. I was raised Jewish. My mother was not born a Jew, she converted. She was a Methodist and met my dad who was Jewish, and we lived near my dad's family. There were Catholic kids I played with who and I couldn't go in their house because I was a Jew, we were "Christ-killers."

I DIDN'T REALLY DISCOVER THE THING ABOUT CLASS UNTIL I MOVED TO NEW YORK, AND IT CLARIFIED A LOT ABOUT WHY I FELT "OTHER," I THINK THAT THAT'S WHAT GOT ME MORE EMPATHETIC TO PEOPLE WHO WERE OPPRESSED. I FELT "OTHER" IN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT BECAUSE A LOT OF WOMEN WERE UPPER CLASS.

There was the fact that we were poor in the reform Jewish synagogue, on scholarship to Sunday School. They paid for us to be at the High Holy Day services–that kind of thing. I couldn't dress as well.

I didn't really discover the thing about class until I moved to New York, and it clarified a lot about why I felt "other," I think that that's what got me more empathetic to people who were oppressed. I felt "other" in the women's movement because a lot of women were upper class.

**Gazette:**

When did you first get introduced to the Coop and what was your job before you retired from it?

**Grant:**

My band used to play when they first got together, we'd do Coop benefits. But I didn't join then because my kids were so young and I was a single parent, and I had a day job as a secretary or an administrative assistant. I joined probably 20 years ago, and my job until the pandemic happened, was to book the coffee house that the Coop ran at the Ethical Culture Society once a month. That was terrific. I was excited about being able to do my job and to be able to cooperate.

*Coop member Sara Ivry is a freelance writer, editor, and podcaster. She lives in Clinton Hill.*