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SPECIAL REPORTS

## Review: Choice and Chance in Elizabeth Crook's *Monday, Monday*

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by [Allison Wright](#) Published on Monday, May 26, 2014, at 8:00 CST

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Kenny Braun

*Elizabeth Crook will read from Monday, Monday at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, May 27, at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum.*

The premise of Elizabeth Crook's fourth novel, *Monday, Monday*, is exceptionally compelling: How will the survivors of Charles Whitman's 1966 University of Texas shooting spree cope, and how will the coping remake their lives? Crook opens with the moments leading up to the shooting, introducing readers to Shelly Maddox, the protagonist whose hesitation inside a classroom—"one of those small, seemingly inconsequential actions that she would recall for the rest of her life"—will underscore the rest of the story. Crook then throws readers directly into the chaos of Aug. 1, 1966, and her ability to create and sustain the narrative tension of a mass murder and its immediate aftermath for the book's first four chapters is impressive.

It almost doesn't matter that we don't necessarily know we're in Austin until midway through the opening chapter, after the first bullets have been fired. Crook, a native Houstonian who now lives in Austin, bandies references to the Student Union, the South Mall, the Drag, and other campus haunts perhaps unfamiliar to those who haven't spent years traipsing the UT grounds, but even if the novel suffers at times from a myopic sense of place, Crook excels at evoking her Texas settings. Her descriptions of Alpine and Big Bend are so accurate that I realized partway through one scene that I'd once spent a long weekend in that scene's very same place, hiking the same canyons and hills Crook's characters traverse. Another character, in another part of the state, notes that he makes two stops on his trips to Lockhart—one to eat at Black's, and another so his cousin can eat at Kreuz Market. If you've spent any time eating meat in Central Texas, you'll likely raise a barbecued beef rib in recognition.

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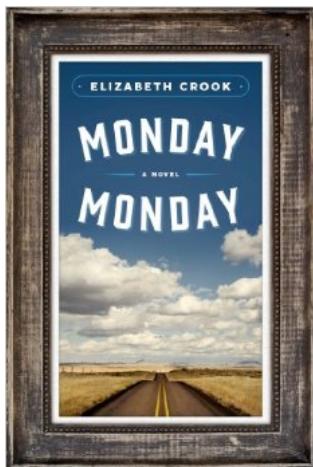
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**Monday, Monday: A Novel**

By Elizabeth Crook

Sarah Crichton Books

352 pages; \$26

The plot of *Monday, Monday* turns on Shelly Maddox's eventual relationship with the married Wyatt Calvert, who, along with his cousin Jack Stone, risked his life to save hers on that fateful August Monday. Their attraction is instantaneous, and the repercussions are felt for decades. Their story, simultaneously moving and predictable, isn't entirely convincing, especially in the moments when Crook holds her reader's hand, specifying exactly what her characters are feeling and why. But she does manage to drop the occasional truth bomb, offering spot-on takes on situations both specific to her characters and universal in their appeal. For instance, this reflection on why two characters had not seen each other in 40-odd years: "She wasn't so much afraid of what would happen if she saw him, as what wouldn't. A lackadaisical meeting would steal whatever legitimacy there had been to that relationship in the first place. The only excuse they had for what they had done was the strength of their need for each other. It had seemed too powerful to resist. And now—if they resisted it? If it proved to be meager and dismissible, what could she feel about their actions back then?"

*Monday, Monday* explores the lives of characters who act—or don't—in the face of tragedy, and it implicitly asks readers to ponder how their own lives might have been different if they'd just left home for work a few seconds earlier, or later; if they'd stopped for coffee on the way; if they'd said yes to that date, or no to that other one; if they'd picked up the phone, or answered that email.

How much of our lives are choice, and how much chance? With *Monday, Monday*, Crook taps into the truth that the answer is some of both.

**Tags:** [Charles Whitman](#), [Elizabeth Crook](#), [Monday Monday](#), [Texas fiction](#)

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A native Texan, Alison Wright is a writer and editor who now lives in Charlottesville, Virginia. She holds a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Texas at Austin.

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