**After Anna** by Scottoline, Lisa

After 16 years of estrangement, Maggie Ippoliti is overjoyed to hear from her daughter, Anna. There has been no contact between mother and daughter since Anna’s birth, when Maggie’s ex-husband, Florian, divorced her while she was hospitalized with postpartum psychosis. Maggie has found happiness with her new husband, Noah, and his son, Caleb, but losing Anna left a hole in her heart. Meeting Anna seems to be a dream come true: Anna wants to leave the boarding school where Florian has “parked” her and move in with Maggie. But, although Noah professes happiness that Anna is living with them, escalating tension between Noah and Anna explodes when Anna accuses him of sexual assault. Weeks later, all of their lives are changed forever when Anna is strangled, and Noah is arrested for her murder. Although Noah insists that he’s innocent, Maggie is convinced of his guilt until she discovers a harrowing secret that forces her to question everything. Scottoline, a master at crafting intense family dramas, expertly twists Maggie’s reality with a page-turning mix of guilt, self-delusion, and manipulation.

**Alternate side : a novel** by Quindlen, Anna

By New York City standards, or anywhere else for that matter, Nora and Charlie Nolan lead a charmed existence. Their vintage townhome has appreciated in value; their twin son and daughter are doing well in college; and they each are employed in fiscally, if not emotionally, satisfying jobs. Their dead-end street is populated by an eclectic but mostly homogeneous group of professionals and stay-at-homes, millennials and matrons, housekeepers and handymen. Some neighbors are barely tolerated as casual acquaintances, while others are friends and all turn out for Christmas parties and summer barbecues. Then one day, their idyllic setting is shattered when Jack Fisk, one of their more volatile neighbors, violently attacks Ricky, their beloved jack-of-all-trades caretaker. In retrospect, it would seem to Nora that with each impact of Jack’s golf club on Ricky’s body, another fissure splintered the Nolans’ carefully constructed world. The quotidian lives of Manhattanites have long fascinated discerning writers, from Wharton to McInerney, and with her ninth novel, best-selling Quindlen (Miller’s Valley, 2016) takes her place within this pantheon. Though she writes with a deceptive casualness about dashed dreams and squandered hopes, Quindlen’s quietly precise evaluation of intertwined lives evinces a keen understanding of and appreciation for universal human frailties.

**Barracoon : the story of the last "black cargo"** by Hurston, Zora Neale

In 1927, Zora Neale Hurston went to Plateau, Alabama, just outside Mobile, to interview eighty-six-year-old Cudjo Lewis. Of the millions of men, women, and children transported from Africa to America as slaves, Cudjo was then the only person alive to tell the story of this integral part of the nation’s history. Hurston was there to record Cudjo’s firsthand account of the raid that led to his capture and bondage fifty years after the Atlantic slave trade was outlawed in the United States. In 1931, Hurston returned to Plateau, the African-centric community three miles from Mobile founded by Cudjo and other former slaves from his ship. Spending more than three months there, she talked in depth with Cudjo about the details of his life. During those weeks, the young writer and the elderly formerly enslaved man ate peaches and watermelon that grew in the backyard and talked about Cudjo’s past—memories from his childhood in Africa, the horrors of being captured and held in a barracoon for selection by American slavers, the harrowing experience of the Middle Passage packed with more than 100 other souls aboard the Clotilda, and the years he spent in slavery until the end of the Civil War. Based on those interviews, featuring Cudjo’s unique vernacular, and written from Hurston’s perspective with the compassion and singular style that have made her one of the preeminent American authors of the twentieth-century, Barracoon masterfully illustrates the tragedy of slavery and of one life forever defined by it. Offering insight into the pernicious legacy that continues to haunt us all, black and white, this poignant and powerful work is an invaluable contribution to our shared history and culture.
**Before we were yours** by Wingate, Lisa  Memphis, 1939. Twelve-year-old Rill Foss and her four younger siblings live a magical life aboard their family's Mississippi River shanty boat. But when their father must rush their mother to the hospital one stormy night, Rill is left in charge—until strangers arrive in force. Wrenched from all that is familiar and thrown into a Tennessee Children's Home Society orphanage, the Foss children are assured that they will soon be returned to their parents—but they quickly realize the dark truth. At the mercy of the facility's cruel director, Rill fights to keep her sisters and brother together in a world of danger and uncertainty. Aiken, South Carolina, present day. Born into wealth and privilege, Avery Stafford seems to have it all: a successful career as a federal prosecutor, a handsome fiancé, and a lavish wedding on the horizon. But when Avery returns home to help her father weather a health crisis, a chance encounter leaves her with uncomfortable questions and compels her to take a journey through her family's long-hidden history, on a path that will ultimately lead either to devastation or to redemption. Based on one of America’s most notorious real-life scandals—in which Georgia Tann, director of a Memphis-based adoption organization, kidnapped and sold poor children to wealthy families all over the country.

**The bishop’s pawn** by Berry, Steve  It took him a while—a dozen books—to get around to it, but Berry has finally written Cotton Malone’s origin story. Set 18 years in the past and narrated by Malone in the first person, this exciting tale of historical intrigue reveals how Malone wound up working for a top-secret U.S. government intelligence group called the Magellan Billet; how he met his longtime boss, Stephanie Nelle; and what he was doing before he entered the world of international intrigue. The Malone novels concern historical mysteries that reverberate into the present day, and this time it’s what happened to 20-odd U.S. Double Eagle gold coins that escaped being melted down in the early 1930s. James Twining’s The Double Eagle (2005) also used the elusive gold coins as his jumping-off point, but Berry is an old hand at turning well-trod ground (the Templars, the Romanovs, Thomas Jefferson) to his own uses, and he does it again here, alchemizing the gold coins into a plot about long-hidden files revealing secrets about the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. As always, Berry’s high-concept story lines require some suspension of disbelief, but adventure junkies are used to that. Besides, it’s a small price to pay for Cotton Malone’s backstory.

**The Book of M** by Shepherd, Peng  Hemu Joshi was the first to lose his shadow, on Zero Shadow Day as it later became known. As he stood in the streets of Mumbai for all to see, the world became fascinated with the shadow less man. Television channels live-streamed him; thousands made the pilgrimage just to be near the unexplainable. Untethered to the world, Joshi became a sign to many that they would all soon transcend to a higher existence. Then he started to forget—his family, the days of the week, how to eat—everything. When others began to lose their shadows, the curiosity turned into a worldwide epidemic, sparing no one. Cities were shut down and violence broke out as shadow less people attacked the shadowed, and what was known about the world changed as the Forgetting spread. Shepherd’s near-future-set first novel flashes between the early days of the epidemic and the current story of Ory and Max, a couple trying to escape it. Eerie, dark, and compelling.

**Calypso** by Sedaris, David  Sedaris spends a good part of every year speaking all over the world; it’s no wonder, then, that many of the personal essays in this new collection (his first since Let’s Explore Diabetes with Owls, 2013, though he released the first volume of his diaries last year) consider air travel and his fellow passengers. Such constant movement, on tour or between his cottage in West Sussex and his home on North Carolina’s Emerald Isle, provides plenty of fodder for him to rage against small talk but not without suggestions for its improvement. Sedaris’ family and upbringing have long been mainstays in his work, but this collection encompasses perhaps his most tender writing on the subjects yet. His sister Tiffany’s recent suicide looms over family get-togethers, and his parents, his mother long passed and his father still hale in his nineties, receive ample page-time, too. For readers concerned that Sedaris has become too reverent, there’s also an episode in which he seeks connection with a tortoise via hilariously head-scratching means. Readers may think they know what to expect from Sedaris; they’ll be both surprised and delighted.
The child finder : a novel by Denfeld, Rene
Naomi has earned a reputation as an investigator with a gift for finding missing children, or determining for certain that they will not be found. This time Naomi, once a lost child herself, seeks Madison Culver, who disappeared three years ago, at age five, during a family outing to chop down a Christmas tree in Oregon’s beautiful, snow-laden, and inhospitable Skookum forest. Into Naomi’s search for Madison, her tentative prodding at her own past, and involvement in a missing-baby case, Denfeld splices in the narration of a young “snow girl,” who is imaginatively surviving her violent imprisonment with the unspeaking Mr. B, whom she believes is her husband, by adopting an identity from her favorite Russian fairy tale. Aptly unclassifiable, Denfeld’s compulsively readable second novel calls on elements of horror, suspense, and fairy tales to explore legacies of abuse and the resilience of the most vulnerable among us.

Circe by Miller, Madeline
In the house of Helios, god of the sun and mightiest of the Titans, a daughter is born. But Circe is a strange child--not powerful, like her father, nor viciously alluring like her mother. Turning to the world of mortals for companionship, she discovers that she does possess power—the power of witchcraft, which can transform rivals into monsters and menace the gods themselves. Threatened, Zeus banishes her to a deserted island, where she hones her occult craft, tames wild beasts and crosses paths with many of the most famous figures in all of mythology, including the Minotaur, Daedalus and his doomed son Icarus, the murderous Medea, and, of course, wily Odysseus. But there is danger, too, for a woman who stands alone, and Circe unwittingly draws the wrath of both men and gods, ultimately finding herself pitted against one of the most terrifying and vengeful of the Olympians. To protect what she loves most, Circe must summon all her strength and choose, once and for all, whether she belongs with the gods she is born from, or the mortals she has come to love. With unforgettable characters, mesmerizing language and page-turning suspense, Circe is a triumph of storytelling, an intoxicating epic of family rivalry, palace intrigue, love and loss, as well as a celebration of indomitable female strength in a man’s world.

The crooked staircase by Koontz, Dean R
In the third Jane Hawk novel, the renegade FBI agent continues her relentless pursuit of the people behind the conspiracy that cost her husband his life. Someone has been turning ordinary men and women into puppets (à la The Manchurian Candidate), forcing them to commit murder and, then, to commit suicide. Driven by rage and an unquenchable thirst for answers, Jane risks her own life to exact revenge on the people who took her husband from her. Beautifully plotted and written with notable care and flare, the novel is a spellbinding follow-up to The Whispering Room and The Silent Corner, both published in 2017. It works just fine as a stand-alone, too, as Koontz allows Jane to bring the reader up to speed in a way that doesn’t feel shoehorned into the story. Koontz has had a long and consistently best-selling career, encompassing horror, science fiction, fantasy, and straight-up thrillers, and he’s rarely stumbled. The Hawk series—there’s a fourth one scheduled to be published in October 2018—is among his best work.

The death of Mrs. Westaway by Ware, Ruth
Hal hasn’t had it easy in the three years since her mother died. She’s dropped out of school and taken over her mother’s tarot booth on Brighton Pier, but there was never much to be made from that. Now interest on the money from a loan shark has grown to an impossible amount, and he’s threatening to break her bones. So when a letter arrives on creamy stationery from a lawyer in Penzance saying she’s an heir to her grandmother’s fortune, Hal goes to claim it, even though she knows he has the wrong person. Yet once at Trepassen House, things take an odd turn; a photograph shows she does have connections to the family.
Finding the truth, however, turns into a very dangerous enterprise indeed. Ware, who, with a run of acclaimed thrillers, including The Lying Game (2017), has established herself as one of today’s most popular suspense writers, twists the knife quite expertly here. Her clues tease readers, making them think they know what will happen next, and they do—up to a point. The labyrinth Ware has devised here is much more winding than expected, with reveals even on the final pages.
**The disappeared** by Box, C. J  Game warden Joe Pickett is on special assignment again. This time, Wyoming’s new governor has sent him south, to the Upper North Platte River Valley, tasking him with finding a high-profile English guest who disappeared without a trace from a four-star dude ranch. Despite help from his daughter, Sheridan, now a horse wrangler at the ranch, and old friend Nate Romanowski, Joe doesn’t like his odds of success—in fact, he soon wonders whether he’s been set up to fail. As their investigation leads to a fish hatchery (where the lethal Nate creatively and hilariously expands his interrogation tactics), a wind farm, a cabin in the woods, and a sawmill with a so-called “wigwam” burner, the government-hating Nate pursues a conspiracy theory of his own—which harkens back to the author’s Cold Wind (2011) and addresses a hot-button issue of the modern West. The eighteenth installment of this hugely popular series delivers everything fans want: a compelling mystery, high-stakes action in a beautiful setting, and enjoyably humorous interaction between characters they’ve come to know and love. There’s a reason we keep coming back for more.

**Don't Stop Believin' --The Man, the Band, and the Song That Inspired Generations** by Cain, Johnathan In this engrossing memoir, Journey keyboardist and songwriter Cain gives readers a backstage pass to his musical, personal, and spiritual lives. He begins with his childhood in Chicago, when his for music became a source of solace after he survived a fire at his elementary school that killed 92 of his classmates. Cain was encouraged by his father to pursue music, and their relationship became the inspiration behind many of Journey's songs, including "Don't Stop Believin." Song titles "Separate Ways (Worlds Apart)" and "Open Arms" double as chapter headings, and Cain's musical life is the focus of much of the book, but even readers who aren't rock aficionados will appreciate his life story. He divulges much of his personal life, including his difficult relationship with his mother, failed marriages, struggles with faith, and the complexities of collaborating with colleagues such as lead singer Steve Perry. Cain's life has been filled with bumps (notably Journey breaking up in 1987) but by the end of this electric, revealing memoir, readers will understand how Cain became emboldened by his belief that God has been a constant in his tumultuous life. Rock fans and Christian readers looking for a heartening story of perseverance through tragedy will find much to enjoy in Cain's candid memoir.

**Eat the apple : a memoir** by Young, Matt If Young enlisted in the U.S. Marines in 2005 out of a post-high-school lack of direction or general brokenness, the next half decade and its accompanying three tours of Iraq would take him further from any certainty and crush him into more and smaller pieces still. His memoir is creatively told in atmospheric and gut-checking essays, some of which include lists, quizzes, or the author's stick-figure drawings. As often as he is “I,” the author also addresses himself as “you,” “past-me,” “the boy,” “this recruit,” or “we,” the collective voice of his fleet. Young sobs in bathrooms; learns to shoot a gun; drinks too much; smokes countless cigarettes; masturbates to pass the time; cheats on his fiancée; loses friends; doesn’t die; doesn’t kill anyone else; doesn’t know what to talk about with civilians. He gets hurt and now knows the places beyond his body where that hurt will live forever. Readers will wonder how people are expected to fight wars at all—let alone survive them. Young’s visceral prose, honed in college and writing programs after his tours of duty, confronts shame, guilt, and pain without flinching yet is beyond sympathetic to its subject; it is another act of service.
**Educated: a memoir** by *Westover, Tara*  To the Westovers, public education was the quickest way to put yourself on the wrong path. By the time the author, the youngest Westover, had come along, her devout Mormon parents had pulled all of their seven children out of school, preferring to teach just the essentials: a little bit of reading, a lot of scripture, and the importance of family and a hard day’s work. Westover’s debut memoir details how her isolated upbringing in the mountains of Idaho led to an unexpected outcome: Cambridge, Harvard, and a PhD. Though Westover’s entrance into academia is remarkable, at its heart, her memoir is a family history: not just a tale of overcoming but an uncertain elegy to the life that she ultimately rejected. Westover manages both tenderness and a savage honesty that spares no one, not even herself: nowhere is this more powerful than in her relationship with her brother Shawn, her abuser and closest friend. In its keen exploration of family, history, and the narratives we create for ourselves, Educated becomes more than just a success story.

**The Fallen** by *Baldacci, David*  Something sinister is going on in Baronville. The rust belt town has seen four bizarre murders in the space of two weeks. Cryptic clues left at the scenes—obscure bible verses, odd symbols—have the police stumped. Amos Decker and his FBI colleague Alex Jamison are in Baronville visiting Alex’s sister and her family. It’s a bleak place: a former mill and mining town with a crumbling economy and rampant opioid addiction. Decker has only been there a few hours when he stumbles on a horrific double murder scene. Then the next killing hits sickeningly close to home. And with the lives of people he cares about suddenly hanging in the balance, Decker begins to realize that the recent string of deaths may be only one small piece of a much larger scheme—with consequences that will reach far beyond Baronville. Decker, with his singular talents, may be the only one who can crack this bizarre case. Only this time—when one mistake could cost him everything—Decker finds that his previously infallible memory may not be so trustworthy after all...

**The Female Persuasion** by *Wolitzer, Meg*  Sexually harassed at a frat party her freshman year, wallflower Greer Kadetsky is motivated to speak up about the outrage when feminist icon Faith Frank gives a lecture at her college. She catches Faith’s attention in the Q&A, then further captures her interest during a chance encounter afterward. Faith recognizes something in this quietly assertive young woman, something she rewards when Greer approaches her for a job upon graduation. Sadly, Faith’s groundbreaking feminist magazine is folding, but Faith and Greer rebound, thanks to a generous offer from a former lover who establishes a philanthropic foundation dedicated to women’s causes. Wanting what she’s having, Greer’s best friend, Zee, pushes her to pass her résumé on to Faith, but Greer’s protective of her success and never tells Faith about Zee’s interest. The betrayal damages their friendship, just as Greer’s burgeoning career drives a wedge between her and her longtime boyfriend when tragedy strikes his family. Sweeping yet intimate, Wolitzer’s timely saga places her characters at the heart of a new wave of feminism, one clinging to the old paradigms of protest while encompassing current politics of personal responsibility. In a complex web of friends, lovers, mentors, and rivals, Wolitzer compassionately and artfully discerns the subtle strengths at the core of these essential connections.
**The flight attendant : a novel** by Bohjalian, Chris  
Flight attendant Cassie Bowden is working the first-class cabin on the JFK to Dubai run and, not uncharacteristically, strikes up a flirtatious banter with the passenger in 2C, Alex Sokolov, a charming Manhattan hedge-fund manager. At the book’s opening, Cassie wakes up in Sokolov’s hotel room, disoriented from their night of binge drinking and repeated lovemaking. The sight of Sokolov’s corpse in the bed next to her, his throat slit and the sheets bloody, effectively banishes Cassie’s incipient hangover. What happens next is a series of misguided decisions that only someone with Cassie’s shaky self-image can make: she lies to the FBI, her lawyer, and her family and unwisely tries to identify the mystery woman who briefly shared a bottle of vodka with them that night. Bohjalian is an unflattering storyteller who crosses genres with fluidity, from historical fiction to literary thrillers. He is also that rare male writer who has mastered the female point of view with adroit credibility, and he is nonjudgmental and sensitive in his portrayal of Cassie’s alcohol and sex addictions.

**Florida** by Groff, Lauren  
The flora and fauna of the Sunshine State vine and prowl through Groff’s second short story collection and first book since the smash-hit novel Fates and Furies (2015). With sympathy for her characters and a keen sensitivity to the natural world, Groff gets readers wondering who or what will triumph or succumb. Contrary to all good advice, a woman waits out a hurricane in her historic home and is visited by the ghosts of men she’s loved. A writer, the mother of two young sons, appears in several stories. In one, she’s alone with the boys in a remote cabin when she falls while changing a lightbulb and then battles to remain calm and awake in a concussed delirium. In “Yport,” the three spend a summer month in France for the woman’s research on Guy de Maupassant, and it will be the boys who teach her something she hadn’t realized about the writer she’d long studied. Though 10 of the 11 stories have been previously published, their power as a single unit is undeniable.

**The gate keeper** by Todd, Charles  
December 1920. Scotland Yard’s Ian Rutledge is driving home from his sister’s wedding when he comes upon the scene of an apparent homicide. A man lies dead in the road; a woman with bloody hands is bending over the body. “I didn’t do it,” she says, claiming that somebody came out of nowhere, shot the man, and vanished. The victim turns out to be Stephen Wentworth, a man with a convoluted family history (including hints that he may have had something to do with a previous death). As Rutledge digs deeper, there’s yet another death, and Rutledge is forced to consider the possibility that someone has just begun a killing spree. The Rutledge series hits a milestone with its twentieth installment. Fans will be pleased but hardly surprised to learn that this one, like its predecessors, is tightly plotted, gracefully written, and dramatically intense. Here’s to another 20.

**The great alone** by Hannah, Kristin  
Ernt Allbright, a former POW, comes home from the Vietnam war a changed and volatile man. When he loses yet another job, he makes an impulsive decision: he will move his family north, to Alaska, where they will live off the grid in America’s last true frontier. Thirteen-year-old Leni, a girl coming of age in a tumultuous time, caught in the riptide of her parents’ passionate, stormy relationship, dares to hope that a new land will lead to a better future for her family. She is desperate for a place to belong. Her mother, Cora, will do anything and go anywhere for the man she loves, even if means following him into the unknown. At first, Alaska seems to be the answer to their prayers. In a wild, remote corner of the state, they find a fiercely independent community of strong men and even stronger women. The long, sunlit days and the generosity of the locals make up for the Allbrights’ lack of preparation and dwindling resources. But as winter approaches and darkness descends on Alaska, Ernt’s fragile mental state deteriorates and the family begins to fracture. Soon the perils outside pale in comparison to threats from within. In their small cabin, covered in snow, blanketed in eighteen hours of night, Leni and her mother learn the terrible truth: they are on their own. In the wild, there is no one to save them but themselves.
The Hellfire Club by Tapper, Jake  The debut novel from CNN's chief Washington correspondent is set in the 1950s and features an assortment of real-life characters (JFK, Roy Cohn, Eisenhower, Joe McCarthy, and others). It tells the story of a rookie congressman, Charlie Marder, who took over after the death of his predecessor; as he learns the intricacies of Washington, D.C., Charlie also tries to find out what really happened to the deceased congressman and—you had to see this coming—winds up waist-deep in a conspiracy that could alter the political landscape of the U.S. This is a remarkably accomplished effort, especially for a first novel, very much like a Brad Meltzer thriller: energetic and mysterious, with plenty of suspense and a general feeling of evil lurking just barely behind the scenes. Tapper brings an expert's eye to the novel, too, layering it with the kind of detailed political knowledge that only someone with his first-hand experience could bring to the story. An auspicious debut.

The hidden life of trees : what they feel, how they communicate : discoveries from a secret world by Wohlleben, Peter  After a lifetime managing and studying forests in his native Germany, Wohlleben shares his distinct perspective on trees in this heartfelt homage. He traces the life cycles of typical trees in central European forests, combining his personal observations with elements of folkloric wisdom and the latest scientific research. In a touch of whimsy, the author likens plant behavior to familiar aspects of human actions: tree species nourishing members of the younger generation by feeding them soil nutrients are tree "mothers"; individual trees that protect and communicate with one another via a rich underground network have formed "friendships"; and urban trees growing up miles from traditional forests are dubbed "street kids." Wohlleben laments the many failings of traditional forest management practices, arguing that patience and ecological balance are essential to maximizing trees' beneficial role in the global ecosystem. In this spirited exploration, he guarantees that readers will never look at these life forms in quite the same way again.

The high tide club by Andrews, Mary Kay  When ninety-nine-year-old heiress Josephine Bettendorf Warrick summons attorney Brooke Trappnell to her 20,000 acre barrier island home, Brooke is puzzled. Everybody in the South has heard about the eccentric millionaire mistress of Talisa, but Brooke has never actually met her. Josephine's cryptic note says she wants to discuss an important legal matter, but why enlist Brooke and not the prestigious Atlanta law firm she has used for years? Brooke travels to Shellhaven and meets the cagey Josephine, whose home is a crumbling pink mansion at the edge of the turquoise sea.

Over the course of a few meetings, Josephine spins a tale of old friendships, dark secrets, betrayal, and a long-unsolved murder. She is hiring Brooke for two reasons: first, to protect her island from those who would despoil her land, and second, to help her make amends with the heirs of the women who were her closest friends, the girls of The High Tide Club—so named because of their youthful skinny dipping escapades—Millie, Ruth, and Varina. To fulfill a dying woman's wishes, Brooke must find Josephine's friends' descendants and bringing them together on Talisa for a reunion of women who've actually never met. But in doing so, Brooke unleashes the makings of a scandal that could make someone rich beyond their wildest dreams...or cause them to be in the crosshairs of a murderer....  The High Tide Club is Mary Kay Andrews at her Queen of the Beach Reads best: a story shrouded in mystery, Spanish moss, verandah cocktails, 1940s dinner dances, love lost, and possibly...love found.

A higher loyalty : truth, lies, and leadership by Comey, James B  On November 11, President Donald Trump called former FBI director James Comey a political hack "proven now to be a liar." Comey responded by quoting from an 1855 sermon by the Rev. Charles Haddon Spurgeon: "If you want truth to go round the world you must hire an express train to pull it; but if you want a lie to go round the world, it will fly." Perhaps this memoir's title is another possible response.
**Less : a novel** by Greer, Andrew Sean  
Who says you can’t run away from your problems? You are a failed novelist about to turn fifty. A wedding invitation arrives in the mail: your boyfriend of the past nine years is engaged to someone else. You can’t say yes—it would be too awkward—and you can’t say no—it would look like defeat. On your desk are a series of invitations to half-baked literary events around the world.  
**QUESTION:** How do you arrange to skip town?  
**ANSWER:** You accept them all.  

What would possibly go wrong? Arthur Less will almost fall in love in Paris, almost fall to his death in Berlin, barely escape to a Moroccan ski chalet from a Saharan sandstorm, accidentally book himself as the (only) writer-in-residence at a Christian Retreat Center in Southern India, and encounter, on a desert island in the Arabian Sea, the last person on Earth he wants to face. Somewhere in there: he will turn fifty. Through it all, there is his first love. And there is his last.  

Because, despite all these mishaps, missteps, misunderstandings and mistakes, *Less* is, above all, a love story.  

A scintillating satire of the American abroad, a rumination on time and the human heart, a bittersweet romance of chances lost, by an author *The New York Times* has hailed as “inspired, lyrical,” “elegiac,” “ingenious,” as well as “too sappy by half,” *Less* shows a writer at the peak of his talents raising the curtain on our shared human comedy.

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**Invitation to a Bonfire** by Celt, Adrienne  
Zoya Andropova’s life is not easy. After the Russian Revolution costs her both parents, she ends up as a scholarship student at Donne School, an elite girls’ academy in 1920s New Jersey. Fellow Russian Leo Orlov, an author whose work has always entranced Zoya, lands a teaching position at Donne. Their subsequent affair sparks a passion that has astounding effects. Celt’s (The Daughters, 2015) literary novel, inspired by Vladimir Nabokov’s relationship with his wife, Véra (Orlov’s wife is also named Véra), has all the delicious tension of a psychological thriller, the mysteries dissected in prose as sharp and precise as a scalpel. Insights into the human mind combine with an assured story structure that explores themes of class, sex, and an outsider’s perspective on the U.S. Véra’s icy sophistication, the casual cruelty of “well-mannered” girls (reminiscent of Margaret Atwood’s *Cat’s Eye*, 1988), and the dangerous self-absorption of an acclaimed author meld with obsession and a claustrophobic sense of place. The result is a novel that packs all the punch of the very best noir—only with more depth. Highly recommended.

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**I’ll be gone in the dark : one woman's obsessive search for the Golden State Killer** by McNamara, Michelle  
McNamara’s posthumously published book tells both the nightmarish story of the Golden State Killer (GSK) and the neighborhoods he terrorized and her own story of true-crime addiction. Growing up in Oak Park, a Chicago suburb, McNamara became obsessed with unsolved murders after a young woman was murdered in an alley blocks away from her home, and the killer was never found. McNamara’s holy grail of killer obsessions came in the form of a serial rapist and murderer responsible for more than 50 sexual assaults and at least 10 murders in California during the 1970s and 1980s. She obtained hundreds of pages of official documents, interviewed those who worked the GSK case then and those who still work it now, and formed her own theories. After she died suddenly in 2016, the book was finished by piecing together her articles, notes, and taped interviews. Though this makes for occasionally disjointed reading, it’s a small distraction from McNamara’s impressive gifts for language and storytelling. Her work paints a picture of not just a killer but of the towns and lives, including hers, that were irrevocably altered by the horror he inflicted. Gillian Flynn and the author’s widower, Patton Oswalt, contribute an introduction and afterword, respectively.
**Love and ruin : a novel** by **McLain, Paula**

Ernest Hemingway inspired McLain to write three enthralling historical novels about strong, adventurous women. The Paris Wife (2011) reimagines the story of the first Mrs. Hemingway, Hadley Richardson. Circling the Sun (2015) is based on aviator and author Beryl Markham, whom Hemingway much admired. Here McLain portrays the heroic and gifted war correspondent and writer Martha Gellhorn struggling to remain true to herself and her calling as she becomes Hemingway’s third wife, while his fame is resurgent and the world erupts in war. Called Marty, she is courageous, empathic, committed, and creative, both admired and belittled for her beauty. McLain has perfected her dramatic and lyrical approach to biographical fiction, lacing Marty’s ardent inner life into electrifying descriptions of place and action. Marty dodges shells and witnesses the deaths of children in the Spanish Civil War, travels rough in war-torn China, aids wounded soldiers as the first journalist and only woman in the “horror and chaos” of D-Day on Omaha Beach, translates her harrowing experiences into vivid dispatches, and, however briefly, revels in hers and Ernest’s Cuban paradise. McLain brings forth the deepest, most ringing elements of both “love and ruin,” the two poles of Marty and Ernest’s tempestuous relationship, a ferocious contest between two brilliant, willful, and intrepid writers. McLain’s fast-moving, richly insightful, heart-wrenching, and sumptuously written tale pays exhilarating homage to its truly exceptional and significant inspiration.

**The only story** by **Barnes, Julian**

In his newest mesmeric novel, Barnes, as in his Man Booker Prize-winner, The Sense of an Ending (2011), portrays an older man, Paul, looking back at his early life. The title refers to how we all have one love story we tell that defines our lives as well as to the old conception of the novel as a literary form that explores love. In this instance, Paul details how at 19, toward the end of the 1960s in leafy Surrey, just outside London, he fell in love with Susan McLeod, a 48-year-old married woman, at a tennis club. As Paul and Susan plunge ever-deeper into love, Barnes beautifully demonstrates that their romantic fantasy—and, by extension, the novel as a genre focused solely on love—struggles to survive in the face of violence, financial practicalities, and alcoholism. With a narrator every bit as intriguing as Stevens in Nobel laureate Kazuo Ishiguro’s The Remains of the Day (1989), the novel slowly unfurls, and the reader drifts along on Barnes’ gorgeous, undulating prose. Focusing on love, memory, nostalgia, and how contemporary Britain came to be, Barnes’ latest will enrapture readers from beginning to end.

**The oracle year : a novel** by **Soule, Charles**

In Soule’s latest writing adventure, Will Dando is an average guitar player in New York—struggling to get by, occasionally assisted by friends—until he wakes from a dream with 108 predictions about the future in his head. The Oracle Year begins with some initial tests to determine the predictions’ accuracy, after which Will protects his anonymity by creating a website and dubbing himself the Oracle. As he reveals more predictions, he draws attention from corporations that would profit from his prophecies, the U.S. president, who will try to control him, and a televangelist determined to discredit him. With assistance from his friend Hazma, a journalist named Leigh, and internet experts nicknamed “the Florida Ladies,” Will unleashes prophecies through the Site, as the public calls it, and profits handsomely by releasing some prophecies privately to his corporate audience. Will and his friends struggle to unscramble the pattern to the prophecies, including a few cryptic ones, while they attempt to evade an assassin grandmother, and the entire world panics about a warlord with a nuclear missile. Soule’s background in comics shows in this dark, rollicking tale.
**The outsider : a novel** by King, Stephen  
An unspeakable crime. A confounding investigation.
At a time when the King brand has never been stronger, he has delivered one of his most unsettling and compulsively readable stories.

An eleven-year-old boy's violated corpse is found in a town park. Eyewitnesses and fingerprints point unmistakably to one of Flint City's most popular citizens. He is Terry Maitland, Little League coach, English teacher, husband, and father of two girls. Detective Ralph Anderson, whose son Maitland once coached, orders a quick and very public arrest. Maitland has an alibi, but Anderson and the district attorney soon add DNA evidence to go with the fingerprints and witnesses. Their case seems ironclad.

As the investigation expands and horrifying answers begin to emerge, King's propulsive story kicks into high gear, generating strong tension and almost unbearable suspense. Terry Maitland seems like a nice guy, but is he wearing another face? When the answer comes, it will shock you as only Stephen King can.

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**The overstory : a novel** by Powers, Richard  
Powers takes on the subject of nature, or our relationship to nature, as filtered through the lens of environmental activism, although at its heart the book is after more existential concerns. As is the case with much of Powers' fiction, it takes shape slowly—first in a pastiche of narratives establishing the characters (a psychologist, an undergraduate who died briefly but was revived, a paraplegic computer game designer, a homeless vet), and then in the kaleidoscopic ways these individuals come together and break apart. “We all travel the Milky Way together, trees and men,” Powers writes, quoting the naturalist John Muir. “In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks.” The idea is important because what Powers means to explore is a sense of how we become who we are, individually and collectively, and our responsibility to the planet and to ourselves. Nick, for instance, continues a project begun by his grandfather to take repeated photographs of a single chestnut tree, “one a month for seventy-six years.” Pat, a visionary botanist, discovers how trees communicate with one another only to be discredited and then, a generation later, reaffirmed. What links the characters is survival—the survival of both trees and human beings. The bulk of the action unfolds during the timber wars of the late 1990s, as the characters coalesce on the Pacific coast to save old-growth sequoia from logging concerns. For Powers, however, political or environmental activism becomes a filter through which to consider the connectedness of all things—not only the human lives he portrays in often painfully intricate dimensions, but also the biosphere, both virtual and natural. “The world starts here,” Powers insists. “This is the merest beginning. Life can do anything. You have no idea.” A magnificent achievement: a novel that is, by turns, both optimistic and fatalistic, idealistic without being naïve.

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**The Perfect Couple** by Hilderbrand, Elin  
There’s no such thing as the perfect couple, and Hilderbrand’s (The Identicals, 2017) beachy latest is chock-full of examples. There’s Greer and Tag Winbury, British expats opening their Nantucket estate for their younger son Benji’s wedding over the Fourth of July weekend. Greer’s mystery-writing career is petering out, which upsets her less than her conviction that Tag is cheating. Celeste, Benji’s fiancée, worries that her working-class parents won’t fit in with the Winburys, which would be especially cruel since her mother is dying of cancer. All of these issues, though, pale in comparison to the maid of honor washing up on shore on the morning of the wedding, dead. The time line moves between the present, the start of the holiday weekend, and the beginning of Benji and Celeste’s relationship, allowing the reader to slowly put the pieces together with the Nantucket police. Or try to. Hilderbrand throws enough curveballs to keep readers guessing, but not too many, maintaining the breezy pace her novels are known for. The mystery element is new, but The Perfect Couple is classic Hilderbrand.
The Power by Alderman, Naomi

What would happen if women suddenly possessed a fierce new power?

In THE POWER, the world is a recognizable place: there’s a rich Nigerian boy who lounges around the family pool; a foster kid whose religious parents hide their true nature; an ambitious American politician; a tough London girl from a tricky family. But then a vital new force takes root and flourishes, causing their lives to converge with devastating effect. Teenage girls now have immense physical power—they can cause agonizing pain and even death. And, with this small twist of nature, the world drastically resets.

From award-winning author Naomi Alderman, THE POWER is speculative fiction at its most ambitious and provocative, at once taking us on a thrilling journey to an alternate reality, and exposing our own world in bold and surprising ways.

The perfectionists : how precision engineers created the modern world by Winchester, Simon

As much as we value our contemporary high-tech conveniences, from cell phones to fuel-injected cars, few have ever considered a vitally important feature that keeps them all running smoothly, precision engineering. With his customary flair for transforming arcane subjects into engaging prose, Winchester (Pacific, 2015) recounts the achievements of several little-known inventors who revolutionized global industry and effectively made all of our modern gadgets possible with their finely crafted machinery. Although Winchester begins by giving due credit to the clockmakers who kept the British railways on schedule, in his view the first pioneer of precision-tooled instruments was eighteenth-century English industrialist John "Iron-Mad Winchester, who constructed the painstakingly accurate boring machines that produced cast-iron cylinders for steam engines. Other innovators profiled include Joseph Bramah (the hydraulic press), Jesse Ramsden (refracting telescopes), and Joseph Whitworth (precision machine tools). While Winchester underscores the importance these men’s contributions have ultimately made to today’s world of endlessly reproducible goods, he also contemplates whether in all this sameness and precision there isn’t still room for less accurate but no less valuable craftsmanship. Another gem from one of the world’s justly celebrated historians specializing in unusual and always fascinating subjects and people.

The punishment she deserves by George, Elizabeth

The death of a person in police custody always presents problems. Even after local authorities and an independent police commission find the death of accused pedophile Deacon Ian Druitt—in jail in the historic town of Ludlow, England—to be a suicide, Scotland Yard is asked to investigate. Newly appointed DCS Isabelle Ardery is sent to look into the case, taking along impetuous DS Barbara Havers, but when their report is inconclusive, DI Thomas Lynley must step in to help wrap up the case. Along the way, George threads in the activities—and the secrets—of the people of Ludlow, eventually tying the various plotlines into the crime at the center of this well-wrought mystery. George’s Inspector Lynley series is more about characters than crime, and she is sympathetic to the human failings of those characters—notably, in this case, those of an Indian doctor who over manages her daughters’ lives and of the acerbic Ardery, whose alcoholism has already caused the loss of her marriage and her twin sons and is now threatening her career. The sheer size of this book (more than 700 pages) shouldn’t dissuade readers: bolstered by George’s polished prose, the twentieth Lynley mystery moves briskly along, showing the author at the peak of her powers.
The rising sea: a novel from the NUMA files  by Cussler, Clive

In one of the best recent novels to bear the Cussler name, Kurt Austin and his NUMA colleagues wing their way to Japan, where a researcher widely dismissed as a crackpot claims to have discovered activity in the East China Sea—strange activity that can't be explained by natural events. After narrowly escaping a well-staged assassination attempt, the NUMA team launches a full investigation, soon stumbling onto a massive conspiracy involving a rare and hitherto unimagined alloy that could upset the balance of political and economic power across the globe. The writing here is spot-on: cowriter Brown, who presumably handled most of the actual wordsmithery, is the author of several other installments in the NUMA Files series—and the story is first-rate, with just enough of a ripped-from-the-headlines feel to it that we imagine it could actually happen. A fine entry in an always-popular series, and a sure bet for those who crave high-concept adventure.

The restless wave good times, just causes, great fights, and other appreciations  by McCain, John

In his moving final memoir, written as he battles terminal brain cancer, Arizona senator McCain reflects on his career. Topics include his 2008 presidential campaign, key points in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, legislative battles around healthcare and immigration reform, today's fractious political climate, and American values. Known for his leadership on foreign policy issues, McCain shares his views on a range of geopolitical topics, including Vladimir Putin ("the clear and present danger... a murderer and a thug"), the Arab Spring, and President Obama's handling of the chemical weapons attacks in Syria ("a shockingly bad mistake"). Despite flashes of the "straight talk" for which McCain has become known, this book meanders into navel-gazing detail and sometimes skirts meaningful examination. McCain lists President Trump's moral and political failings, but hedges: "I don't know what to make of Trump's convictions," he writes, and "it's hard to know what to expect" from him. McCain is at his best when arguing that America is exceptional because of its "founding conviction" that all people deserve equal rights and because of "our conduct in the world"—the book's most powerful chapter is devoted to rejecting torture. Rather than a response to extraordinary times, this fine memoir reads more like a requiem of a long, patriotic life.

A separation: a novel  by Kitamura, Katie M

This is her story. About the end of her marriage. About what happened when Christopher went missing and she went to find him. These are her secrets, this is what happened...

A young woman has agreed with her faithless husband: it's time for them to separate. For the moment it's a private matter, a secret between the two of them. As she begins her new life, she gets word that Christopher has gone missing in a remote region in the rugged south of Greece; she reluctantly agrees to go look for him, still keeping their split to herself. In her heart, she's not even sure if she wants to find him. As her search comes to a shocking breaking point, she discovers she understands less than she thought she did about her relationship and the man she used to love.

A searing, suspenseful story of intimacy and infidelity, A Separation lays bare what divides us from the inner lives of others. With exquisitely cool precision, Katie Kitamura propels us into the experience of a woman on edge, with a fiercely mesmerizing story to tell.
**Sing, unburied, sing : a novel** by Ward, Jesmyn

Jojo, 13, and his 3-year-old sister, Kayla, live with their grandparents, Mam and Pop, while their mother, Leonie, struggles with drug addiction and her failures as a daughter, mother, and inheritor of a gift (or curse) that connects her to spirits. Leonie insists that Jojo and Kayla accompany her on a two-day journey to the infamous Parchman prison to retrieve their white father. Their harrowing experiences are bound up in unresolved and reverberating racial and family tensions and entanglements: long-buried memories of Pop's time in Parchman, the imminent death of Mam from cancer, and the slow dawning of the children's own spiritual gifts. Ward alternates perspectives to tell the story of a family in rural Mississippi struggling mightily to hold themselves together as they are assailed by ghosts reflecting all the ways humans create cruelty and suffering.

**She has her mother's laugh : the powers, perversions, and potential of heredity** by Zimmer, Carl

When Gregor Mendel died, in 1884, his funeral drew thousands of grieving peasants—but not a single scientist. Zimmer here illuminates the Augustinian friar’s once-unrecognized scientific breakthrough as a pivotal turning point in a human investigation of heredity, which has replaced Aristotle’s speculative conjectures on the topic with the empirical knowledge compiled in the twenty-first-century chromosomal map of the human genome. That map and potent new microtechnologies for manipulating the biochemistry of the mapped genes have opened astonishing possibilities both for probing the distant past of human origins and for creating a brave new future of human development, free from genetic disease and weakness. But alongside this trajectory of stunning progress, readers trace a history of misconceptions about heredity. Some of those misconceptions—such as Darwin’s mistaken pangenesis theory of all body cells influencing heredity—have arguably benefited science by stimulating debate and better research. Others, such as those motivating Nazi eugenicists, have augured only brutal racism. As revolutionary science now opens the prospect of designer superbabies—tantalizing some, horrifying others—Zimmer challenges the widespread misconception that DNA alone determines human identity, adducing compelling evidence that the way genes express themselves depends on environment, nutrition, and even culture. A wide-ranging and eye-opening inquiry into the way heredity shapes our species.

**There there : a novel** by Orange, Tommy

The at-first disconnected characters from whose perspectives Orange voices his symphonic debut are united by the upcoming Big Oakland Powwow. Some have been working on the event for months; some will sneak in with only good intentions, while others are plotting to steal the sizable cash prizes. Creative interludes from an omniscient narrator describe, for example, the names of First Nations people or what it means to be an Urban Indian: “We ride buses, trains, and cars across, over, and under concrete plains. Being Indian has never been about returning to the land. The land is everywhere or nowhere.” Opal recalls occupying Alcatraz as a child with her family; today she raises her sister’s grandchildren as her own after their unspeakable loss. With grant support, Dene endeavors to complete the oral-history project his deceased uncle couldn’t, recording the stories of Indians living in Oakland. In his thirties, with his white mother’s blessing, Edwin reaches out to the Native father he never met. While anticipation of the powwow provides a baseline of suspense, the path Orange lights through these and his novel’s many other stories thrills on its own. Engrossing at its most granular, in characters’ thoughts and fleeting moments, There There introduces an exciting voice.

**Two girls down : a novel** by Luna, Louisa

Luna offers an outstanding neo-noir, introducing enigmatic bounty hunter Alice Vega, a perfect female incarnation of Jack Reacher. Ultimately, it is not what she tells you about herself, but what she doesn’t tell you, that makes her a riveting character. A Pennsylvania small-town police chief “who thinks he’s in a James Patterson book” dismisses her as “a girl with a gun who has watched too much Buffy” but soon finds out that this woman is driven by a need to make it right that he will never fathom. She teams up with disgraced former cop turned PI Max Caplan, whose consolation for a troubled life comes in the form of a brilliant and independent teenage daughter, Nell, who finds instant intrigue in Vega. Two young sisters have disappeared from a local strip-mall parking lot. With little to go on, Vega and Cap go to extraordinary lengths in a highly unorthodox way, untangling an odd assortment of complex relationships, to rescue the girls as the hourglass drains down. Vega springs to life in the hands of this immensely talented writer.
**White houses : a novel** by *Bloom, Amy*

While researching her previous novel, *Lucky Us* (2014), Bloom found her next subject: the long-camouflaged if richly rumored relationship between First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and trailblazing journalist Lorena Hickok. "Hick" narrates this empathic story of true and besieged love—and what a discerning, courageous, and mordantly witty observer she is. She frankly recounts her brutal childhood in South Dakota, her striking out on her own as a young teen (including a stint with a circus), and her discovery of her reportorial talents and feelings for women. When Hick begins covering the White House, she and Eleanor fall promptly in love. As their hidden-in-plain-sight affair gains intensity, and Hick moves into the White House, she gives up her hard-won journalistic career. Via Hick’s crisp delivery and fluency in telling detail, Bloom uncloaks the insidious treacheries girls and women face, poor and privileged alike. Through Hick’s loving eyes, we witness Eleanor’s complex struggles, unwavering discipline, and fierce passion, while Hick’s take on FDR and the rest of the Roosevelts is deftly lacerating. Hick’s outrage over the trauma inflicted on gays and lesbians, the class divide, the beauty quotient, and the gender double standard fuels this socially incisive, psychologically saturated, funny, and erotic fictionalization of legendary figures; this novel of extraordinary magnetism and insight; this keen celebration of love, loyalty, and sacrifice.
**The woman in the window** by **Finn, A. J**  
Anna Fox lives alone—a recluse in her New York City home, unable to venture outside. She spends her day drinking wine (maybe too much), watching old movies, recalling happier times . . . and spying on her neighbors. Then the Russells move into the house across the way: a father, a mother, their teenage son. The perfect family. But when Anna, gazing out her window one night, sees something she shouldn't, her world begins to crumble—and its shocking secrets are laid bare. What is real? What is imagined? Who is in danger? Who is in control? In this diabolically gripping thriller, no one—and nothing—is what it seems. Twisty and powerful, ingenious and moving, The Woman in the Window is a smart, sophisticated novel of psychological suspense that recalls the best of Hitchcock.

**The woman who smashed codes : a true story of love, spies, and the unlikely heroine who outwitted America's enemies** by **Fagone, Jason**  
Fans of forgotten history, take note. Fagone (Ingenious: A True Story of Invention, Automotive Daring, and the Race to Revive America, 2013) has found a twentieth-century story that reads more like a thriller than nonfiction. Furthermore, Elizebeth Smith Friedman’s life has all the hallmarks of a Hollywood hit, and she is long overdue for the limelight. One of the greatest cryptologists of all time, she started her career in 1917, working for a mercurial millionaire who sought to prove that a hidden code exists in Shakespeare’s works that reveals Francis Bacon as their true author. After meeting an equally gifted code-breaking genius on that project, William Friedman, the man who became the father of the National Security Agency, the two broke German codes in WWI. Then, as a married couple working for the government, Elizebeth unraveled ciphers created by rumrunners and gangsters during Prohibition, then moved on to undermine the Nazis. She never sought the spotlight, and as others, notably J. Edgar Hoover, took credit for her achievements, she was forced by national security requirements to remain silent. Riveting, inspiring, and rich in colorful characters, Fagone’s extensively researched and utterly dazzling title is popular history at its very best and a book club natural.

**Wicked River** by **Milchman, Jenny**  
A kayaking trip into the Adirondacks’ remotest corners isn’t Natalie’s honeymoon fantasy, but she’s persuaded by fiancé Doug’s vision of idyllic time together in nature. Their first days on the trail follow Doug’s scenario pretty closely until he loses their GPS in a hairy section of rapids. Uncomfortable navigating the dense terrain without the GPS, they decide to attempt hiking to a way station. Natalie’s fears about the dangers of the wilderness quickly become reality when Doug stumbles into a murder scene and they are forced to flee further into the forest to escape the gunman. Injured and dehydrated, Natalie and Doug struggle to find help, never suspecting that a second predator who has made the forest his own is effortlessly guiding them into his trap. Milchman’s fourth Adirondack-centered thriller is a tense exploration of survival and psychological manipulation with a raw, sharply drawn setting sure to please fans of wilderness thrillers like those by Nevada Barr and C. J. Box.