**An Anonymous Girl** by Hendricks, Greer  
The coauthors of the mega–best-selling *The Wife between Us* (2018) return with another spooky tale of psychological seduction. Two main characters (a makeup artist and a psychology professor) try to figure each other out, with the stakes growing ever higher, as in a David Mamet drama. Jessica struggles to make a living as a freelance makeup artist in New York. Her house calls all over the city give her some street smarts; her profession has made her skilled in sizing up people and what they need almost instantaneously. If she weren’t so hard up, she probably wouldn’t answer the ad from the psychology professor asking for volunteers to take a survey about morality and ethics. We meet the professor as she observes Jessica taking the survey and silently (and creepily) addresses her in the second person (“you”). The action moves from the psychologist’s asking Jessica to take more surveys, with more intimate questions, and then instructing her to engage in real-time scenarios. Jessica’s financial need propels her, along with the subtle manipulations of the professor, with whom Jessica slowly becomes obsessed. The movement here from small tests to bigger ones masterfully escalates the suspense. The juxtaposed points of view, with reactions of each protagonist to the other, keep the reader guessing until the end. A great follow-up to *The Wife between Us*.

**Ask Again, Yes** by Keane, Mary Beth  
Neighboring families in a New York commuter suburb are entwined, root and branch, through work, their children, and a tragedy of profound consequence. Displaying impressive reach in this third—and possibly breakout—novel, Keane delivers an epic of domestic emotional turmoil. Its twin families are united initially through the careers of Francis Gleeson and Brian Stanhope, who meet as unmarried rookies in the New York City police academy. Later, now with partners, they move into adjacent homes in the safe-seeming small town of Gillam, where Francis’ wife, Lena, gives birth to three daughters, Sara, Natalie, and Kate. Brian’s wife, Anne, whose temperament is increasingly mercurial, loses her first child but then has a boy, Peter. Friendship between Peter and Kate is cemented from the outset, and as teenagers, the couple’s affections intensify. But on the night Peter tells Kate he thinks they will marry one day, Anne’s mental disturbance and violence reach a climax, one that inflicts terrible, indelible damage and drives Peter and Kate apart. Narrated from multiple perspectives, in compassionate but cool tones, Keane’s story embraces family lives in all their muted, ordinary, yet seismic shades. The Gleesons offer solidarity and an assumption that marriage will endure, no matter the tests. The Stanhopes, however, are seamed with inherited fault lines, and Peter will not emerge unscathed from his upbringing. Keane offers empathy and the long view, across a larger spectrum of issues than is at first apparent, pursuing her story for decades while adhering to Anne’s observation “that the beginning of one’s life mattered the most, that life was top-heavy that way.” Tender and patient, the novel avoids excessive sweetness while planting itself deep in the soil of commitment and attachment. Graceful and mature. A solidly satisfying, immersive read.
Before She Knew Him by Swanson, Peter What would happen if a serial killer met the perfect confidant, someone who would never be believed if they revealed his or her secrets? Nothing good. Hen and Lloyd Mazur’s move to the suburbs is meant to be a fresh start; Hen has recently been released from a psychiatric hospital after a manic episode sparked a dangerous obsession with the murder of her neighbor, Dustin Scott. Their first dinner with new neighbors Matthew and Mira Dolamore is going smoothly until Hen recognizes a fencing trophy in Matthew’s office that she knows was taken from Scott’s murder scene. Certain that Matthew is Scott’s killer, Hen begins following him and soon wins a hollow victory when she witnesses him killing another man. Matthew, however, has seen her, too, and—confident that Hen’s mental-health challenges make her an unreliable witness—he seizes the opportunity to unburden himself. Instead of relieving pressure, though, this dangerous connection sends Matthew spiraling out of control, leaving only Hen to stop him. Swanson has crafted another bar-raising psychological thriller with this tense, unexpected spin on serial killers and those obsessed with them.

Beautiful Bad by Ward, Annie Nigh Travel-writer Maddie met soldier-of-fortune Ian almost 20 years ago in the war-ravaged Balkans. After a lengthy and tumultuous relationship, they are now married and living the family life. But when Maddie begins a writing-therapy program after an accident leaves her face badly scarred, we are drawn into her burgeoning paranoia—Or are her fears legitimate? —based on Ian’s erratic behavior. This is a well-constructed thriller with strong appeal for millennials, but the premise seems a bit contrived. Although we are taken artfully through a no-one-is-who-you-think-they-are—and, most likely, no-one-is-who-they-think-they-are—narrative, the idea that two badly damaged people who “filled up rooms with their worldliness, their big words, and their general aura of disdain” would expect to find contentment in simple domesticity off the beaten path in Kansas strains credulity, even before murder comes to farm country. Still, the brilliantly conceived and presented conclusion would do Patricia Highsmith proud.

Baby of the Family by Roosevelt, Maura. Roger Whitby Jr. of “the landlords of New York” Whitbys has died, leaving behind children from four separate marriages and a depleted fortune that he bequeaths in full to his 20-year-old adopted son, Nick. Among the remaining assets are several houses, including one in Boston occupied by daughter Brooke and another in New York occupied by daughter Shelley. All have struggled with their father’s disregard as well as the need to live up to expectations that come with being a Whitby. Brooke, unexpectedly pregnant, wants stability and hopes Nick can be convinced to sign over the Boston house to her. One problem: Nick has disappeared. Shelley, meanwhile, has dropped out of college and is on her own since her unhinged mother has been hospitalized again. In need of cash, she accepts a job as an assistant to blind architect Yousef Kamal, a situation that takes an unsettling turn. Then Nick shows up, on the run from authorities, and her house becomes a squat for a group of eco-activists. Roosevelt’s debut reveals a sure hand, an eye for detail, and a keen sense of the absurd, and her affection for Brooke, Shelley, and Nick shines through as they fumble their way toward wisdom.
**The Bird King** by **Wilson, G. Willow** Wilson's newest novel is a historical fantasy set during the violence, bigotry, and hysteria of the Spanish Inquisition. Fatima is a young concubine in the court of the last Muslim sultan in Spain. She has lived a pampered life at the cost of her freedom. When her one true friend, Hassan, a royal mapmaker who can draw maps that bend reality, is set to be sacrificed by the sultan in order to satisfy the inquisitors, Fatima risks everything to escape with him. With the help of various jinn and other unlikely allies, Fatima and Hassan's journey tests their endurance and their faith. This is a novel that thoughtfully contemplates the meaning of love, power, religion, and freedom. But even while exploring all of these heavy issues, this is a fun, immersive adventure that moves at a brisk pace through lush settings, across dangerous terrain, and eventually out to the open sea. This ultimately life-affirming tale of a young woman who rejects her dismal fate and creates her own family will appeal to readers of S. A. Chakraborty’s *City of Brass* (2017), Helene Wecker’s *The Golem and the Jinni* (2013), and Naomi Novik’s fairy tale-esque *Uprooted* (2015).

---

**Blood Oath** by **Fairstein, Linda** Alex Cooper returns to work as head of the Manhattan Sex Crimes Unit after her mentor Paul Battaglia’s murder (in *Deadfall*, 2017), and is greeted by a political maelstrom of attorneys jockeying to fill the DA power vacuum. Alex’s determination to avoid the fray is thwarted by a new case: Lucy Jenner reveals that when she was 14 and the star witness in a highly publicized trial, she was raped by a federal prosecutor. Zachary “Jake” Palmer used his role to groom and, finally, assault her, forcing her to take a “blood oath” of silence. Now, Palmer is making a heavy-handed bid for the DA’s office. As Alex painstakingly works to corroborate Lucy’s recollections, her public-defender friend, Frances Fain, is poisoned. Alex discovers a link between Jenner and Fain but may be too late to stop a killer from silencing all three of them. A fast-paced battle of wits leading to a hair-raising climax in NYC’s Rockefeller University medical research facility; series fans will get what they came for here.

---

**Black Leopard, Red Wolf** by **James, Marlon** The first installment in the Dark Star trilogy has been touted as “an African Game of Thrones," and, indeed, James, author of the Man Booker Prize winner *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (2014), throws pretty much every fantasy and horror creature known into this brilliantly chaotic mash-up of genres and styles. Readers will discover mermaids, vampires, zombies, and witches, along with edge-of-your-seat chills and cheeky humor. James' tale digs its hooks in and never lets go, rather like the claws of the flesh-eating Zogbanu trolls, or the teeth of a vicious ghommid. Yet for all the fantasy and action, James never loses sight of the human story as his hero, Tracker, searches for the truth about a mysterious boy. Tracker's quest across wildlands and through cities brings him tantalizingly closer to the elegant, shape-shifting Leopard. James' world building weaves in cultural references from Sudan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Mali, Congo, Burkina Faso, and Senegal as he spins his griot’s tale of love, revolutions, murder, and magic. Gender-bending romance, fantastical adventure, and an Afrocentric setting make for an inventive and engaging read.

---

**Blood Oath** by **Fairstein, Linda** Alex Cooper returns to work as head of the Manhattan Sex Crimes Unit after her mentor Paul Battaglia’s murder (in *Deadfall*, 2017), and is greeted by a political maelstrom of attorneys jockeying to fill the DA power vacuum. Alex’s determination to avoid the fray is thwarted by a new case: Lucy Jenner reveals that when she was 14 and the star witness in a highly publicized trial, she was raped by a federal prosecutor. Zachary “Jake” Palmer used his role to groom and, finally, assault her, forcing her to take a “blood oath” of silence. Now, Palmer is making a heavy-handed bid for the DA’s office. As Alex painstakingly works to corroborate Lucy’s recollections, her public-defender friend, Frances Fain, is poisoned. Alex discovers a link between Jenner and Fain but may be too late to stop a killer from silencing all three of them. A fast-paced battle of wits leading to a hair-raising climax in NYC’s Rockefeller University medical research facility; series fans will get what they came for here.
**Bluff** by **Hitchcock, Jane Stanton** The axiom “write what you know” deliciously foretells this poker-themed thriller. Hitchcock (*Mortal Friends*, 2009) is a Brearley and Sarah Lawrence graduate who was defrauded by a man assigned to oversee the nearly $80 million estate left by Hitchcock's father to her mother. The fictitious Maud Warner is a former socialite turned “mature” card shark (another link to the author's life: Hitchcock won her first poker tournament at age 71). Maud’s claims that famed accountant Burt Sklar squandered her family fortune have fallen on deaf ears among Manhattan’s elite for years. But when she walks into the Four Seasons restaurant and shoots Sklar’s lunch companion, millionaire Sun Sunderland, her former friends suddenly take notice. Maud turns the invisibility of a middle-aged woman to her advantage as she hides out among her poker cronies. It soon becomes clear, though, that Maud is playing a long game. Her bluff is more audacious than anyone could imagine. And if she pulls it off, she’ll get the payout she’s been waiting years to collect. A smartly plotted upper-crust caper.

---

**The Bookshop of the Broken Hearted** by **Hillman, Robert** When Tom Hope’s wife, Trudy, returns to their remote farm after several mysterious weeks away, she’s pregnant with another man’s child. Generous soul that he is, Tom comes to love Peter as if he were his own, which makes Trudy’s next and final departure to a religious commune with Peter in tow unbearable. Tom is just making his peace with his abandonment when along comes Hannah Babel, a colorful, charismatic woman several years Tom’s senior, who opens a bookshop in their quaint little town and hires Tom to refurbish the shop. Their attraction is mutual and physical and astonishing to those who have witnessed Tom’s pain. What the unassuming but often skeptical citizens of this backwater Australian town in the mid-1960s don’t realize about Hannah, however, is that she carries scars of her own as a Holocaust survivor who lost her husband and son to the horrors of Auschwitz. Tom and Hannah’s marriage brings the solace both were seeking, until eight-year-old Peter escapes from the commune bearing the physical and emotional consequences of the cult leader’s torturous punishment. The openness of the Australian countryside is an apt setting for a complex exploration of grief, faith, and restoration, and in poignant, meditative, and stirring prose Hillman tells a heartrending and heartwarming tale of love and sacrifice.

---

**The Border** by **Winslow, Don** Winslow’s conclusion to his Cartel trilogy (*The Cartel; The Power of the Dog*) not only immerses readers in a terrifying world of crime and mistrust, it also showcases a situation that eerily ties in to current headlines. Art Keller has seen and experienced horror in his life, and when he receives a promotion to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), he soon realizes that the battle against the drug cartels in Mexico has financial ties to the U.S. government. A violent and harrowing journey plunges Keller into a scenario from which he might not find justice, and in the middle of it all he discovers that the border is imaginary when it comes to the war on drugs. Winslow mixes poetic prose with the modern crime tale and best fantasy novels to craft a thriller that is more than just a look at the fight to stop drugs from reaching the United States. This story couldn’t be timelier if Winslow had scheduled it directly with the federal government. It promises to deliver worthy discussions on several topics, making it perfect for a book group selection.
**Call me Evie** by Pomare, J. P Seventeen-year-old Kate Bennet finds herself in a remote cabin in New Zealand with a man named Jim. Kate's memory is foggy, and she struggles to remember what has happened and how she ended up there. Jim says that he is protecting her and trying to help her remember that awful night—the reason they are in hiding. He tells her she should tell the locals to call her Evie and that Jim is her uncle. He adds that she did something really bad back in Melbourne, but is Jim telling the truth and protecting her, or is it all a lie? The story alternates between chapters of before and after Kate is at the cabin. Pomare skillfully leads readers along, slowly revealing parts of the puzzling mystery. The "before" sections present different ideas as to what may be happening. Absorbing, engrossing, and intriguing are just a few descriptors for this book. Pomare keeps readers on the edge of their seats right up to the surprising conclusion. With a story line that hooks readers immediately and twists and turns galore, this impressive debut is highly recommended for fans of Gillian Flynn and those who enjoy well-written psychological suspense tales.

**Bowlaway** by McCracken, Elizabeth McCracken is a beloved bard of the eccentric, the misbegotten, and the unfathomable. In this epic American tall tale, a woman has seemingly fallen from the sky, landing in a cemetery in little, turn-of-the-twentieth-century Salford, Massachusetts. Two misfits happen upon her: the limping, lonely orphan Joe Wear and Leviticus Sprague, a poetry-loving doctor. Bertha Truitt, strong, solid, and assertive, turns out to be an evangelist for the tricky sport of candlepin bowling. She opens a bowling alley, the book's anchoring center; hires Joe; encourages women bowlers; and scandalously marries Dr. Sprague, a black man. They have a prodigy daughter, Minna, fervently loved by the household help, Margaret, long after Minna vanishes. Mysteries human and supernatural percolate, punctuated by unlikely passions, crimes, and bizarre deaths as scoundrels, godsenders, lost souls, and screw-ups converge at the bowling alley. As the Truitt line barely survives generation-by-generation, the decades are marked by changes in bowling-alley equipment and decor. McCracken writes with exuberant precision, ingenious lyricism, satirical humor, and warmhearted mischief and delight. Though some otherworldly elements feel forced, McCracken is unerring in her spirited emotional and social discernment. This compassionate and rambunctious saga about love, grief, prejudice, and the courage to be one's self chimes with novels by John Irving, Audrey Niffenegger, and Alice Hoffman.

**Cape May** by Cheek, Chip It might have been an ordinary if disappointing honeymoon for a conventional 1950s couple from Georgia, Effie and Henry: a week at Cape May on the Jersey Shore, in a house owned by a relative; unfortunately, it's September, and the shore has been shuttered for the winter, leaving the naive couple at loose ends. Until something happens. It takes decades for Henry to make sense of it: "He understands now the way desire spreads, like heat—how, when he and Effie discovered it in each other, they awoke to the swollen desirability all around them." And, yet, this is no soft-focus coming-of-age story, like the movie Summer of '42; Effie and Henry are utterly unprepared for the welter of emotions brought to the surface through their exposure to sex, gin, jazz, and, most of all, a trio of distinctly unconventional hedonists encamped in a house down the road. Mood drives the story—the empty beach town exudes a barely hidden sense of threat, of the unknown lurking everywhere. And, as Effie and Henry become closer to playboy Max; his lover, Clara; and his half-sister, Alma, we feel the gathering storm in every aspect of the landscape, from the roiling ocean waves to the reverberating clink of the gin bottle. Yes, betrayals are at the core of what happens at Cape May, but, beyond that, this remarkable debut novel offers a sobering reminder of how the possibilities of life, when first encountered, often carry their own riptide.
**Cemetery Road** by **Iles, Greg** After the remarkable trifecta of Iles’ magnificent, perhaps career-defining Natchez Burning trilogy, readers couldn’t help but speculate about what the author would do next. After three thick novels, would he go with something shorter, sleeker, less freighted with dramatic import? Nope. His new book, coming in at more than 750 pages is another big one, but—as with the Natchez Burning novels—it contains not an ounce of fat. The story starts simply: in Bienville, Mississippi, a man is murdered. Marshall McEwan, a journalist who was closer to the murdered man than he is to his own father, vows to expose the killer, but to do that, he must go up against the most powerful men in Bienville, who are part of a conspiracy that goes much deeper than McEwan could possibly have imagined. Iles sits alongside the icons at the top of today’s crime-fiction mountain. He has made Mississippi his own in the same way that James Lee Burke has claimed Cajun country and Michael Connelly has remapped contemporary Los Angeles. Readers who have been eagerly awaiting his first post-Natchez novel needn’t have worried; they will be talking about this one for a quite a while. Another big, intense tale from a heavy-hitter.

---

**The Care and Feeding of Ravenously Hungry Girls** by **Gray, Anissa** Gray’s engrossing and moving debut novel considers secrets and lies and their effect on the families of three sisters. Growing up, Althea took care of her younger siblings after their mother died, but now that she and her husband are facing prison sentences, she will be the one who needs all the help she can get. Lillian, the youngest sister, steps in to take care of Althea’s children, angry Kim and shy Baby Vi, while middle sister Viola travels in from Chicago to help. Lillian and Viola are already fighting their own battles—Lillian cares for her elderly mother-in-law and struggles with the legacy of childhood abuse at the hands of her brother, while Viola is in the throes of an eating-disorder relapse. Alternating among each sister’s perspective, the story unravels at a measured pace, deliciously feeding the reader surprises about the past and present throughout.

---

**Carnegie’s Maid** by **Benedict, Marie** In 1863, Clara Kelley, a farm girl from County Galway, sails to America to procure employment, hoping to send money back to her impoverished family in Ireland. When she answers a call for a girl of the same name who perished aboard ship, Clara quickly assumes the identity of this unfortunate, which leads her to obtaining a better position than she could have hoped: lady’s maid to Mrs. Carnegie, mother of the successful, talented businessman Andrew Carnegie. Clara quickly renders herself indispensable to her employer. However, her good sense and intelligence come to the notice of Andrew, and a bond formed over talk of commerce turns to a deeper affection. Unfortunately, Mrs. Carnegie learns of Clara’s true origins. Can Andrew’s love withstand learning her secret—or should Clara simply leave it all behind? Benedict’s (*The Other Einstein*) second novel captures the rush of industry that accompanied the American Civil War and the men like Andrew Carnegie, who were truly self-made. With its well-drawn characters, good pacing, and excellent sense of time and place, this volume should charm lovers of historical fiction, romance, and the Civil War period.
**The Confessions of Frannie Langton** by **Collins, Sara.** All of London is abuzz with the scandalous case of Frannie Langton, accused of the brutal double murder of her employers, renowned scientist George Benham and his eccentric French wife, Marguerite. Crowds pack the courtroom, eagerly following every twist, while the newspapers print lurid theories about the killings and the mysterious woman being tried at the Old Bailey. The testimonies against Frannie are damning. She is a seductress, a witch, a master manipulator, a whore. But Frannie claims she cannot recall what happened that fateful evening, even if remembering could save her life. She doesn't know how she came to be covered in the victims' blood. But she does have a tale to tell: a story of her childhood on a Jamaican plantation, her apprenticeship under a debauched scientist who stretched all bounds of ethics, and the events that brought her into the Benhams' London home-and into a passionate and forbidden relationship. Though her testimony may seal her conviction, the truth will unmask the perpetrators of crimes far beyond murder and indict the whole of English society itself. The Confessions of Frannie Langton is a breathtaking debut: a murder mystery that travels across the Atlantic and through the darkest channels of history. A brilliant, searing depiction of race, class, and oppression that penetrates the skin and sears the soul, it is the story of a woman of her own making in a world that would see her unmade.

---

**Daisy Jones & the Six** by **Reid, Taylor Jenkins** Daisy Jones was the "it girl" of the 1970s rock-and-roll scene, gifted but unpolished. She couldn't finish a single song on her own and behaved as though she loved the lifestyle more than the music, making her as dangerous as she was beautiful. Billy Dunne was the dynamic front man of the Six, a struggling addict who was desperate to prove himself to his wife and kids. They were talented apart and explosive together. While delivering intricate and impassioned story lines for all band members, this novel centers on how the partnership, chemistry, hostility, and love shared by Daisy and Billy shot the group straight to the top of charts, until their strained relationship ultimately ended the band. Told decades later through pieced-together interviews, the story is filtered through nostalgia. The narrative's presentation and the emotional, raw way the characters recall their glory days will make readers question if the band is really fictional.

---

**Daughter of a Daughter of a Queen** by **Bird, Sarah** Bird's rich historical novel (after Above the East China Sea) is a layered study of post-Civil War America from the imagined perspective of remarkable Buffalo Soldier Cathy/Cathay Williams, the first woman to serve in the legendary all-black cavalry and infantry. Mining the rich terrain of Civil War military history, the nation's western expansion and clashes with Native Americans, and the fraught issues of gender and race relations, Bird frames an epic romantic tale around Williams. It tracks her life from the time she's taken from her family as "contraband" by the Union Army in the waning days of the Civil War, to her service as a cook's aide to Gen. Philip Sheridan, to her illicit enlistment in the Army-disguised as William Cathay-and service as a rifleman with the Buffalo Soldiers cavalry. Williams, as narrator, reveals a bravado fueled by her love of dashing Yankee soldier Wager Swayne, hero-worship of Sheridan, and pride in her heritage as the granddaughter of an African queen. Bird's fast-paced, action-packed story is a bittersweet one-grand love and legacy ultimately eluded Williams—but this fearless, often heartbreaking account sheds a welcome light on an extraordinary American warrior.
**Deep River** by *Marlantes, Karl*  In the early 1900s, as the oppression of Russia's imperial rule takes its toll on Finland, the three Koski siblings--Ilmari, Matti, and the politicized young Aino--are forced to flee to the United States. Not far from the majestic Columbia River, the siblings settle among other Finns in a logging community in southern Washington, where the first harvesting of the colossal old-growth forests begets rapid development, and radical labor movements begin to catch fire. The brothers face the excitement and danger of pioneering this frontier wilderness--climbing and felling trees one-hundred meters high--while Aino, foremost of the books many strong, independent women, devotes herself to organizing the industry's first unions. As the Koski siblings strive to rebuild lives and families in an America in flux, they also try to hold fast to the traditions of a home they left behind. Layered with fascinating historical detail, this is a novel that breathes deeply of the sun-dappled forest and bears witness to the stump-ridden fields the loggers, and the first waves of modernity, leave behind. At its heart, *Deep River* is an ambitious and timely exploration of the place of the individual, and of the immigrant, in an America still in the process of defining its own identity.

---

**The DNA of You and Me** by *Rothman, Andrea*  Rothman's first novel is a powerful one. As DNA is woven into a new person via chromosomes from parents, so sequences of events connect and in some cases are dependent on one another for existence, yet the linear course in which these sequences express may irrevocably lock out all other options. Emily and Aeden both come to Justin McKinnon's lab for breakthrough research to catapult their careers; in this process, they grapple with regret, jealousy, sleeplessness, and dignity. Seemingly random yet interconnected circumstances arrive with Emily on the cusp of a breakthrough, and Aeden makes an incredible and irrevocable choice. What he has done for Emily forces her to juxtapose her life's trajectory as a scientist with a breakthrough or not in a decision that leaves little room to blend the possible nuances and combinations of her life's trajectory together. Though we come and go in one another's lives, at various points we are each altered from every meeting. Great for readers who would enjoy a surprisingly literary love story set against the clinical, sterile, and cutthroat environment of an academic research lab.

---

**The Dragonfly Sea** by *Owuor, Yvonne Adhiamb*  Owuor brings to life a beautiful story of loss and compassion. On the island of Pate, off the coast of Kenya, young girl Ayaana is an outcast from the community and ignored by her scandalous mother. Exploring the beach each day in search of a father she has never known, Ayaana meets a sailor and fellow outcast, Muhidin. A love of the sea brings this unlikely pair together, and Muhidin becomes the father for which Ayaana has always longed. Readers follow Ayaana's journey into adulthood and through her tumultuous voyage off the island. But Pate is like a magnet for lost souls, and all who leave eventually make their way back home. This path is true for Ayaana, and she must face her tragic past before she is able to build her future. Elucidating her characters' emotions and struggles, Owuor takes readers to the core of each one and shows that even in the face of heartache and betrayal, there is always a path to redemption.
**Gingerbread** by Oyeyemi, Helen  A tale about three generations of women and the gingerbread recipe that is their curse and their legacy. In an effort to understand her heritage, precocious British schoolgirl Perdita Lee recreates her family’s famed gingerbread recipe—but with additional ingredients that have near-fatal consequences. When she slips into a coma, her mother, Harriet, is forced to tell her the truth of their family. To do so, she must recount her upbringing in the mysterious country DruhAístrana and the arduous journey that finally brought her and her mother, Margot, out of it. Harriet’s account is an astonishing tale of rigged lotteries, girls in wells, and the mystifying and meddling Gretel Kercheval, a childhood friend of Harriet’s who seems to have an awful lot to do with Harriet’s fate. Though Harriet and Margot do eventually manage to leave DruhAístrana, they realize that it’s not quite as easy to master the outside world, especially not when there are more Kerchevals around to complicate things.

**The Farm** by Ramos, Joanne. Ramos's transfixing debut scrutinizes the world of high-end surrogacy with stinging critiques and sets up heartrending dilemmas. Timid Filipina immigrant Jane is persuaded by her much older cousin Evelyn to apply as a surrogate, known as a "host," for the ultra-rich after she is fired from her lucrative nannying job. Jane passes the highly selective process, hesitantly leaves her own infant daughter with Evelyn, and, already pregnant, moves into Golden Oaks, a luxury resort-style center in the Hudson Valley where the surrogates live together. Assertive, smooth-talking Mae runs Golden Oaks with strict rules, very curtailed outside contact, and constant surveillance. Jane bonds quickly with her roommate, Reagan, an aspiring photographer and "premium host" (because she’s white), who hopes the staggering bonuses for healthy delivery will allow her to escape her father's control. Lisa, another surrogate returning for her third pregnancy, disastrously pulls Jane and Reagan into her schemes to subvert rules. After Jane learns some secrets about Mae and Evelyn, her concern for her absent daughter propels her on a dangerous path that threatens Mae’s ambitious plans and Jane's security. Ramos particularly shines at her nuanced, emotional depictions of these women's interior struggles. A surefire hit with book groups, this striking novel will also appeal strongly to readers who like dystopian touches and ethically complicated narratives.

**The Guest Book** by Blake, Sarah. It is a simple word, uttered on a summer porch in 1936. And it will haunt Kitty Milton for the rest of her life. Kitty and her husband, Ogden, are both from families considered the backbone of the country. But this refusal will come to be Kitty’s defining moment, and its consequences will ripple through the Milton family for generations. For while they summer on their island in Maine, anchored as they are to the way things have always been, the winds of change are beginning to stir. In 1959 New York City, two strangers enter the Milton’s’ circle. One captures the attention of Kitty’s daughter, while the other makes each of them question what the family stands for. This new generation insists the times are changing. And in one night, everything does. So much so that in the present day, the third generation of Milsons doesn’t have enough money to keep the island in Maine. Evie Milton’s mother has just died, and as Evie digs into her mother’s and grandparents' history, what she finds is a story as unsettling as it is inescapable, the story that threatens the foundation of the Milton family myth. Moving through three generations and back and forth in time, *The Guest Book* asks how we remember and what we choose to forget. It shows the untold secrets we inherit and pass on, unknowingly echoing our parents and grandparents.
The Hearts of Men by Butler, Nickolas

Opening in 1962 and spanning six decades, Butler’s latest (Beneath the Bonfire) delves into the meaning of loyalty and friendship, how some rise to life’s -challenges while -others fail. At Camp Chippewa, a Wisconsin Boy Scout retreat, 13-year-old camp bugler Nelson Doughty is a misfit overwhelmed by bullying and his parents' deteriorating marriage. Scoutmaster Wilbur Whiteside, a World War II veteran and tough-love leader, sees in Nelson the character he hopes for all his boys. In time, upon Whiteside's death, Nelson takes his place. An annual reunion brings back many former scouts, including Jonathan Quick, a false friend to Nelson in their younger days. With son Trevor in tow, Jonathan ruins their stay by drunkenly taunting Nelson for his bravery in Vietnam. Years pass, and the 70-year-old Nelson is ready to retire. With Jonathan's teenage grandson and daughter-in-law among the present-day group, a shocking incident demonstrates Nelson's courage and selflessness. As the story moves effortlessly through the decades, readers become emotionally invested in the strong, well-drawn characters and will be touched by the affecting and memorable conclusion. Top of the class for Butler on this one.

If, Then by Day, Kate Hope

Day’s complex debut explores the mind-bending idea that for every decision made, alternate choices lead to different lives. Four neighbors, living at the foot of a dormant volcano in a peaceful Pacific Northwest community, experience a series of unprecedented events. Those incidents will weave their lives together in unexpected ways. Each is suffering from loneliness, loss, resentment, disappointment, and frustration: a successful surgeon too wrapped up in her job, her research-scientist husband seeking acceptance, a new mom longing to complete her abandoned Ph.D., and a grieving daughter reluctantly taking up the life her mother left behind. They all begin having visions, “what if” scenarios of how their lives could be if another choice is made. The options are tempting, and each decides to follow that different course, some for the better, others falling prey to dangerous obsession. When those paths start intersecting, and the mountain starts to rumble, everyone will wonder if their choice of another life is real or simply a delusion. Multiverse-theory fans will enjoy the speculation offered in this novel.

Instructions for a Funeral - stories by Means, David

In the title story, a man directs every last detail of his own send-off (“Please tilt the coffin slightly toward the room so that a view of my body is unavoidable.”) in a letter that doubles as a tale of betrayal foretold. Often, stories contain told tales, creating an aura of oral history. In the wonderfully digressive ”The Ice Committee,” a Vietnam vet tries to tell a story he’s already told to a man who's already heard it, about a story he once told someone else. In the gripping ”El Morro,” a dreamer holds two women captive from northern California to New Mexico with his ceaseless mania. Characters in ”Fistfight, Sacramento, August 1950” and ”The Tree Line, Kansas, 1934” interrogate explosions of violence with the attention to detail of the obsessed. What Means writes about his dying father in the auto fictional ”Confessions” aptly describes his own distinct style of storytelling: ”He is consumed in the vortex of the moment.” Means spins intricate, highly textured yarns with great artistry, care, and an acute, empathetic eye. Treasures abound.
**The Last Ballad** by *Cash, Wiley*  
Inspired by the events of an actual textile-mill strike in 1929, creates a vivid picture of one woman’s desperation. Ella May Wiggins works long, grueling hours in a mill, but it still isn’t enough to keep her children fed. The year is 1929, and fed-up workers are fighting for rights like a standard wage, a five-day work week, and equal pay for equal work. Ella’s curiosity about the union leads her to attend a rally in a neighboring town, but when she gets up on stage to sing a song that she wrote, she becomes an unexpected star of the labor movement. Her prominence makes her a target for those who view union members as communists, and Ella’s belief that African-Americans should be included in the union places her in even more danger. But Ella’s voice isn’t the only one Cash explores—there are multiple points of view, including Ella’s now-elderly daughter Lilly, an African-American porter named Hampton, and several others whose lives intersect with Ella’s. Cash vividly illustrates the difficulties of Ella’s life; her exhaustion and desperation leap off the page. She faces extreme hardship in her fight for workers’ rights, but it’s always clear that she keeps going because of her love for her children. Although it is initially a bit difficult to keep so many points of view straight, it is satisfying to see them all connect. It’s refreshing that Cash highlights the struggles of often forgotten heroes and shows how crucial women and African-Americans were in the fight for workers’ rights. A heartbreaking and beautifully written look at the real people involved in the labor movement.

**The Last Romantics** by *Conklin, Tara*  
No family is perfect. No one truly knows what’s happening behind closed doors unless they’re there, a part of it from the beginning. Conklin (*The House Girl*, 2013) captures these truths with honesty and seeming ease in her second novel, a beautifully written story of four siblings’ love for one another across their entire lives. Sibling relationships are exposed in their truest forms as Renee, Caroline, Joe, and Fiona Skinner fall in and out of love with each other over a lifetime. Bound together early in life by both blood and tragedy, they find solace and security in childhood summers spent at a neighborhood pond. These early memories shape their lives and future relationships, and when tragedy strikes again years later, the siblings are once again forced to either sink or swim together. Despite spanning almost a century, *The Last Romantics* never feels rushed. Conklin places readers in the center of the Skinner family, moving back and forth in time and allowing waves of emotion to slowly uncurl. Perfectly paced, affecting fiction.

**The Lesson** by *Turnbull, Cadwell*  
Several residents of St. Thomas weather the storms of life before and after the occupation of the alien species Ynaa in Turnbull’s rich debut novel about family, love, and loyalty in turbulent times. The story centers on Mera, Ynaa ambassador to the human residents of the Virgin Islands, who has hidden among humans for centuries, and Derrick Reed, her human assistant, who persists despite accusations of betraying his kind. Neither is a perfect fit for the worlds they come from, and the closer they grow to each other, the more adversity they face. When a Ynaa kills a young man and his grieving brother responds by assassinating one of the aliens, a terrible cycle of violent retribution begins, and Mera and Derrick must choose sides.
Lost Children Archive by Luiselli, Valeria No stranger to inventive storytelling and the Mexican-American borderlands, Luiselli launches this ultimately harrowing novel with an innocuous enough premise. An unnamed couple and their children embark on a cross-country road trip from New York City to Arizona. Husband and wife both work as audio recording artists, dedicated to capturing the soundscapes of everyday life. Upon their arrival, he plans to investigate the native Apache people who used to populate the Southwest, and she has promised to find a friend's daughters who have been arrested at the border. When the family arrives at their destination, however, the overwhelming scale of the migrant crisis redirects their efforts, and the children eventually lose themselves in the strange, uncertain terrain. As husband and wife rush to recover their own offspring, stories of Latin American asylum seekers and the disappeared Apaches overlap and converge, creating a poignant portrait of current events. Intense and keenly timely, Luiselli's latest work is perhaps her most politically relevant, and themes of translation and migration resonate, making it one of few novels that fully and powerfully convey the urgency of this unsettling situation.

The Lost Man by Harper, Jane New York Times best-selling Harper's two earlier novels were both constructed around the harsher extremes of the Australian outback, and in this one we experience the isolated and inhospitable desert in Queensland. It is a brutal existence for the ranchers who live and work there, in relentless heat, hours away from any vestige of civilization. When the sunbaked body of Cam Bright, experienced at desert survival, is found by his brothers adjacent to a lone headstone in the middle of nowhere, marking the “stockman's grave,” they are hard pressed to find an explanation. The answer is found only by revisiting their childhood, which was hobbled by a battered mother and “flooded with terror” by an abusive father. The atmosphere is so thick you can taste the red-clay dust, and the folklore surrounding the mysterious stockman adds an additional edge to an already dark and intense narrative. The truth is revealed in a surprising ending that reveals how far someone will go to preserve a life worth living in a place at once loathed and loved.

Lost Roses by Kelly, Martha Hall. Kelly is back with another epic tale of three women’s lives overlapping against the backdrop of history, this time a generation earlier than—and starring the mother of a heroine from—her debut, The Lilac Girls (2017). The setting is WWI and the Russian Revolution; the stories are inspired by true events. New Yorker Eliza Ferriday returns home when her tour of Russia with her school friend Sofya Streshnayva, a cousin of the Romanovs, is cut short by the outbreak of war in Europe. Sofya’s family retires to their country estate to wait out the troubles, while Eliza works to find refuge and employment for displaced Russians in America. Sofya hires a local peasant girl, Varinka, to help with her small son, unaware of the danger that Varinka’s revolutionary connections pose to her family. Kelly’s gift is bringing to life and to light the untold stories of women and families far away from the war front yet deeply affected by the decisions of leaders and the efforts of fighters. Fans of historical fiction like the works of Marie Benedict and Lisa See, and viewers of period dramas, will want to clear their calendars when Lost Roses comes out.
**The Malta Exchange** by [Berry, Steve](#)  The latest Cotton Malone thriller begins with the assassination of Benito Mussolini and then jumps forward several decades to the present day, where Malone, a former field agent for the U.S. Department of Justice who gets into life-threatening situations with startling regularity, is hot on the trail of some letters allegedly exchanged between Mussolini and Winston Churchill. As he tends to do, Cotton winds up embroiled in a centuries-old conspiracy, this time involving the real-life Knights of Malta, a humanitarian organization founded roughly a millennium ago. The events unfold at a breakneck pace, as usual, but Berry slows things down once in a while to give the reader some much-needed exposition and historical context. He really is very good at the historical-conspiracy thriller; he’s a skilled writer—much more so than Dan Brown, to whom he’s often compared—and a more dexterous plotter than many of his contemporaries. Fans of the Malone series will give this one an enthusiastic thumbs-up.

---

**Miracle Creek** by [Kim, Angie](#)  A Byzantine web of lies surrounds a fatal fire at an unusual treatment facility in this taut legal drama. Kim, a former trial lawyer who turns 50 the same week her debut novel is published, does not make it easy on the reviewer charged with describing her book. This is a complicated and unusual story—though when you are reading it, it will all seem smooth as silk. The Yoos, an immigrant family from Korea, own a hyperbaric oxygen therapy tank in a town called Miracle Creek, Virginia. (In a characteristically wry aside, we learn that "Miracle Creek didn't look like a place where miracles took place, unless you counted the miracle of people living there for years without going insane from boredom.") HBOT treatment, which involves sitting in a chamber breathing pure, pressurized oxygen, is believed to be effective in remediating autism and male infertility, and those conditions are what define the group of people who are in the "submarine" when a fire, clearly set by an arsonist, causes it to explode. Two people are killed; others survive paralyzed or with amputations. The novel opens as the murder trial of the mother of a boy who died in the fire begins. As we come to understand the pressures she has been under as the single mother of a special needs child, it does not seem out of the question that she is responsible. But with all the other characters lying so desperately about what they were doing that evening, it can’t be as simple as that. With so many complications and loose ends, one of the miracles of the novel is that the author ties it all together and arrives at a deeply satisfying—though not easy or sentimental—ending. Intricate plotting and courtroom theatrics, combined with moving insight into parenting special needs children and the psychology of immigrants, make this book both a learning experience and a page-turner. Should be huge.

---

**My Lovely Wife** by [Downing, Samantha](#)  Downing's debut thriller offers a chilling look into the marriage of two psychopaths. Our unnamed narrator (known mostly by an alias, Quentin) likes to pick up women in bars while pretending to be deaf. His wife, Millicent, is perfectly fine with this because he brings them home for her to torture and murder. When the freshly killed body of a young woman is found, nearly a full year after Millicent was supposed to have dumped her, Quentin realizes that Millicent is apparently playing a different game than he thought. They think they’re safe, though, because she planted several clues that match the MO of a serial killer who has been on the loose for over a decade. Things start to unravel—best-laid plans and all that—and the couple’s relationship quickly spirals into a cat-and-mouse game. Whom can you trust when your spouse is a lunatic? Meanwhile, the couple's two (seemingly normal) children know nothing of their parents' extracurricular activities. Readers will be fascinated by the abject coldness of Millicent, the odd and unreliable narrator, and the almost unbelievable denouement.
Normal People by Rooney, Sally. Marianne and Connell attend the same secondary school in Carricklea, a small town in Sligo, Ireland. The popular Connell, captain of the football team and a promising scholar, is the son of a single mother who cleans house for Marianne’s mother. Marianne, bullied by her financially well-off family, occupies the lowest rung of the school’s social ladder but outshines all of her peers academically. Though they avoid each other in public, Marianne and Connell share an intense emotional bond reinforced by secrecy and sex. Over several years, both will test and undermine this fierce and sometimes disturbing attachment. As the intimacy between Marianne and Connell evolves over time, they seem to identify and embrace varying degrees of self-worth from their powerful regard for each other, which may depend on a mutual acceptance of the social, economic, and emotional inequalities they have at different times embraced and exploited at their own and each other’s expense. This brilliantly nuanced second novel fulfills the promise evident in the stunning debut, Conversations with Friends, as Rooney once again portrays to dazzling effect intelligent young adults who negotiate social roles and scenarios reinforcing power structures that, for better or worse, define relationships. Marianne and Connell are unforgettable characters, alluring and sympathetic, and Rooney is a formidable talent. A major literary achievement.

The Nickel Boys by Whitehead, Colson. There were rumors about Nickel Academy, a Florida reform school, but survivors kept their traumas to themselves until a university archaeology student discovered the secret graveyard. Whitehead follows his dynamic, highly awarded, best-selling Civil War saga, The Underground Railroad (2016), with a tautly focused and gripping portrait of two African American teens during the last vicious years of Jim Crow. There is no way Elwood Curtis would ever have become a Nickel Boy if he was white. Raised by his strict grandmother, Elwood, who cherishes his album of recorded Martin Luther King Jr. speeches, is an exemplary student who earns admission to early college classes. But trouble whips up out of thin air, and instead he is sent to Nickel, where the Black boys are barely fed, classes are a travesty, and the threat of sexual abuse and torture is endemic. As Elwood tries to emulate Dr. King’s teachings of peace and forgiveness, he is befriended by the worldlier and pragmatic Turner, and together they try to expose the full extent of the brazenly racist, sadistic, sometimes fatal crimes against the Nickel Boys. Whitehead’s magnetic characters exemplify stoicism and courage, and each supremely crafted scene smolders and flakes with injustice and resistance, building to a staggering revelation. Inspired by an actual school, Whitehead’s potently concentrated drama pinpoints the brutality and insidiousness of Jim Crow racism with compassion and protest.

The New Me by Butler, Halle. Thirty-year-old Millie just can’t seem to move on with her life. Every day she works at the same fruitless temp job and returns home to her empty apartment, fixating on all the little ways she could turn her life around. Then she watches TV until she falls asleep, only to restart the cycle once again. Sarah is Millie’s only constant friend, and even though they talk often and do things together, Millie finds herself more annoyed with her than not. When Millie misconstrues an email from the temp agency, the dream of a full-time position finally seems within reach. But when it falls through and the temp agency refuses to place her again, Millie scrambles for work and realizes just how empty that vision has become. Butler is a master of satire. Her darkly hilarious novel vividly captures contemporary American life and will keep readers addicted to the end.
**The Old Drift** by Serpell, Namwali. A rich, complex saga of three intertwined families over the course of more than a century. The epic stretches out from a single violent encounter: in the early 20th century, a British colonialist adopts North-western Rhodesia (now Zambia) as his home, settling in the Old Drift, a settlement near Victoria Falls, where the colonist gets into a fateful skirmish with a local hotelier. After this, readers first meet Sibilla, the hotelier’s granddaughter, a woman born with hair covering her body, who runs away to Africa with a man who frequents the wealthy Italian estate at which her mother is a servant; then, in England, there’s Agnes, the colonialist’s granddaughter, a rich white girl and talented tennis player who goes blind and falls in love with a student who, unbeknownst to her, is black; and Matha, the servant’s granddaughter, a spirited prodigy who joins a local radical’s avant-garde activism. In part two, Agnes’s son, Lionel, has an affair with Matha’s daughter, which leads to a confrontation that also involves Niala, Sibilla’s granddaughter. Serpell expertly weaves in a preponderance of themes, issues, and history, including Zambia’s independence, the AIDS epidemic, white supremacy, patriarchy, and familial legacy.

**The Orphan of Salt Winds** by Brooks, Elizabeth According to 86-year-old Virginia’s plan, New Year’s Eve 2015 is not only her last day in Salt Winds, the bleak old house on Tollbury Marsh, but also her last day on Earth. She has lived at Salt Winds since she was a 10-year-old orphan, brought there by her adoptive parents, Lorna and Clem. Though Lorna is distant, Clem is attentive and kind. But an air of menace hangs over the house. Friend-of-the-family Max Deering, sleek and overly familiar, is always hanging about. And Clem’s repeated warnings about the marsh’s dangers are reinforced when a German fighter plane crashes, setting in motion a series of calamities. In her debut, Brooks convincingly renders a child trying to make sense of the confusing and mysterious world of adults; Virginia is observant, but she doesn’t always get things right, and her efforts to control events can have unintended consequences. Back in 2015, her “farewell tour” of the house is interrupted by the appearance of Sophie, a runaway teenager who evokes protectiveness but also stirs up old hatreds. A careful buildup of suspense will keep readers guessing and glued to the pages.

**The Other Americans** by Lalami, Laila Who killed Driss Guerraoui? Was it an accident, a hit-and-run in the wee hours of the morning? Or was it murder, a brutal act against the Moroccan immigrant who might pose a threat to a neighborhood business in a small Mojave-desert town? The mystery at the center of Lalami’s (The Moor’s Account, 2014) novel brings together an intriguing set of characters, including Driss’ daughter, Nora, a struggling composer who returns home to the remnants of her family. There’s Maryam, Driss’ wife, who misses her native country; Iraq War veteran Jeremy, who is battling his own demons while trying to help Nora; and African American detective Coleman, who is trying to work out the mechanics of the case while facing her own domestic challenges. Now and then the story is nearly drowned out by the nine narrating voices, yet Lalami impressively conducts this chorus of flawed yet graceful human beings to mellifluous effect. “I didn’t know which version of the past I could trust, which story was supported by the facts and which had been reshaped to fit them, whether out of grief or out of malice,” Coleman worries. An eloquent reminder that frame of reference is everything when defining the “other.”
**The Parade** by **Eggers, Dave**

Four knows instantly that Nine, his new partner, is “an agent of chaos.” The two strangers with their terse pseudonyms have been hired to pave a new road connecting the north and south of a poor, civil-war-ravaged country. The protocols are strict; the schedule is tight—they are to complete the road in time for a celebratory parade—and the dangers are many. Four pilots the grand RS-90, which lays down perfect asphalt; Nine rides ahead, scouting for obstacles. They are to set up tents next to their vehicles at night, keep their weapons handy, eat rations, and avoid contact with locals. Four is monastic in his discipline. Nine is a man of frank carnality and curiosity, as friendly as a bounding dog and utterly reckless. Clearly things will go awry, but how and how badly? The ever-incisive, wordly-wise, compassionate, and imaginative Eggers) maintains the tension of a cocked crossbow in this magnetizing, stealthily wry, and increasingly chilling tale of First World corporate mercenaries way out of their element.

---

**The Reckoning** by **Grisham, John**

Shortly after WWII, a decorated veteran, a genuine war hero, calmly and with malice aforesought murders a Methodist preacher. He makes no effort to conceal the crime, and, even after he’s arrested and charged with homicide, he refuses to give anyone, even his lawyer, an explanation. His family is distraught; the murdered man’s family is grief-stricken. What makes Grisham’s latest something more than a typical legal thriller is its structure. The tale begins with the crime itself, then takes us back in time to 20 years before the murder, portraying the events that led up to it. Finally, the narrative jumps forward again, to the aftermath of the trial. If Grisham had elected to tell this story in a linear fashion, it would have been a good, if unremarkable, thriller. But spooled out in this deliberately disjointed fashion, it becomes a fascinating literary jigsaw puzzle, with pieces of the story from the book’s multiple sections finally clicking into place in the end. This is Grisham experimenting with the traditional legal-thriller format, and his experiment yields thoroughly engaging results. The Grisham brand shows no signs of losing its power to draw readers, giving him the leverage to play with the thriller format, as he does successfully here.

---

**The River** by **Heller, Peter**

Taking time off from jobs and classes, Dartmouth pals and consummate outdoorsmen Jack and Wynn, “diehards nostalgic for the days of the voyageurs,” undertake a weeks-long canoe trip in Northern Canada. Colorado rancher’s son Jack is the quicker-witted, tougher of the two, while Wynn’s sensitive connection to nature stems from his Vermont youth spent steeped in art and literature. The boys’ fluency with one another and the rugged landscape is quickly tested, though, by an encroaching wildfire and their unknowing entry into an argument between the married couple they try to warn about it. Disasters, growing in severity, eat away at their provisions and their sanity. Heller (*Celine*, 2017) once again chronicles life-or-death adventure with empathy for the natural world and the characters who people it. He writes most mightily of the boys’ friendship and their beloved, uncompromising wilderness, depicting those layers of life that lie far beyond what is more commonly seen: the fire’s unapologetic threats, the wisdom of the birds and animals seeking their own safety, and the language of the river itself.
**The Ruin of kings** by Lyons, Jenn Lyons's dazzling debut is an audacious start to an ambitious five-book series. Kihrin alternates narrative duties with a demonic mimic who knows parts of Kihrin’s story he is no longer aware of because of her ability to devour brains to absorb power and memories. The twisting genealogies of a complex set of royal families add mystery to Kihrin's awakening to a portentous destiny that involves training in magic and swordplay as well as intrigues in the various courts of Capital City. His adventures include encountering a diverse range of fascinating races, summoning demons, suffering magical enslavement, serenading a dragon of immense proportions, and dealing with goddesses who walk among the peoples of the Known World, making for a multilevel thrill ride. Thoroughly modern in her use of dialogue and assured in her world building, Lyons eventually dovetails the two narratives into one with one stunning revelation after another that will leave the breathless reader wanting more. With the scope and sense of fatality of Patrick Rothfuss and well-choreographed action sense of Brandon Sanderson, Lyons leaps into the big leagues of epic fantasy and sticks the landing.

**Run Away** by Coben, Harlan Simon Greene sits on a bench in New York's Central Park watching a strung-out street performer struggle through each song. It's painful to watch, as the young woman is badly in need of help but will likely not accept it. She is Simon’s runaway daughter Paige. This encounter, their first in six months, does not go well. Paige runs off and Simon has a physical altercation with her scumbag junkie boyfriend Aaron, leading to claims that Wall Street is now attacking the homeless. Then Aaron turns up dead. This is only the beginning of a twisty, edge-of-your-seat thriller and events that rapidly begin to spiral out of control. Simon must decide how far he'll go to save his child, plunging into a world ruled by drugs, secrets, missing people, murder, and more. To say more would ruin the sheer genius of a puzzle Coben (Don't Let Go; Home) has crafted. He maintains many threads perfectly, ultimately weaving them in unexpected ways. An absolutely brilliant, taut thriller that begs to be read in one sitting.

**The Satapur Moonstone** by Massey, Sujata India’s first female lawyer is back in her second mystery (after The Widows of Malabar Hill). This time Perveen Mistry travels to the remote princely state of Satapur to help mediate a dispute between the dowager maharani and her daughter-in-law over the future education of the young maharaja. Perveen’s task is complicated by palace intrigue and the unexpected attraction she feels for the British political agent for the kingdom, Colin Sandringham. When intrigue turns to murder, Perveen realizes her mission has moved beyond education into the realm of life and death. It will take all her skill and intuition to keep the young prince, and herself, alive. Once again Massey does a superb job of combining a fascinating snapshot into 1920s British-ruled India with a top-notch mystery. She has created a strong, appealing heroine who is forging her own path in a rapidly changing world.
**The Silent Patient** by **Michaelides, Alex** Alicia Berenson is a famous painter, living a life that many envy with her handsome fashion-photographer husband, Gabriel. With a gorgeous house, complete with a painting studio, and that perfect marriage, Alicia couldn’t be happier. Until one day Gabriel comes home late from work, and Alicia shoots him in the face. In the brutal aftermath that leads to an indefinite stay in a psychiatric hospital, Alicia mutely accepts her punishment. Forensic psychotherapist Theo Faber is put in charge of her therapy; however, since the night of the shooting, she hasn’t spoken a word. With a nod to Greek mythology, art, and love, debut novelist Michaelides effectively blurs the lines between psychosis and sanity. Multiple story lines are told with a writing style that combines past diary entries with present-day prose, becoming more tangled as they weave together, keeping readers on edge, guessing and second-guessing. The Silent Patient is unputdownable, emotionally chilling, and intense, with a twist that will make even the most seasoned suspense reader break out in a cold sweat.

---

**Trust Exercise** by **Choi, Susan** Set in the early 1980s, the book’s first section depicts the Citywide Academy for the Performing Arts, an elite high school in an unnamed Southern city. Galvanized by the charged atmosphere created by the school’s magnetic theater teacher, Mr. Kingsley, 15-year-old classmates Sarah and David have an intense sexual relationship the summer between their freshman and sophomore years. Sarah, who has taken its secrecy for granted, is horrified when David makes their romance public that fall. She repudiates him, the two spend the year estranged, and she grows increasingly isolated until an English theater troupe makes an extended visit to the school. When she is pursued by one of the troupe’s actors at the same time her classmate Karen falls in love with its director, the two young women form a fraught, ambivalent bond. The novel’s second segment reintroduces the characters a dozen years later, shifting from Sarah’s perspective into a new viewpoint that casts most of what readers thought they knew into doubt. After the tensions of the past culminate in an act at once shocking and inevitable, a brief coda set in 2013 adds a final bold twist.

---

**The Volunteer** by **Scibona, Salvatore** When he enlisted, Vollie Frade exchanged the Iowa farmland of his childhood for the jungles of Vietnam and quickly observed that those who fear death have an uncanny way of turning that concern prophetic. He subsequently adopts a devil-may-care philosophy, but on his third tour, Vollie is captured and held in a subterranean tunnel. Upon his release, he is provided a new identity as Dwight Tilly and coerced into a black ops unit with mysterious goals and murkier ethics. After an assignment leaves a young girl dead, Dwight heads to New Mexico in search of an old army pal only to discover a derelict adobe home and a young woman, Louisa, and a young boy, Ellroy, the last inhabitants of an idealistic commune. Dwight and Louisa endeavor to raise the boy and start a family until Dwight’s past catches up with him. Scibona’s lyrical yet muscular prose anchors this majestic work as he probes deep philosophical questions about family, identity, belonging, and sacrifice. A present-day story line follows Ellroy’s son, whom Ellroy abandoned in a Hamburg airport and who has been raised in a German orphanage. Scibona’s greatest strength is his ability to inhabit each character with profound psychological depth to explore their guilt, doubt, and humanity. This novel rewards close reading and deserves wide readership.
**The Wolf and the Watchman** by **Dag, Niklas Natt Och**
Stockholm, 1793. Watchman Mickel Cardell, face-down at his local pub, is annoyed when he's roused from his drinking to pull a mutilated corpse out of the stinking, refuse-choked local lake. Investigator Cecil Winge is tasked with solving this heinous murder, which leads him into both the city's criminal underbelly and the estates of the aristocracy. The two men make an incongruous team: Cardell a one-armed blunt instrument, war-scarred inside and out; Winge precise, brilliant, and dying of consumption. Already a best-seller and award-winner in Sweden, this English-language version of Natt och Dag's first novel is engrossing and gross. The imagery is vividly conveyed and not for the faint of heart or stomach. Yet for those who like their mysteries dark, this is a standout. The characterization is excellent, as is the evocation of eighteenth-century Stockholm, an uncommon historical setting that provides a vibrant backdrop for this unusual mystery. Natt och Dag's side-plots dovetail neatly, his pacing is skillful, and he explores with aplomb his novel's main theme, Homo homini lupus est — Man is wolf to man.

---

**Where the Crawdads Sing** by **Owens, Delia**
In Owens's evocative debut, Kya Clark is a young woman growing up practically on her own in the wild marshes outside Barkley Cove, a small coastal community in North Carolina. In 1969, local lothario Chase Andrews is found dead, and Kya, now 23 and known as the "Marsh Girl," is suspected of his murder. As the local sheriff and his deputy gather evidence against her, the narrative flashes back to 1952 to tell Kya's story. Abandoned at a young age by her mother, she is left in the care of her hard-drinking father. Unable to fit in at school, Kya grows up ignorant until a shrimper's son, Tate Walker, befriends her and teaches her how to read. After Tate goes off to college, Kya meets Chase, with whom she begins a tempestuous relationship. The novel culminates in a long trial, with Kya's fate hanging in the balance. Kya makes for an unforgettable heroine. Owens memorably depicts the small-town drama and courtroom theatrics, but perhaps best of all is her vivid portrayal of the singular North Carolina setting.

---

**When We Left Cuba** by **Cleeton, Chanel**
Cleeton continues the stories of the Perez sisters, introduced in *Next Year in Havana* (2018), this time featuring the firebrand sister Beatriz, who bookends her first-person story with a prologue and an epilogue that take place on the night of Fidel Castro's death, November 25, 2016. In between, this passionate novel set in the 1980s dramatizes Beatriz's laser focus on making Castro pay for her brother's death and her family's exile by scheming with members of exiled Cuban groups, including Eduardo, a handsome friend from her youth, and a slippery CIA operative. While the Perez family struggles to maintain its social standing in Miami, Beatriz seeks intrigue and falls into an illicit and impossible love affair with charming Nick, a Kennedy-like figure already engaged in a match that will be politically favorable. In often purple prose, Cleeton offers plenty of melodrama to ponder, and fans of the first novel will be thrilled.
**Wolf Pack** by Box, C. J. Wyoming game warden Joe Pickett, last seen in *The Disappeared* (2018), has his old badge and district back, a brand-new pickup truck, and is happy to be out in the field tracking an illegal trapper. Across the mountains, a colleague has an uncomfortable encounter with a drone that is spooking wildlife. As they track the violators, they have no idea they’re about to collide with aggressive FBI agents and a Sinaloa cartel hit squad that’s about to unleash a shocking level of violence in Twelve Sleep County. Joe’s old friend Nate Romanowski may be back on the grid, running a business and actually planning for the future, but Joe’s going to need Nate’s killer instincts this time. As always, Box takes familiar elements of his long-running series—the upstanding Joe, the renegade Nate, a daughter in danger (this time it’s Lucy), and a threat from outside—and seamlessly combines them into a read that makes your heart race, even though you won’t leave the couch until you’ve turned the last page. Half mystery, half thriller, totally worthwhile. HIGH- You can just about set your watch by a Joe Pickett novel in March; the number-one-best-selling author’s legion of fans will be counting down the minutes.

**Women Talking** by Toews, Miriam. After more than 300 women in the Mennonite colony of Molotschna were attacked between 2005 and 2009, eight of the settlements women, from the Loewen and Friesen families, gather secretly to discuss their plan of action. They believed that the nightly attacks were by ghosts and demons until a man was caught and named other perpetrators; then the women realized that the victims were drugged and raped by men from their community. The Friesens want to stay and fight the men, and the Loewens want to leave Molotschna altogether; the rest of the women in the colony decide to do nothing and skip the clandestine meetings. Schoolteacher August Epp who takes the minutes of the meetings for the women, since they are illiterate, and is trusted by them because he has been ostracized by the community. Through Epp, Toews has found a way to add lightness and humor to the deeply upsetting and terrifying narrative while weaving in Epp’s own distressing backstory. Epp’s observations (such as those about how the women physically react or respond when someone shares a divisive suggestion) are astute, and through him readers are able to see how carefully and intentionally the women think through their life changing decisions critically discussing their roles in society, their love for their families and religion, and their hopes and desires for the future. This is an inspiring and unforgettable novel.

**A Wonderful Stroke of Luck** by Beattie, Ann. Beattie anchors her latest psychologically forensic novel to a New Hampshire prep school where troubled “overachievers” are enthralled by teacher Pierre LaVerdere, a charismatic master of irony and dissemblance who will haunt them. Ben, a student with family issues, narrates, and his cynicism, passivity, and existential viewpoint make him a millennial Holden Caulfield whom we accompany into perplexing adulthood. Bewitched by sexually adventurous and brazenly manipulative women, as well as by a neglectful friend, and bereft of conviction and ambition, post-college Ben flees New York City for a small, shabby upstate town about to be transformed by a boutique-generating tide of rich Manhattan refugees. Ben’s attempts at friendship and romance fail; he is shaken by a request from a former classmate and lover, now in a lesbian relationship, and stricken when the diabolical LaVerdere resurfaces with a dire claim. Gimlet-eyed Beattie has created a stunningly unnerving and provocative tale spiked with keen cultural allusions and drollery. This jarring dissection of privilege and anxiety, gender expectations, lust, ludicrous predicaments, defensive selfishness, moral confusion, and numbing loneliness projects a matrix of angst somewhat countered by the solace and sustenance found in a quiet life far from the grasping, hurried, hostile world.
Non-Fiction & Biographies

**All That You Leave Behind** by Carr, Erin Lee  
Documentary filmmaker Carr addresses her addiction to alcohol and her father’s influence over her in this bold and incisive memoir. The daughter of the late New York Times journalist David Carr (1956-2015), Erin and her twin sister Meagan were born three months early to parents addicted to cocaine. The weight of parenthood forced their father to straighten himself out, while the girls’ mother disappeared from their lives. Erin began drinking in high school, and, like her father, she drifted in and out of AA meetings. But after her father, who was battling lung cancer, collapsed on the New York Times newsroom floor and died at age 58, Erin realized that life is precious, and she clung to his used reporter's notebooks and continued to send her father daily text messages for advice. Erin writes honestly about her relationship with her father (“In order for our relationship to work, I had to learn to not take his darker moments personally”) as she delivers a clear-eyed view into multigenerational substance abuse and simultaneously celebrates the redemption of a father's love. Readers can't help but get caught up in Erin's tragic and ultimately transformative story.

**American Moonshot: John F. Kennedy and the Great Space Race** by Brinkley, Douglas  
On May 25, 1961, JFK made an astonishing announcement: his goal of putting a man on the moon by the end of the decade. In this engrossing, fast-paced epic, Douglas Brinkley returns to the 1960s to recreate one of the most exciting and ambitious achievements in the history of humankind. American Moonshot brings together the extraordinary political, cultural, and scientific factors that fueled the birth and development of NASA and the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo projects, which shot the United States to victory in the space race against the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War. Drawing on new primary source material and major interviews with many of the surviving figures who were key to America's success, Brinkley brings this fascinating history to life as never before. American Moonshot is a portrait of the brilliant men and women who made this giant leap possible, the technology that enabled us to propel men beyond earth’s orbit to the moon and return them safely, and the geopolitical tensions that spurred Kennedy to commit himself fully to this audacious dream. Brinkley's ensemble cast of New Frontier characters include rocketeer Wernher von Braun, astronaut John Glenn and space booster Lyndon Johnson.

**American Cipher: Bowe Bergdahl and the U.S. tragedy in Afghanistan** by Farwell, Matt  
The U.S. military had been fighting in Afghanistan for almost eight years before Private First Class Bowe Bergdahl, for unclear reasons, walked away from his post and was taken prisoner by the Taliban. Another five years passed before he returned home. Farwell and Ames recount the complete Bergdahl saga and much of the sorry tale of America's Afghanistan involvement. They move effortlessly between Bergdahl’s life (friends and family, the reasons behind his actions, and his ordeal at the hands of the enemy) and the larger picture of the war and the American political divisions over it. Along the way, they profile a storied cast of characters—from those who use or exploit the troubled young man to those who seek to understand him—and tell his father’s journey—from being a strict disciplinarian to a devoted guardian willing to sacrifice everything for his son. Farwell and Ames make a great case for the continuum of history, depicting Afghanistan as a graveyard of empires in which the U.S. is the latest victim of a military quagmire and showing how one soldier’s actions can polarize an entire nation. American Cipher sets the record straight on a tragic subject and will strongly appeal to a wide audience.
**Becoming Dr. Seuss** by **Jones, Brian Jay** Dr. Seuss is a classic American icon. Whimsical and wonderful, his work has defined our childhoods and the childhoods of our own children. The silly, simple rhymes are a bottomless well of magic, his illustrations timeless favorites because, quite simply, he makes us laugh. The Grinch, The Cat in the Hat, Horton, and so many more, are his troupe of beloved, and uniquely Seussian, creations. Theodor Geisel, however, had a second, more radical side. It is there that the allure and fascination of his Dr. Seuss alter ego begins. He had a successful career as an advertising man and then as a political cartoonist, his personal convictions appearing, not always subtly, throughout his books—remember the environmentalist of *The Lorax*? Geisel was a complicated man on an important mission. He introduced generations to the wonders of reading while teaching young people about empathy and how to treat others well. Agonizing over word choices and rhymes, touching up drawings sometimes for years, he upheld a rigorous standard of perfection for his work. Geisel took his responsibility as a writer for children seriously, talking down to no reader, no matter how small. And with classics like *Green Eggs and Ham*, and *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish*, Geisel delighted them while they learned. Suddenly, reading became fun.

**The Birth of Loud: Leo Fender, Les Paul, and the guitar-pioneering rivalry that shaped rock 'n' roll** by **Port, Ian S** A rip-roaring journey through the early days of rock 'n' roll, told through the lives of the men whose innovative guitars helped usher it into existence. In his first book, former San Francisco Weekly music editor Port offers an apt approach to the story of rock, in which the protagonists are less Leo Fender (1909-1991) and Les Paul (1915-2009)—whose instruments helped create the sounds associated with the genre—than the instruments themselves. In the hands of artists like Buddy Holly, Eric Clapton, and Jimi Hendrix, the Fenders and the Gibson Les Paul revolutionized the way guitar was perceived, how it was played, and, crucially, how it was heard. At the center of the narrative are the two opposite personalities behind the instruments, and their biographies are fascinating in their own rights—though workhorse Paul winds up much less compelling than the shy and inventive Fender—but it is the results of their creations that make the book an entertaining read. The author does an excellent job following the two sparring guitars around the world, moving smoothly among a variety of musicians. Port also peoples the narrative with intriguing supporting characters, including Fender’s Don Randall, who “changed the image of the guitar in the popular mind”; Carol Kaye and James Jamerson, bassists on the forefront of a new rhythm offered by an electric sound; and F.C. Hall, the former Fender man who wound up supplying the Beatles with his competing Rickenbacker guitars. “Nothing could be at once louder, more vivid, more chaotic, more human,” Port writes of Hendrix’s iconic performance of “The Star-Spangled Banner” at Woodstock in 1969, but he could very well have been describing his own indelible cultural history of rock ‘n’ roll. A lively, difficult-to-put-down portrait of an important era of American art that enhances readers’ appreciation for the music it depicts.
The Catalogue of Shipwrecked Books Christopher Columbus, His Son, and the Quest to Build the World's Greatest Library by Wilson-Lee, Edward

In the 238 books brought to Hispaniola in four chests by Hernando Colón, son of Christobal Colón (Christopher Columbus), Wilson-Lee recognizes the first library in the Americas. And in recounting how that library grew to more than 15,000 volumes, he chronicles the remarkable life of its bibliophile librarian. It is a Renaissance life, astonishing for both its geographic and intellectual breadth. As the son of the world’s most famous explorer, Hernando repeatedly sails to the New World, the first time with his father, whose books he gives a place of honor in his burgeoning library and about whom he himself penned a glowing biography. Still, readers will quickly realize that as much as he wanted to retrace his idolized father’s voyages across uncharted seas, Hernando yearned even more to carve new routes through the sixteenth century’s exploding world of print. In Hernando’s obsession with gathering books, maps, pictures, music, and pamphlets, and then systematically cataloguing them—even the volumes lost through shipwreck—Wilson-Lee discerns a prescient anticipation of twenty-first-century cyber search engines. Though much of Hernando’s singular library disintegrated after his death, he emerges from this narrative as an archival pioneer, ceaselessly in pursuit of universal knowledge. A potent reminder that a great library originates as a bold adventure.

Dannemora: two escaped killers, three weeks of terror, and the largest manhunt ever in New York State by Gardner, Charles A

In June 2015, two prisoners escaped from Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora, NY, a state facility near the Canadian border. Gardner, a retired correctional training lieutenant, describes the events that preceded the escape and the three-week manhunt that followed. The story is bizarre; it is no wonder that it was recently adapted into a TV series for Showtime. Gardner describes Clinton Correctional as a safe and secure facility where local residents work as guards and support staff. Enter Joyce Mitchell, a civilian employee who hatches a plan with career criminals Richard Matt and David Sweat, helping them dig a tunnel and escape. She then met them outside and they were to drive to Canada, leaving behind Mitchell’s abusive husband. All goes as planned—except Mitchell chickens out at the last minute, and the two men are left to fend for themselves in upstate New York’s wild and wooly North Country. The greater portion of the book recounts the efforts by law enforcement to locate the men. Writing in a simple, no-nonsense style, Gardner grips readers with details of the hunt, ending with the death of Matt and the capture of Sweat. A riveting, head-shaking read for anyone interested in stranger-than-fiction tales, the criminal justice system, or Great Escape-style adventures.

Eating the Sun by Sanders, Ella

In this sweet and optimistic new book, author-illustrator Sanders explores the sweeping science of the universe and then breaks it down so that even right-brainers and hopeless romantics can comprehend. The book is a collection of one- to two-page explanations of some of science’s biggest concepts, each with an adorable accompanying illustration. What makes the book so unique and delightful are the subjectively positive closing lines of each otherwise objective section; Sanders concludes every piece with a bit of hopefulness or wisdom that puts the illustrated principle into human perspective. For example, Sanders writes this of the beautiful partnership that the Earth shares with the moon: "How glad we can be, that we have someone to figure out this universe business alongside, to dance with, to gradually lengthen our days and keep us slow." Sanders’ marveling is inspiring and sure to be contagious, even for the least scientifically minded of readers. As Sanders explains, we’re all just small lumps of space matter that feed on particles of the sun. Why make life so complicated?
**Freedom's Detective: the Secret Service, the Ku Klux Klan and the man who masterminded America’s first war on terror** by Lane, Charles

In the years following the Civil War, a new battle began. Newly freed African American men had gained their voting rights and would soon have a chance to transform Southern politics. Former Confederates and other white supremacists mobilized to stop them. Thus, the KKK was born. After the first political assassination carried out by the Klan, Washington power brokers looked for help in breaking the growing movement. They found it in Hiram C. Whitley. He became head of the Secret Service, which had previously focused on catching counterfeiters and was at the time the government’s only intelligence organization. Whitley and his agents led the covert war against the nascent KKK and were the first to use undercover work in mass crime—what we now call terrorism—investigations. Like many spymasters before and since, Whitley also had a dark side. His penchant for skulduggery and dirty tricks ultimately led to his involvement in a conspiracy that would bring an end to his career and transform the Secret Service. Populated by intriguing historical characters—from President Grant to brave Southerners, both black and white, who stood up to the Klan—and told in a brisk narrative style, Freedom’s Detective reveals the story of this complex hero and his central role in a long-lost chapter of American history.

---

**Everything in Its Place** by Sacks, Oliver

The acclaimed neurologist and author’s spaciousness of mind, humanity, and attachment to all life has its last showcase in this posthumously published collection. As in most of his books, Sacks includes clinical case studies from his medical practice. There is an unusually intriguing discussion of the many sides of Tourette’s syndrome as well as a detailed analysis of the misleadingly named “bipolar” disorder. While underscoring the physician’s role in some of the most intimate decisions of a patient’s life, the author discusses the aging brain; mania as a biological rather than psychological condition; the various manifestations of dementia; and the folly of a “premature sense of impotence and doom” that can accompany a diagnosis of Alzheimer’s. In a lighter vein, Sacks discusses his early fascination with fossil botany and chemistry. He also offers odes to libraries, swimming, museums, the necessity of gardens, and the majesty of the ginkgo. His disquisitions extend further to the ancient building blocks of cyanobacteria and the evolution of earthlike planets, the premonitory power of dreams, photography’s transformation of the way we perceive movement and the world, and the hallucinatory nature of out-of-body and near-death experiences, states that are far from supernatural in origin but rather “part of the normal range of human consciousness and experience.” In the last days of his life, Sacks offered strong lamentations about the book as an endangered species and the loss of civility in an age of cellphones and social media. Balanced and insightful, this valedictory collection offers a fine coda to a remarkable life and career.

---

**From Scratch: A Memoir of Love, Sicily, and Finding Home** by Locke, Tembi

This is a love story that starts not at the beginning but the end, with the death of actor and TED speaker Locke’s husband, and it is her mesmerizing grief that pulls readers in. As a student at Wesleyan, Locke, from Houston, Texas, met Saro, a chef from Sicily nearly a dozen years older than she, while on a study-abroad adventure, and they fell in love. As she recounts with pleasure and sorrow, she was attracted to Saro because he had a gift for feeding not only people’s bodies but also their spirits. After the chef moves to Los Angeles, they marry. His parents initially shun Locke, strongly objecting to their son marrying an African American and an actress; they even refuse to attend their wedding. Locke and Saro have a daughter and conduct successful careers, and finally the families are brought together by the tragedy of Saro’s cancer. Readers will not want to put Locke’s memoir down, so compellingly does she describe her unique experiences and the universal ups and downs of life.
Furious Hours - murder, fraud, and the last trial of Harper Lee by Cep, Casey

Cep’s debut recounts how a series of rural Alabama murders inspired Harper Lee to write again, years after the publication of To Kill a Mockingbird. Death surrounded the Rev. Willie Maxwell. Following his wife’s mysterious murder in 1970, four more of Maxwell’s family members were inexplicably found dead within seven years. Locals blamed voodoo, but a deeper investigation pointed to fraud: Maxwell, said Lee, “had a profound and abiding belief in insurance,” and he collected thousands in death benefits. He was a suspect in his wife’s case (charged and curiously acquitted), but years later, before the police could make another arrest, he was killed in a public fit of vigilant justice. In a further twist, the same lawyer who helped clear Maxwell’s name decided to represent his killer. Lee, still uncomfortable over the embellishments of her friend Truman Capote’s In Cold Blood, wondered “whether she could write the kind of old-fashioned, straitlaced journalism she admired, and whether it could be as successful as the far-bending accounts of her contemporaries.” In this effortlessly immersive narrative, Cep engagingly traces how Lee found the case and began—and ultimately abandoned—a project she called The Reverend. Cep writes with the accessible erudition of podcast-style journalism; she breathes not only life, but style into her exhaustive, impressively researched narrative. She relies heavily on the backstories of each of her narrative threads, which transforms her book into a collection of connected preambles. Short histories of fraud, Southern politics, and urban development take shape alongside a condensed biography of Lee. This kind of storytelling may feel disjointed, but there’s a reason for it: By fully detailing the crimes before Lee even appears, Cep allows readers to see the case through Lee’s eyes and recognize its nascent literary potential. Above all, this is a book about inspiration and how a passion for the mysteries of humanity can cause an undeniable creative spark. A well-tempered blend of true crime and literary lore.

The Kennedy Heirs by Taraborrelli, J. Randy.

A unique burden was inherited by the children of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy and his celebrated siblings, Senators Robert and Ted Kennedy. Raised in a world of enormous privilege against the backdrop of American history, the lives of this third generation of Kennedys often veered between towering accomplishment and devastating defeat. In his revelatory new book, acclaimed Kennedy historian J. Randy Taraborrelli draws back the curtain on the next generation of America’s most famous family. John Kennedy, Jr.’s life in the public eye is explored, following the Kennedy scion as he faced the challenges posed by marrying his great love, Carolyn Bessette. Riveting new details are shared about the couple’s tragic demise—and why Ethel Kennedy advised Carolyn not to take the trip that would ultimately end her life. John’s sister, Caroline Kennedy, had her own complicated relationships, including a marriage to Ed Schlossberg that surprised her mother, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, and an unexpected bond with her mother-in-law, Mae Schlossberg. Additional stories, many shared here for the first time, illuminate the rest of the Kennedy dynasty: Kara Kennedy, Ted’s daughter, and her valiant battle against lung cancer; how Ted’s wife, Vicki, introduced a new era of feminism to the Kennedy family; the lifelong struggles with addiction faced by Bobby Kennedy Jr. and Patrick Kennedy; the unexpected way pop star Taylor Swift helped Conor Kennedy heal after the death of his mother, Bobby’s wife Mary; and Congressman Joe Kennedy III’s rise to prominence. At the center of it all is the family’s indomitable matriarch, Ethel Kennedy—a formidable presence with her maddening eccentricities and inspiring courage. Based on hundreds of exclusive first-hand interviews and cultivated over twenty years of research—including numerous Oral Histories from the JFK Library and the Edward M. Kennedy Institute—The Kennedy Heirs is an epic drama of ambition, scandal, pride and power.
**Kitchen Yarns: notes on life, love, and food** by **Hood, Ann**  
Novelist Hood (The Book That Matters Most) recounts the events of her life in a series of autobiographical essays that center on the foods she loves and craves and the dishes that have helped her through hardship. The author grew up in Providence, RI, in an Italian American family, where her grandmother cooked gallons of red sauce every week, and her mother crafted delicious meatballs and fancy lady sandwiches that Hood took to school functions. Hood details her teenage years working for the department store Jordan Marsh and subsequent 15 years as a TWA flight attendant. As her travels allowed her to explore more sophisticated foods around the world, it was the simple dishes from her childhood (e.g., her father Indiana fried chicken made from three simple ingredients: flour, salt, and pepper) to which she always returned. Hood writes movingly about her failed marriage, the tragic deaths of her father, brother, and five-year-old daughter, and the recipes that kept her going through these difficult periods. This warm, humorous, touching, and wonderfully readable book will appeal to food lovers and fans of culinary biographies.

**The Lost Gutenberg: The Astounding Story of One Book's Five-hundred-year Odyssey** by **Davis, Margaret Leslie**  
Quite certainly the most renowned of all early printed books, a Gutenberg Bible (or even a part of it) crowns any rare-book collection. Davis has traced the remarkable history of one incomplete exemplar, Hubay Number 45, shaken loose in the Napoleonic Wars’ upheavals. This particular volume came to rest for a spell in Northern Ireland in a British bibliophile's library. Bouncing around Britain, it eventually ended up in the hands of an American widow. Book collecting might seem a preoccupation of a limited cadre of obsessive, pedantic academic wannabes, but Davis makes bibliographic history utterly page-turning and absorbing, with intrigues, devastating tragedies, vast fortunes, embezzlement, a seductively voiced telephone operator, the Teapot Dome scandal, murder-suicide, earthquake, and even Worcestershire sauce. Davis’ brilliantly told story features outsize characters but focuses primarily on Estelle Doheny, the Los Angeles purchaser of Number 45, who, in one further irony, held in her hands this long-sought volume only after she had turned nearly blind.

**Merchants of Truth: the business of news and the fight for facts** by **Abramson, Jill**  
These are perilous times to be a journalist. As if the advent of the internet and the aftereffects of the 2008 recession weren’t enough to challenge the existing model of daily print newspapers and nightly network broadcasts, now we have a president who makes spurious charges of “fake news” and dangerously deems reporters to be “enemies of the people.” As a former executive editor of the New York Times, Abramson was uniquely situated to observe the changes that are affecting the ways in which media companies develop and distribute news and information. On the one hand, the New York Times and Washington Post epitomize the old guard of careful and credentialed journalism. On the other, upstarts such as BuzzFeed and Vice Media are challenging those standards by capitalizing on the immediacy of web-based sharing in conjunction with social media platforms such as Facebook and Google. It’s a battle for industry dominance in which all entities will need to adapt or die, when the choice is often between revenue and substance. Never better than when she is detailing her personal professional crises when inherent conflicts between old and new media rattled Times management, Abramson offers an engrossing “behind the curtains” journey into the demanding business of modern media. Abramson’s expert and frank assessment of the struggles of the press in the "fake news" era will attract avid attention.
**Midnight in Chernobyl: the untold story of the world's greatest nuclear disaster** by Higginbotham, Adam. In 1986, an explosion at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in modern-day Ukraine made headlines around the world. Journalist Higginbotham writes a detailed account of the disaster, complete with firsthand interviews and an extensive bibliography of secondary and primary sources. The narrative tension builds as the author documents what led up to the accident, describing the technology involved in running the plant and how the Soviet Union cut corners when it came to nuclear safety. The heroics of the story are revealed through the actions of ordinary Soviet citizens who fought the resulting fires and cleaned up the radiation sites, which leaves a profound impression on readers. While Chernobyl often gets portrayed as a small piece within the larger collapse of the USSR, this work aims to reset that notion by pointing out that the disaster solidified mistrust toward the Communist Party and Soviet system and that the recovery costs bankrupted the Soviet economy. This gripping nonfiction account is highly recommended for Russophiles and fans of real-life dystopias.

**Nanaville** by Quindlen, Anna A first-time grandmother discovers joy and self-knowledge in her new role. Quindlen celebrates the gift of being a grandmother: a new experience, she writes, that gives her “a second chance, to see, to be, to understand the world, to look at it and reimagine my place in it, to feel as though I’ve made a mark.” Besides reporting sweet anecdotes about her toddler grandson, the author reflects on her changing relationship with her son and daughter-in-law, an inevitable shift from being central in the lives of her children to a “peripheral place” in a new family dynamic. Her son, she has observed with pride, has become an exemplary parent; when she asked “what surprised him most about being a father,” he replied, “I guess it’s how much I love him in a way that I’ve never loved anyone before.” For Quindlen, that reply was “like sunrise and sunset and New Year’s Eve all at once.” Admitting that she can be opinionated, she has learned to hold her tongue when it comes to parenting decisions. “Nana judgment must be employed judiciously, and exercised carefully,” she warns. “Those who make their opinions sound like the Ten Commandments see their grandchildren only on major holidays and in photographs.” The author was 64 when her grandson was born; her grandmother was 47 when she had her first grandchild, yet grandparents seemed so much older then: “Our grandmothers were pre-gym, pre-Botox, pre–skinny jeans.” They never kissed, hugged, or praised; they would never have gotten down on the floor to play with their dozens of grandchildren, but Quindlen was certain of their love. “I thought,” she writes, “they were the patriarchs, the source of all judgment and wisdom.” The author imparts sensible advice with self-deprecating humor and sincere gratitude for the bounty of her life. A warmhearted memoir sure to appeal to other new grandmothers—and Quindlen’s many fans.

**Old in art school: a memoir of starting over** by Painter, Nell Irvin In her mid-sixties, Painter was a professor at Princeton and an acclaimed historian and writer. Yet, nearly finished with what became a best-seller, The History of White People (2010), she decided to end her prestigious academic career and enroll as an undergraduate art major at Rutgers. Culture shock ensued. Well versed in discrimination as a woman and an African American, Painter found herself confronting ageism. More confounding was the need to learn to think visually instead of narratively. She also had to care for her elderly parents. But Painter persevered, ultimately earning an MFA at the Rhode Island School of Design. Bracingly candid in her vividly analytical chronicling of her challenging adventure and its emotional, intellectual, and creative demands, she astutely critiques the way art is taught and charts her quest to figure out if her passion for history was detrimental or essential to her visual explorations. With her art displayed throughout this deeply inquisitive, involving memoir of transformation enriched by art history, Painter—funny, furious, brilliant, and mesmerizing—celebrates the hard work art requires and the profound freedom it engenders.
**Rough magic: Riding the world's loneliest horse race** by Prior-Palmer, Lara. First-time author Prior-Palmer transforms from hopeless 19-year-old underdog into surprising champion of the grueling 2013 Mongol Derby in this exhilarating, visceral account of her attempt to win a 1,000-kilometer horse race across the Mongolian countryside. Driven by her own restlessness, Prior-Palmer, an English woman who had been working as an au pair in Austria, decided to enter the 10-day contest on a lark, unprepared for the arduous competition involving dozens of riders each racing a series of 25 wild ponies across Mongolia to recreate the horse-messenger system established by Genghis Khan. Struggling with an uncooperative pony at the beginning, the headstrong author battles GPS troubles (the devices show the participants straight line routes, rather than following the intended trails), minor nuisances (a group of boys chase and throw stones at her), and intense competition (she eagerly referred to logs at checkpoints to see who was ahead of her and by how long) as she discovers the race is as much an existential journey as it is a sports competition ("The race reclaims me as an animal-my original form, my rawest self, my favorite way to be"). Filled with soulful self-reflection and race detail, this fast-paced page-turner is a thrill ride from start to finish.

**Sacred Duty A Soldier's Tour at Arlington National Cemetery** by Cotton, Tom. Cotton was a platoon leader with the storied 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment--The Old Guard--between combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the height of the Iraq Surge, he carried the flag-draped remains of his fallen comrades off of airplanes at Dover Air Force Base, and he laid them to rest in Arlington's famed Section 60, "the saddest acre in America." He also performed hundreds of funerals for veterans of the Greatest Generation, as well as the Korean and Vietnam Wars. The Old Guard has embodied the ideals of honor and sacrifice across our nation's history. America's oldest active-duty regiment, dating back to 1784, The Old Guard conducts daily military-honor funerals on the 651 rolling acres of Arlington, where generations of American heroes' rest. Its soldiers hold themselves to the standard of perfection in sweltering heat, frigid cold, and driving rain. Every funeral is a no-fail, zero-defect mission, whether honoring a legendary general or a humble private. In researching and writing the book, Cotton returned to Arlington and shadowed the regiment's soldiers, from daily funerals to the state funeral of President George H. W. Bush to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, reliving the honor--and the challenges--of duty at the nation's "most sacred shrine."
**Sea Stories** by **McRaven, William H** Admiral William H. McRaven is back with amazing stories of bravery and heroism from his career as a Navy SEAL and commander of America's Special Operations Forces. Admiral William H. McRaven is a part of American military history, having been involved in some of the most famous missions in recent memory, including the capture of Saddam Hussein, the rescue of Captain Richard Phillips, and the raid to kill Osama bin Laden. Sea stories begins in 1963 at a French Officer's Club in France, where Allied officers and their wives gathered to have drinks and tell stories about their adventures during World War II -- the place where a young Bill McRaven learned the value of a good story. Sea Stories is an unforgettable look back on one man's incredible life, from childhood days sneaking into high-security nuclear sites to a day job of hunting terrorists and rescuing hostages. Action-packed, humorous, and full of valuable life lessons, Sea Stories is a remarkable memoir from one of America's most accomplished leaders.

**Say nothing : a true story of murder and memory in Northern Ireland** by **Keefe, Patrick Radden** In 1972, Jean McConville, single mother of ten, was believed to be an informant for the British army. For that reason, she was kidnapped by a group of masked IRA (Irish Republican Army) members and never heard from again. Three decades later, her remains were uncovered. Sandwiched in the decades in-between was the violent conflict in Northern Ireland commonly known as the Troubles. The story of McConville and the Troubles is told here by New Yorker staff writer Keefe. Shifting focus between the people involved in the IRA, such as Dolours Price, Gerry Adams, and Brendan Hughes, and McConville and her family, the author illustrates how interconnected Northern Ireland was during the conflict and how trauma, as well as silence about trauma, can destroy individuals, families, and communities. Drawing on controversial oral histories from Boston College as well as personal interviews, archival materials, affidavits, newspapers, memoirs, and a variety of other sources, Keefe blends threads of espionage, murder mystery, and political history into a single captivating narrative. Keefe deftly turns a complicated and often dark subject into a riveting and informative page-turner that will engage readers of both true crime and popular history.

**See You in the Piazza: new places to discover in Italy** by **Mayes, Frances Mayes**, best known for her lyrical works about Tuscany (*Under the Tuscan Sun*), divides her time between a farm near Hillsborough, NC, and a home in Cortona, Tuscany. She admits that it would often take lifetimes to know Italy well. This work takes readers along with the author and husband Ed as they travel by car, train, ferry, or foot, to lesser-known village squares where two or more roads meet. At these crossroads, they find a church, market, osteria or trattoria, and perhaps a town hall. Visitors to Italy may appreciate the role of the piazza in Rome, Naples, Venice, Pisa, Florence, and Trieste, for example. Here, we are off the beaten track, soaking in the distinctive sunlight, traditional cuisines, architecture, and geographical features of each area. Mayes celebrates the ethnic, cultural, and culinary differences of picturesque villages in the north, central, south, and island regions of the country, providing delightful trattoria recipes, poetry, and anecdotes. Readers will definitely eat well by staying by her whimsical and conversational side. Recommended for those who look for the unexpected when they travel.
**Solitary : unbroken by four decades in solitary confinement : my story of transformation and hope** by Woodfox, Albert.

Solitary is the unforgettable life story of a man who served more than four decades in solitary confinement—in a 6-foot by 9-foot cell, 23 hours a day, in notorious Angola prison in Louisiana—all for a crime he did not commit. That Albert Woodfox survived was, in itself, a feat of extraordinary endurance against the violence and deprivation he faced daily. That he was able to emerge whole from his odyssey within America’s prison and judicial systems is a triumph of the human spirit, and makes his book a clarion call to reform the inhumanity of solitary confinement in the U.S. and around the world. Arrested often as a teenager in New Orleans, inspired behind bars in his early twenties to join the Black Panther Party because of its social commitment and code of living, Albert was serving a 50-year sentence in Angola for armed robbery when on April 17, 1972, a white guard was killed. Albert and another member of the Panthers were accused of the crime and immediately put in solitary confinement by the warden. Without a shred of actual evidence against them, their trial was a sham of justice that gave them life sentences in solitary. Decades passed before Albert gained a lawyer of consequence; even so, sixteen more years and multiple appeals were needed before he was finally released in February 2016.

**Spearhead** by Makos, Adam.

An in-the-moment re-creation of the Allied breakthrough of the West Wall into Nazi Germany by a remarkable cadre of tank crewmen of the 3rd Armored Division. Based on testimony from several surviving veterans—both American and German—military writer Makos (Devotion: An Epic Story of Heroism, Friendship, and Sacrifice, 2015, etc.) presents the true story of this intrepid division, which Gen. Omar Bradley described as having led the endgame against the beleaguered Germans across Europe “with a serious and grim intensity.” The primary hero of this tale is Cpl. Clarence Smoyer, who evolved in his tank duties from being a gunner on an aging Sherman tank, dodging superior Panthers through the fields of occupied Belgium, to commanding the first Pershing in a spectacular showdown into Cologne, Germany, in spring 1945. It was the beginning of the end for Germany in the months after the D-Day landings, and the 3rd Armored Division was leading the breakout across northern France, thus earning the name “Spearhead” Division. With illustrations and photos, Makos offers comparisons between the unpopular and outgunned Shermans and the seemingly invulnerable Panthers and Tigers. However, “a secret weapon” had just arrived from America in the form of the Pershing tank, introduced by the legendary commander Maj. Gen. Maurice Rose, who led the Spearhead Division. In it, Smoyer would charge into Germany’s fortress city, Cologne. However, as the author writes, “this is not a story about machines, how one tank stacked up against another. This is a story about people.” Through alternating firsthand accounts by Smoyer and a German tank crewman, Makos reveals much about the German determination to thwart the Allies during the final Battle of the Bulge as well as the weary civilian population’s quick turn to fraternization once the game was over. A compelling, exciting adventure of a hard-driving American force, “the first Allied unit to punch through the West Wall and to also capture a German town.”
**Topgun** by Pedersen, Dan. While you won’t receive “permission to buzz the tower” from this memoir by the founder of the so-called Topgun navy fighter school, now celebrating its fiftieth anniversary, you will learn a dizzying array of facts about naval aviation and air-to-air combat. Former lieutenant commander Pedersen does allude to the 1986 movie starring Tom Cruise that made his school a household name, but his mission is to delve deeply into the poor state of dogfighting, technology, and rules of engagement over Vietnam that his U.S. Navy Fighter Weapons School was designed to remedy. Topgun overcame bureaucratic inertia, institutional stubbornness, equipment shortages, and low morale to reimagine the art of dogfighting. Pederson shares personal stories of aerial combat and the larger-than-life pilots who joined him on his quest to return the navy’s aviators to the dominant place they held before guided missiles promised but never quite delivered an end to the art of combat maneuvering. This is an exciting and well-written journey through more than five decades of naval and air-combat history and the service to which Pedersen devoted most of his life.

**The Trial of Lizzie Borden : a true story** by Robertson, Cara. Lawyer Robertson debuts with the definitive account to date of one of America’s most notorious and enduring murder mysteries. In August 1892, the bodies of Lizzie Borden’s father, Andrew, and her stepmother, Abby, were found hacked to death in their home in Fall River, Mass. As the murders were committed during daylight, when the house was occupied by Lizzie, who lived there along with her sister, she became an obvious person of interest. Strong circumstantial evidence showing that Lizzie alone had the opportunity to commit the crimes—along with testimony that she’d attempted to buy prussic acid the day before and that she’d burned a dress after the killings—led to her arrest. The absence of a clear motive, any prior history of violence, and the difficulty many had in viewing the respectable churchgoing Lizzie as a savage killer proved obstacles to widespread acceptance of the prosecution’s case, and Lizzie was acquitted after a trial. Robertson methodically rebuts the numerous theories advanced at the time and since, some of which pointed to other members of the household. The end result is a superior, page-turning true crime narrative that will leave most readers believing that the jury got it wrong.

**We Were Rich and We Didn’t Know It : a memoir of my Irish boyhood** by Phelan, Tom. On a 52-acre farm in County Laois, the Phelan family’s house was heated by the kitchen fireplace, hot-water bottles relieved the beds’ cold dampness for most of the year, and dry overcoats were piled on as extra blankets. Every Saturday evening, a black, cast-iron pot was hung above the fire, heating water in which every family member bathed. “As a child, I believed that my family was poor,” writes the author, because unlike some other children, he rarely had money for small pleasures. Whatever luxuries they had—a chemical toilet, gramophone, and Brownie Box camera, for example—were the rewards of tireless, demanding toil by his father, “with his all-devouring work ethic,” and his mother, “the sheltering harbor from the storms that sometimes raged in Dad’s head and spewed out in loud and angry words.” Frustration, fatigue, and worry fueled those storms. “I remember him as a man who loved his wife and his children,” Phelan reflects, “who at times was driven over the edge while trying desperately to take care of them.” Being a farmer was not in the author’s future; instead, it was assumed he was destined for the priesthood, a vocation he did not question. He absorbed Catholic theology and developed a requisite sense of guilt about breaking the Ten Commandments as well as a healthy skepticism about the “Irish mania” for missionary work: “the conversion of happy pagans into miserable Catholics.” He reveled in being an altar boy, besotted by the lovely Sister Carmel, who made learning responses for the Latin Mass “a time of warmth, love, and delight.” Ordained in 1965, he left the priesthood after a decade. A captivating portrait of a bygone time.