

January 2024

FICTION

Barkskins by Annie Proulx. This is the story of 300 years of the timber industry in the US and Canada, and the descendants of two wood-cutters who traveled from France to Canada to work for a feudal lord in exchange for land.

Amy and Isabelle by Elizebeth Strout. This 1998 award winner was Strout's first book. It looks at some of the people and their relationships in a small Maine town. The two main characters are a single mom and her teenage daughter who both live with secrets.

A Painted House by John Grisham. The story is set in 1952 in the Arkansas delta. A seven-year-old boy lives on a farm in a small rural town. He and his family pick cotton, aided by local "Hill People" and Mexican laborers. They struggle to meet their debts. It was inspired by Grisham's childhood.

North Woods by Daniel Mason. This best seller follows the lives of five generations living in the same house in northwestern Massachusetts. It is an interesting, fast read.

Unsheltered by Barbara Kingsolver. This is the tale of two families living through precarious times at the same address in New Jersey.

Lessons in Chemistry by Bonnie Garmus. The story is set in the 1960s, focusing on the life of Elizabeth Zott, a brilliant chemist, who believes that a woman should be treated with respect and dignity. It is told with great humor.

NONFICTION

Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents by Isabel Wilkerson. This book posits that an unacknowledged caste system exists in America. The author backs up her claims through a historical review of the treatment of American minorities. This treatment, sadly, became a model for the Nazis to copy.

For Small Creatures Such As We: Rituals for Finding Meaning in Our Unlikely Worlds by Sasha Sagan. This book, written by the daughter of Carl Sagan, discusses the rituals shared by all humanity, regardless of religious beliefs or backgrounds.

Boostrapped by Alisa Quart. While discussing the American obsession with self-reliance, the author examines our belief that you can "pull yourself up by your bootstraps," and finds it comes up short and, in fact, harms us. Through her research, she reveals how interdependent we are and that is the basis for a healthy society.

MYSTERIES

Stargazer by Anne Hillerman. This work features a Navaho policewoman. It is written in the tradition of Hillerman's father, Tony. Officer Bernadette Manuelito searches for an old friend who has confessed to the murder of an astronomer.

Spy Coast by Tess Garritsen. This is the first book in the Martini Club series. It is set in a small Maine town where retired CIA agents hope to live quietly. Unfortunately, the past comes to call.

MEMOIR

The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating by Elisabeth Tova Bailey. This short, award-winning book describes the bed-ridden author's close observations of a snail. It brings her to an appreciation of her own existence and nature's lessons.

February 2024

FICTION

The Perfect Girl by Gilly Macmillan. Set in 2014, a 17-year-old musical prodigy is bullied at school in England. She makes a tragic mistake in which three people die, serves time, and then gets a chance at a new life. The story is told from the perspective of several characters.

The Winter House by Joan MacCracken. This Maine author tells the story of four older women who decide to combat the long, cold winter by living together. Each has her own story, and there are surprises along the way.

The Midcoast by Adam White. This novel, set in Damariscotta, is by an author who lived there. It features ambition, class, family drama, and criminal enterprise while going back and forth in time.

The Magic Kingdom by Russell Banks. The title of this historical novel implies the story is about Disney World, but it is about the lives of people in the Shaker community of New Bethany, Fla., in the swamplands near what is now Disney World.

NONFICTION

Not to Be Missed by Kenneth Turan. The well-known NPR critic looks back on a lifetime of film viewing and makes his unconventional choices for the best film of each decade.

The Last Winter of the Weimar Republic by Rudiger Barth and Hauke Friedericks. Similar to a diary, the book gives a day-to-day account of the final 2 1/2 months of democracy in 1930s Germany.

A Fever in the Heartland: The Klu Klux Klan's Plot to Take Over America, and the Woman Who Stopped Them by Timothy Egan. This is the story of The Klan's meteoric rise in the 1920s, the efforts of D.C. Stephenson, its leader in Indiana, to take over the national government, and the woman who stopped him.

MYSTERIES/THRILLERS

The Silent Patient by Alex Michaelides. A well-known artist gruesomely murders her husband and remains silent thereafter. A psychotherapist works with her to uncover her story in this gripping story with a dramatic ending.

The Last House Guest by Morgan Miranda. The story is set in Littleport, Maine, a harbor community which attracts wealthy summer visitors. A summer guest who befriends a local girl dies unexpectedly. The girl comes under suspicion and must clear her name.

A Dangerous Business by Jane Smiley. Two young women who work in brothels in California during the gold rush try to catch a killer. They are inspired by reading Poe's mysteries.

March 2024

FICTION

The Man from St Petersburg by *Ken Follett*. This novel is set against the background of the Anglo-German arms race just before World War I.

Demon Copperhead by *Barbara Kingsolver*. This book, inspired by “David Copperfield” of Charles Dickens fame, dives deeply into some of our modern-day societal evils: opioid addictions, harmful child services, and prejudice. Set in Appalachia.

Kate Meader by *Deborah Gould*. This Brunswick author created an engaging story based on real people who lived in a Gardiner, Maine, almshouse in 1900. Very well researched.

Bernard Malamud: The Complete Stories. Intensely human tales about people coping with difficult lives, often made more difficult by the people themselves.

Among the Beautiful Beasts by *Lori McMullen*. This historical fiction is the story of the early life of Marjory Stoneman Douglas, who later became a tireless activist for the Florida Everglades.

A Different Sun by *Elaine Neil Orr*. The daughter of a prosperous slave owner becomes a missionary in Africa.

NONFICTION

Braiding Sweetgrass by *Robin Wall Kimmerer*. This professor of environmental biology and founder of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment believes ecological consciousness requires a reciprocal relationship with nature. In her writing, she embraces the idea that plants and animals are our teachers.

First in His Class: A Biography of Bill Clinton by *David Maraniss*. This book covers Clinton’s life from his birth in 1946 to the day he announced his run for President in October, 1991.

Think Again by *Adam Grant*. The author wants us to rethink our beliefs, thoughts, and identity – and asks why we believe in certain things and also encourages us to question old assumptions and embrace new ideas and perspectives.

A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School by *Carlotta Walls LaNier with Lisa Fraiser Page*. The story of the desegregation of this Arkansas high school told by the youngest of the first nine students to attend.

MYSTERIES

The Best Man to Die by *Ruth Rendell*. In this British mystery a bridegroom’s best man is murdered the night before the wedding. Suspects include small-time gangsters, “loose” women, and cheating men. What’s not to like?

The Ghost Orchid by *Jonathan Kellerman*. This is the 39th book in a terrific series set in southern California. A psychologist and a police detective work to solve a double homicide. Which victim was the target?

Desert Star. This is *Michael Connelly*’s 37th book. Harry Bosch and Renee Ballard resume a partnership which they had years ago before they split up. They go after two killers.

SCIENCE FICTION

Selected Stories of *Philip K. Dick*. Dark stories by the author behind the movie “Blade Runner.”

April 2024

FICTION

Our Missing Hearts by *Celeste Ng*. An Asian woman goes on the run when an a 1984-type dictator takes over America. Children are taken from their homes. Will she be able to reunite with her son?

Chronicle of a Death Foretold by *Gabriel Garcia Marquez*. This novella is a fictional reconstruction of a murder that was foreseen by many people in a town, but nobody attempted to prevent it.

Lady Clementine by *Marie Benedict*. This historical fiction is the story of Winston Churchill’s wife, her background and her role in the events of his life.

A Symmetry by *Lisa Halliday*. This book explores inequities in age, power, talent, wealth, fame, geography, and justice. The story is told in several sections, with the characters experiencing different situations.

Night of the Living Rez by *Morgan Talty*. This is short- story fiction about modern Native American life by a citizen of the Penobscot Nation in Maine.

The Guest List by *Lucy Foley*. This story is set on a remote island off Ireland’s west coast. Wedding guests arrive in a gale. Disaster erupts during the reception. A fun read.

NONFICTION

To Wake the Giant by *Jeff Scharra*. An excellent book examining both sides – the U.S. and Japan – of the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Call Me American by *Abdi Nor Iftin*. A young Somali man fights his way out of Africa to gain freedom in the U.S. A good book about war-torn conditions.

Midnight in Chernobyl by *Adam Higginbotham*. The book describes the causes and aftermath of the 1986 meltdown of the nuclear reactor in Chernobyl, Ukraine, featuring the USSR bureaucracy and the mistake of a single operator.

Sins of the Shovel by *Rachel Morgan*. This is about the evolution of American archeology – a tale of robbery and murder, leading to legislation.

MYSTERY

Lightseekers by *Kemi Kayode*. An investigative psychologist travels to a Nigerian town to uncover the truth about the murder of university students.

The Spy Coast by *Tess Gerritsen*. This book by a Maine author is set in the town of Purity, Maine. Former spy Maggie Bird and the “Martini Club” of former operatives investigate when a body turns up on Maggie’s driveway. She knows her past has come back – former foes have not forgotten.

May 2024

FICTION

Homestead by *Melissa Moustakis*. This is a debut novel set near Anchorage in the 1950s as Alaska moves toward statehood. A couple meets and marries within a few days, then begin homesteading 150 acres. Problems ensue.

The Paris Wife by *Paula McClain*. This is a work of historic fiction which tells the story of Ernest Hemingway's life in Paris with his first wife, Hadley Richardson.

The Ball at Versailles by *Danielle Steel*. Four young debutantes from America are invited to a cotillion at Versailles in 1959. Their lives are changed.

NONFICTION

A Walk in the Woods by *Bill Bryson*. This classic tale of tackling the Appalachian Trail does not disappoint. It is educational, thought-provoking, and very funny. It is a good read which can lift your spirits.

Dark City: The Lost World of Film Noir by *Eddie Muller*. This is a thorough and fun study of the all-American film genre of the 1940s and 50s. The films featured tough guys and gals in a world that won't give them a break.

The Black Angels by *Maria Smilios*. The Untold Story of the Nurses Who Helped Cure Tuberculosis. In 1929, white nurses were refusing to work at the Sea View Municipal Hospital on Staten Island. The city recruited black nurses from the South. The book covers the time from 1929-1952, highlighting social, cultural, and medical changes as the cure for TB was found.

The Doctors Blackwell by *Janice P. Nimura*. In 1849, Elizabeth Blackwell became the first woman in America to get an MD degree. Her sister, Emily, also became a doctor. They founded the first hospital staffed by women in New York City.

POETRY

Selected Poems of *May Sarton* edited by Hilsinger and Brynes. These were chosen from the first 40 years of Sarton's long career, nicely organized by category.

MYSTERY

The Proof of the Pudding by *Rhys Bowen*. One in the Royal Spyness series. Lady Rannoch is the hostess at a party at her home. A murder occurs during the festivities.

JANE AUSTEN

Here are three books for Jane Austen fans: **Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels** by *Deirdre Le Faye*; **Jane's Fame** by *Claire Harman*; **The Real Jane Austen: A Life in Small Things** by *Paula Byrne*.