

1. **West of Sunset** by Stewart O'Nan 304pp

In 1937, F. Scott Fitzgerald was a troubled, uncertain man whose literary success was long over. In poor health, with his wife consigned to a mental asylum and his finances in ruins, he struggled to make a new start as a screenwriter in Hollywood. By December 1940, he would be dead of a heart attack.

Those last three years of Fitzgerald's life, often obscured by the legend of his earlier jazz age glamour, are the focus of Stewart O'Nan's gorgeously and gracefully written novel. With flashbacks to key moments from Fitzgerald's past, the story follows him as he arrives on the MGM lot, falls in love with brassy gossip columnist Sheila Graham, begins work on *The Last Tycoon*, and tries to maintain a semblance of family life with the absent Zelda and daughter Scottie.

Fitzgerald's orbit of literary fame and the Golden Age of Hollywood is brought vividly to life through the novel's romantic cast of characters, from Dorothy Parker and Ernest Hemingway to Humphrey Bogart. A sympathetic and deeply personal portrait of a flawed man who never gave up in the end, even as his every wish and hope seemed thwarted.

2. **Clara and Mr. Tiffany**, by Susan Vreeland, 432 pp

Against the unforgettable backdrop of New York near the turn of the twentieth century, from the Gilded Age world of formal balls and opera to the immigrant poverty of the Lower East Side, bestselling author Susan Vreeland again breathes life into a work of art in this extraordinary novel, which brings a woman once lost in the shadows into vivid color.

It's 1893, and at the Chicago World's Fair, Louis Comfort Tiffany makes his debut with a luminous exhibition of innovative stained-glass windows, which he hopes will honor his family business and earn him a place on the international artistic stage. But behind the scenes in his New York studio is the freethinking Clara Driscoll, head of his women's division. Publicly unrecognized by Tiffany, Clara conceives of and designs nearly all of the iconic leaded-glass lamps for which he is long remembered.

Clara struggles with her desire for artistic recognition and the seemingly insurmountable challenges that she faces as a professional woman, which ultimately force her to protest against the company she has worked so hard to cultivate. She also yearns for love and companionship, and is devoted in different ways to five men, including Tiffany, who enforces to a strict policy: he does not hire married women, and any who do marry while under his employ must resign immediately. Eventually, like many women, Clara must decide what makes her happiest—the professional world of her hands or the personal world of her heart.

3. **Calling Me Home** by Julie Kibler 336 pages A National Best Seller!

Calling Me Home is a soaring debut interweaving the story of a heartbreaking, forbidden love in 1930s Kentucky with an unlikely modern-day friendship.

Eighty-nine-year-old Isabelle McAllister has a favor to ask her hairdresser Dorrie Curtis. It's a big one. Isabelle wants Dorrie, a black single mom in her thirties, to drop everything to drive her from her home in Arlington, Texas, to a funeral in Cincinnati. With no clear explanation why. Tomorrow.

Dorrie, fleeing problems of her own and curious whether she can unlock the secrets of Isabelle's guarded past, scarcely hesitates before agreeing, not knowing it will be a journey that changes both their lives.

Over the years, Dorrie and Isabelle have developed more than just a business relationship. They are friends. But Dorrie, fretting over the new man in her life and her teenage son's irresponsible choices, still wonders why Isabelle chose her.

Isabelle confesses that, as a willful teen in 1930s Kentucky, she fell deeply in love with Robert Prewitt, a would-be doctor and the black son of her family's housekeeper—in a town where blacks weren't allowed after dark. The tale of their forbidden relationship and its tragic consequences makes it clear Dorrie and Isabelle are headed for a gathering of the utmost importance and that the history of Isabelle's first and greatest love just might help Dorrie find her own way.

4. **Secrets of a Charmed Life** by Susan Meissner, 409 pp

She stood at a crossroads, half-aware that her choice would send her down a path from which there could be no turning back. But instead of two choices, she saw only one—because it was all she really wanted to see...

Current day, Oxford, England. Young American scholar Kendra Van Zant, eager to pursue her vision of a perfect life, interviews Isabel McFarland just when the elderly woman is ready to give up secrets about the war that she has kept for decades...beginning with who she really is. What Kendra receives from Isabel is both a gift and a burden—one that will test her convictions and her heart.

1940s, England. As Hitler wages an unprecedented war against London's civilian population, one million children are evacuated to foster homes in the rural countryside. But even as fifteen-year-old Emmy Downtree and her much younger sister Julia find refuge in a charming Cotswold cottage, Emmy's burning ambition to return to the city and apprentice with a fashion designer pits her against Julia's profound need for her sister's presence. Acting at cross purposes just as the Luftwaffe rains down its terrible destruction, the sisters are cruelly separated, and their lives are transformed...

5. **The Silent Wife**, by A.S.A Harrison 337 Pages

A chilling psychological thriller about a marriage, a way of life, and how far one woman will go to keep what is rightfully hers

Jodi and Todd are at a bad place in their marriage. Much is at stake, including the affluent life they lead in their beautiful waterfront condo in Chicago, as she, the killer, and he, the victim, rush haplessly toward the main event.

He is a committed cheater. She lives and breathes denial. He exists in dual worlds. She likes to settle scores. He decides to play for keeps. She has nothing left to lose. Told in alternating voices, *The Silent Wife* is about a marriage in the throes of dissolution, a couple headed for catastrophe, concessions that can't be made, and promises that won't be kept.

6. **Z: A novel of Zelda Fitzgerald**, by Therese Anne Fowler, 384 pp

Novelist Fowler (Exposure, 2011) considered it fate that she would write about Zelda, the wife of celebrated writer Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald: the author's mother and the famous flapper passed away on the same day. In this frothy offering, readers glimpse the glorious lives of the rich and famous of the Jazz Age. From the moment gorgeous Zelda laid eyes on her officer husband, her days were filled with magical moments, as Scott began to receive critical acclaim, and the pair navigated a social circuit graced by the likes of Ernest Hemingway, Tallulah Bankhead, and Gertrude Stein. But the high life dropped low when Fitzgerald's good fortune began to fizzle, and his already excessive drinking increased. As her husband grew more distant and distracted, Zelda fell into the arms of a charming Frenchman, but she gave up the romance in hopes of saving her marriage. Could the dazzling literary "It" couple ever find its way back to bliss? Fowler renders rich period detail in this portrayal of a fascinating woman both blessed-and cursed-by fame.

7. **The Ice Cream Queen of Orchard Street**, by Susan Jane Gilman 505pp

In 1913, little Malka Treynovsky flees Russia with her family. Bedazzled by tales of gold and movie stardom, she tricks them into buying tickets for America. Yet no sooner do they land on the squalid Lower East Side of Manhattan, than Malka is crippled and abandoned in the street.

Taken in by a tough-loving Italian ices peddler, she manages to survive through cunning and inventiveness. As she learns the secrets of his trade, she begins to shape her own destiny. She falls in love with a gorgeous, illiterate radical named Albert, and they set off across America in an ice cream truck. Slowly, she transforms herself into Lillian Dunkle, "The Ice Cream Queen" -- doyenne of an empire of ice cream franchises and a celebrated television personality.

Lillian's rise to fame and fortune spans seventy years and is inextricably linked to the course of American history itself, from Prohibition to the disco days of Studio 54. Yet Lillian Dunkle is nothing like the whimsical motherly persona she crafts for herself in the media. Conniving, profane, and irreverent, she is a supremely complex woman who prefers a good stiff drink to an ice cream cone. And when her past begins to catch up with her, everything she has spent her life building is at stake.

8. **The Oregon Trail: A New American Journey** by Rinker Buck 451 pp

In the bestselling tradition of Bill Bryson and Tony Horwitz, Rinker Buck's "The Oregon Trail" is a major work of participatory history: an epic account of traveling the 2,000-mile length of the Oregon Trail the old-fashioned way, in a covered wagon with a team of mules--which hasn't been done in a century--that also tells the rich history of the trail, the people who made the migration, and its significance to the country.

Spanning 2,000 miles and traversing six states from Missouri to the Pacific Ocean, the Oregon Trail is the route that made America. In the fifteen years before the Civil War, when 400,000 pioneers used it to emigrate West--historians still regard this as the largest land migration of all time--the trail united the coasts, doubled the size of the country, and laid the groundwork for the railroads. The trail years also solidified the American character: our plucky determination in the face of adversity, our impetuous cycle of financial bubbles and busts, the fractious clash of ethnic populations competing for the same jobs and space. Today, amazingly, the trail is all but forgotten.

Rinker Buck is no stranger to grand adventures. "The New Yorker" described his first travel narrative, "Flight of Passage," as "a funny, cocky gem of a book," and with "The Oregon Trail" he seeks to bring the most important road in American history back to life. At once a majestic American journey, a significant work of history, and a personal saga reminiscent of bestsellers by Bill Bryson and Cheryl Strayed, the book tells the story of Buck's 2,000-mile expedition across the plains with tremendous humor and heart. He was accompanied by three cantankerous mules, his boisterous brother, Nick, and an "incurably filthy" Jack Russell terrier named Olive Oyl. Along the way, Buck dodges thunderstorms in Nebraska, chases his runaway mules across miles of Wyoming plains, scouts more than five hundred miles of nearly vanished trail on foot, crosses the Rockies, makes desperate fifty-mile forced marches for water, and repairs so many broken wheels and axels that he nearly reinvents the art of wagon travel itself. Apart from charting his own geographical and emotional adventure, Buck introduces readers to the evangelists, shysters, natives, trailblazers, and everyday dreamers who were among the first of the pioneers to make the journey west. With a rare narrative power, a refreshing candor about his own weakness and mistakes, and an extremely attractive obsession for history and travel, "The Oregon Trail" draws readers into the journey of a lifetime.

9. **Ray and Joan The Man who Made The McDonald's Fortune and The Woman who Gave It All Away**, by Lisa Napoli 363 pages

Ray & Joan is a quintessentially American tale of corporate intrigue and private passion: a struggling *Mad Men*—era salesman with a vision for a fast-food franchise that would become one of the world's most enduring brands, and a beautiful woman willing to risk her marriage and her reputation to promote controversial causes that touched her deeply.

Ray Kroc was peddling franchises around the country for a fledgling hamburger stand in the 1950s—McDonald's, it was called—when he entered a St. Paul supper club and encountered a beautiful young piano player who would change his life forever. The attraction between Ray and Joan was instantaneous and instantly problematic. Yet even the fact that both were married to other people couldn't derail their roller coaster of a romance.

To the outside world, Ray and Joan were happy, enormously rich, and giving. But privately, Joan was growing troubled over Ray's temper and dark secret, something she was reluctant to publicly reveal. Those close to them compared their relationship to that of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. And yet, this volatility paved the way for Joan's transformation into one of the greatest philanthropists of our time. A force in the peace movement, she produced activist films, books, and music and ultimately gave away billions of dollars, including landmark gifts to the Salvation Army and NPR.

Together, the two stories form a compelling portrait of the twentieth century: a story of big business, big love, and big giving.