

## March 2018 Book Suggestions (May-August 2018)

### **The Book That Matters Most** by Ann Hood.

Ava's twenty-five-year marriage has fallen apart, and her two grown children are pursuing their own lives outside of the country. Ava joins a book group, not only for her love of reading but also out of sheer desperation for companionship. The group's goal throughout the year is for each member to present the book that matters most to them. Ava rediscovers a mysterious book from her childhood—one that helped her through the traumas of the untimely deaths of her sister and mother. Alternating with Ava's story is that of her troubled daughter Maggie, who, living in Paris, descends into a destructive relationship with an older man. Ava's mission to find that book and its enigmatic author takes her on a quest that unravels the secrets of her past and offers her and Maggie the chance to remake their lives.

### **Manhattan Beach** by Jennifer Egan.

The long-awaited novel from the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, *Manhattan Beach* opens in Brooklyn during the Great Depression. Anna Kerrigan, nearly twelve years old, accompanies her father to the house of a man who, she gleans, is crucial to the survival of her father and her family. Anna observes the uniformed servants, the lavishing of toys on the children, and some secret pact between her father and Dexter Styles.

Years later, her father has disappeared and the country is at war. Anna works at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, where women are allowed to hold jobs that had always belonged to men. She becomes the first female diver, the most dangerous and exclusive of occupations, repairing the ships that will help America win the war. She is the sole provider for her mother, a farm girl who had a brief and glamorous career as a Ziegfeld folly, and her lovely, severely disabled sister. At a night club, she chances to meet Styles, the man she visited with her father before he vanished, and she begins to understand the complexity of her father's life, the reasons he might have been murdered.

Mesmerizing, hauntingly beautiful, with the pace and atmosphere of a noir thriller and a wealth of detail about organized crime, the merchant marine and the clash of classes in New York, Egan's first historical novel is a masterpiece, a deft, startling, intimate exploration of a transformative moment in the lives of women and men, America and the world. *Manhattan Beach* is a magnificent novel by one of the greatest writers of our time.

### **Vincent and Theo The Van Gogh Brothers** by Deborah Heiligman. 409 pages.

The deep and enduring friendship between Vincent and Theo Van Gogh shaped both brothers' lives. Confidant, champion, sympathizer, friend—Theo supported Vincent as he struggled to find his path in life. They shared everything, swapping stories of lovers and friends, successes and disappointments, dreams and ambitions. Meticulously researched, drawing on the 658 letters Vincent wrote to Theo during his lifetime, Deborah Heiligman weaves a tale of two lives intertwined and the extraordinary love of the Van Gogh brothers.

**The Chaperone** by Laura Moriarty, 377 pp., Historical Fiction

Only a few years before becoming a famous silent-film star and icon of her generation, a 15-yr-old Louise Brooks leaves Kansas to study with a prestigious dancing school in New York. Much to her annoyance, she is accompanied by a 36-yr-old chaperone, who is neither mother nor friend. Cora Carlisle, a complicated but traditional woman with her own reasons for making the trip, has no idea what she's in for. Young Louise, already stunningly beautiful and sporting her famous black bob with blunt bangs, is known for her arrogance and her lack of respect for convention. Ultimately, the five weeks they spend together will transform their lives forever.

Drawing on the rich history of the 1920s, 30s, and beyond—from the orphan trains to Prohibition, flappers, and the onset of the Great Depression to the burgeoning movement for equal rights and new opportunities for women—Laura Moriarty's *The Chaperone* illustrates how rapidly everything, from fashion and hemlines to values and attitudes, was changing at this time and what a vast difference it all made for Louise Brooks, Cora Carlisle, and others like them.

**The Twelve tribes of Hattie** by Ayana Mathis 243 pages fiction

Captured here in twelve luminous narrative threads, their lives tell the story of a mother's monumental courage and the journey of a nation. Beautiful and devastating. Ayana Mathis's *The Twelve Tribes of Hattie* is Wondrous from first to last. Glorious, harrowing, unexpectedly uplifting, and blazing with life.

A debut of extraordinary distinction: Ayana Mathis tells the story of the children of the Great Migration through the trials of one unforgettable family. In 1923, fifteen-year old Hattie Shepherd flees Georgia and settles in Philadelphia, hoping for a chance of a better life.

**Lincoln in the Bardo**, by George Saunders 368 pages

February 1862. The Civil War is less than one year old. The fighting has begun in earnest, and the nation has begun to realize it is in for a long, bloody struggle. Meanwhile, President Lincoln's beloved eleven-year-old son, Willie, lies upstairs in the White House, gravely ill. In a matter of days, despite predictions of a recovery, Willie dies and is laid to rest in a Georgetown cemetery. "My poor boy, he was too good for this earth," the president says at the time. "God has called him home." Newspapers report that a grief-stricken Lincoln returns, alone, to the crypt several times to hold his boy's body. From that seed of historical truth, George Saunders spins an unforgettable story of familial love and loss that breaks free of its realistic, historical framework into a supernatural realm both hilarious and terrifying. Willie Lincoln finds himself in a strange purgatory where ghosts mingle, gripe, commiserate, quarrel, and enact bizarre acts of penance. Within this transitional state-called, in the Tibetan tradition, the bardo—a monumental struggle erupts over young Willie's soul.

**Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald** by Therese Anne Fowler 384 pages

A dazzling novel that captures all of the romance, glamour, and tragedy of the first flapper, Zelda Fitzgerald.

When beautiful, reckless Southern belle Zelda Sayre meets F. Scott Fitzgerald at a country club dance in 1918, she is seventeen years old and he is a young army lieutenant stationed in Alabama. Before long, the "ungettable" Zelda has fallen for him despite his unsuitability: Scott isn't wealthy or prominent or even a Southerner, and keeps insisting, absurdly, that his writing will bring him both fortune and fame.

Her father is deeply unimpressed. But after Scott sells his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, to Scribner's, Zelda optimistically boards a train north, to marry him in the vestry of St. Patrick's Cathedral and take the rest as it comes.

**Little Fires Everywhere** by Celeste Ng 352 pages

The Richardson family lives in the planned community of Shaker Heights, Ohio—a place of wealth, comfort, and stability—and they are a clan that embodies those traits. But when Mia, a single mother, and her fifteen year old daughter, Pearl, rent a house in the area, their very different lives will merge with those of the Richardson family and begin to contort the carefully laid lattice that supports their views.

**An Hour Before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood** by Jimmy Carter 464 pages

A personal look at the boyhood years of President Carter that also depicts everyday life in the deep south in the 20th century. President Carter was as American as "apple pie" and serves as an excellent example of how a small town boy learned family values to sustain him for a lifetime.

**The Broken Girls** by Simone St. James 336 pages

**Vermont, 1950.** There's a place for the girls whom no one wants--the troublemakers, the illegitimate, the too smart for their own good. It's called Idlewild Hall. And in the small town where it's located, there are rumors that the boarding school is haunted. Four roommates bond over their whispered fears, their budding friendship blossoming--until one of them mysteriously disappears. . . .

**Vermont, 2014.** As much as she's tried, journalist Fiona Sheridan cannot stop revisiting the events surrounding her older sister's death. Twenty years ago, her body was found lying in the overgrown fields near the ruins of Idlewild Hall. And though her sister's boyfriend was tried and convicted of murder, Fiona can't shake the suspicion that something was never right about the case.

When Fiona discovers that Idlewild Hall is being restored by an anonymous benefactor, she decides to write a story about it. But a shocking discovery during the renovations will link the loss of her sister to secrets that were meant to stay hidden in the past--and a voice that won't be silenced.

**Everybody's Fool** by Richard Russo 477 pages

Richard Russo, at the very top of his game, now returns to North Bath, in upstate New York, and the characters he created in *Nobody's Fool*.

The irresistible Sully, who in the intervening years has come by some unexpected good fortune, is staring down a VA cardiologist's estimate that he has only a year or two left, and it's hard work trying to keep this news from the most important people in his life: Ruth, the married woman he carried on with for years . . . the ultra-hapless Rub Squeers, who worries that he and Sully aren't still best friends . . . Sully's son and grandson, for whom he was mostly an absentee figure (and now a regretful one). We also enjoy the company of Doug Raymer, the chief of police who's obsessing primarily over the identity of the man his wife might've been about to run off with, before dying in a freak accident . . . Bath's mayor, the former academic Gus Moynihan, whose wife problems are, if anything, even more pressing . . . and then there's Carl Roebuck, whose lifelong run of failing upward might now come to ruin. And finally, there's Charice Bond—a light at the end of the tunnel that is Chief Raymer's office—as well as her brother, Jerome, who might well be the train barreling into the station.

*Everybody's Fool* is filled with humor, heart, hard times and people you can't help but love, possibly because their various faults make them so stridently human. This is classic Russo—and a crowning achievement from one of the greatest storytellers of our time.

**40 Autumns** by Nina Wilner

In *Forty Autumns*, Nina recounts her family's story—five ordinary lives buffeted by circumstances beyond their control. She takes us deep into the tumultuous and terrifying world of East Germany under Communist rule, revealing both the cruel reality her relatives endured and her own experiences as an intelligence officer, running secret operations behind the Berlin Wall that put her life at risk.

A personal look at a tenuous era that divided a city and a nation, and continues to haunt us, *Forty Autumns* is an intimate and beautifully written story of courage, resilience, and love—of five women whose spirits could not be broken, and who fought to preserve what matters most: family.