

STAFF PICKS: THE BEST OF 2010

Fiction

[*The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*](#) by Aimee Bender

Nine-year-old Rose discovers that she is able to taste people's emotions in the food they make: anger in a cookie, guilt in a roast chicken, longing in a sandwich. Her gift/curse shapes her life in unexpected ways.

Mockingjay by Suzanne Collins (Book Three of The Hunger Games trilogy) In Teen Services collection

Against all odds, Katniss Everdeen has survived the Hunger Games twice. But now that she's made it out of the bloody arena alive, she's still not safe. The Capitol is angry. The Capitol wants revenge. Who do they think should pay for the unrest? Katniss. And what's worse, President Snow has made it clear that no one else is safe either. Not Katniss's family, not her friends, not the people of District 12.

[*Room*](#) by Emma Donoghue

To five-year-old Jack, Room is the entire world. It is where he was born and grew up; it's where he lives with his Ma as they learn and read and eat and sleep and play. At night, his Ma shuts him safely in the wardrobe, where he is meant to be asleep when Old Nick visits. Room is home to Jack, but to Ma, it is the prison where Old Nick has held her captive for seven years. Through determination, ingenuity, and fierce motherly love, Ma has created a life for Jack. But she knows it's not enough...not for her or for him. She devises a bold escape plan, one that relies on her young son's bravery and a lot of luck. What she does not realize is just how unprepared she is for the plan to actually work. Told entirely in the language of the energetic, pragmatic five-year-old Jack, *Room* is a celebration of resilience and the limitless bond between parent and child, a brilliantly executed novel about what it means to journey from one world to another.

[*Freedom*](#) by Jonathan Franzen

Patty and Walter Berglund were the new pioneers of old St. Paul, the gentrifiers, the hands-on parents, the avant-garde of the Whole Foods generation. Patty was an enviably perfect mother and the wife of Walter's dreams. Together with Walter (environmental lawyer, commuter cyclist, total family man) she was doing her small part to build a better world. But now, in the new millennium, the Berglunds have become a mystery. Why has their teenage son moved in with the aggressively Republican family next door? Why has Walter taken a job working with Big Coal? What exactly is Richard Katz rocker and Walter's college best friend and rival still doing in the picture? Most of all, what has happened to Patty? Why has the bright star of Barrier Street become a very different kind of neighbor? In his first novel since *The Corrections*, Franzen has given us an epic of contemporary love and marriage. *Freedom* comically and tragically captures the temptations and burdens of liberty: the thrills of teenage lust, the shaken compromises of middle age, the wages of suburban sprawl, the heavy weight of empire. In charting the mistakes and joys of Freedom's characters as they struggle to learn how to live in an ever more confusing world,

[*The Widower's Tale*](#) by Julia Glass

In a historic farmhouse outside Boston, seventy-year-old Percy Darling is settling happily into retirement: reading novels, watching old movies, and swimming naked in his pond. His routines are disrupted, however, when he is persuaded to let a locally beloved preschool take over his barn. As Percy sees his rural refuge overrun by children, parents, and teachers, he must reexamine the solitary life he has made in the three decades since the sudden death of his wife.

[*Winter Garden*](#) by Kristin Hannah

Can a woman ever really know herself if she doesn't know her mother? From the author of the bestseller *Firefly* comes a powerful, heartbreaking novel that illuminates the intricate mother-daughter bond and explores the enduring links between the present and the past. Meredith and Nina Whitson are as different as sisters can be. One stayed at home to raise her children and manage the family apple orchard; the other followed a dream and traveled the world to become a famous photojournalist. But when their beloved father falls ill, Meredith and Nina find themselves together again, standing alongside their cold, disapproving mother, Anya, who even now, offers no comfort to her daughters. Alternating between the past and present, Meredith and Nina will finally hear the singular, harrowing story of their mother's life, and what they learn is a secret so terrible and terrifying that it will shake the very foundation of their family and change who they believe they are.

[*Elegies for the Brokenhearted*](#) by Christie Hodgen

In this savvy, spirited, moving, and surprisingly humorous novel, Mary Murphy tells her own story as she paints lively portraits of the people with whom she's crossed paths.

[*The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*](#) by Stieg Larsson (Book 3 of the Millennium Trilogy Series)

Lisbeth Salander - the heart of Larsson's two previous novels - lies in critical condition, a bullet wound to her head, in the intensive care unit of a Swedish city hospital. She's fighting for her life in more ways than one: if and when she recovers, she'll be taken back to Stockholm to stand trial for three murders. With the help of her friend, journalist Mikael Blomkvist, she will not only have to prove her innocence, but also identify and denounce those in authority who have allowed the vulnerable, like herself, to suffer abuse and violence. And, on her own, she will plot revenge against the man who tried to kill her, and the corrupt government institutions that very nearly destroyed her life. Once upon a time, she was a victim. Now Salander is fighting back.

[*A Question of Belief*](#) by Donna Leon

Leon's bestselling series featuring the principled, warmhearted Venetian Commissario Guido Brunetti has won her international renown as one of the world's best crimewriters. In *A Question of Belief*, Brunetti must contend with ingenious corruption, bureaucratic intransigence, and the stifling heat of a Venetian summer.

[*The Long Song*](#) by Andrea Levy

The author of *Small Island* tells the story of the last turbulent years of slavery and the early years of freedom in 19th-century Jamaica.

[Wolf Hall](#) by Hilary Mantel

England in the 1520s is a heartbeat from disaster. If the king dies without a male heir, the country could be destroyed by civil war. Henry VIII wants to annul his marriage of twenty years and marry Anne Boleyn. The pope and most of Europe opposes him. Into this impasse steps Thomas Cromwell: a wholly original man, a charmer and a bully, both idealist and opportunist, astute in reading people, and implacable in his ambition. But Henry is volatile: one day tender, one day murderous. Cromwell helps him break the opposition, but what will be the price of his triumph?

[The Lake Shore Limited](#) by Sue Miller

Four unforgettable characters beckon readers into this new novel from the author of the bestseller *The Senator's Wife*. Miller's latest is a tour de force about the dislocations wrought in our lives by accidents of fate and time, and about how we try to make peace with whom we become in the face of circumstances beyond our control.

[I Curse the River of Time](#) by Per Petterson

Author of *Out Stealing Horses*, Petterson returns with the tale of nearly 40 Arvid Jansen. It's 1989, the Wall is tumbling down, and so is Arvid's life -- he's divorcing, and his mother has been diagnosed with cancer.

[Every Last One](#) by Anna Quindlen

A moving, suspenseful, and surprising new novel by the bestselling author of *Rise and Shine*, *Blessings*, and *Black and Blue*, *Every Last One* follows a suburban family and the disastrous, unintended consequences of what seem like small, casual actions.

[The Imperfectionists](#) by Tom Rachman

Set against the gorgeous backdrop of Rome, Tom Rachman's debut follows the topsy-turvy private lives of the reporters, editors, and executives of an international English language newspaper as they struggle to keep it -- and themselves--afloat. Fifty years and many changes have ensued since the paper was founded by an enigmatic millionaire, and now, amid the stained carpeting and dingy office furniture, the staff's personal dramas seem far more important than the daily headlines. Kathleen, the imperious editor in chief, is smarting from a betrayal in her open marriage; Arthur, the lazy obituary writer, is transformed by a personal tragedy; Abby, the embattled financial officer, discovers that her job cuts and her love life are intertwined in a most unexpected way. Out in the field, a veteran Paris freelancer goes to desperate lengths for his next byline, while the new Cairo stringer is mercilessly manipulated by an outrageous war correspondent with an outsize ego. And in the shadows is the isolated young publisher who pays more attention to his prized basset hound, Schopenhauer, than to the fate of his family's quirky newspaper. As the era of print news gives way to the Internet age and this imperfect crew stumbles toward an uncertain future, the paper's rich history is revealed, including the surprising truth about its founder's intentions

[Elliot Allagash](#) by Simon Rich

An unlikely friendship develops when the arrogant heir of America's largest fortune takes up a challenging (and expensive) new hobby: transforming chunk style eighth-grader Seymour into the most popular boy in school.

[*The Three Weissmanns of Westport*](#) by Cathleen Schine

Jane Austen's beloved *Sense and Sensibility* has moved to Westport, Connecticut, in this enchanting modern-day homage to the classic novel. When Joseph Weissmann divorced his wife, he was seventy-eight years old and she was seventy-five . . . He said the words "Irreconcilable differences," and saw real confusion in his wife's eyes. "Irreconcilable differences?" she said. "Of course there are irreconcilable differences. What on earth does that have to do with divorce?" Thus begins *The Three Weissmanns of Westport*, a contemporary adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*. In Schine's story, sisters Miranda, an impulsive but successful literary agent, and Annie, a pragmatic library director, quite unexpectedly find themselves the middle-aged products of a broken home. Dumped by her husband of nearly fifty years and then exiled from their elegant New York apartment by his mistress, Betty is forced to move to a small, run-down Westport, Connecticut, beach cottage. Joining her are Miranda and Annie, who dutifully comes along to keep an eye on her capricious mother and sister. As the sisters mingle with the suburban aristocracy, love starts to blossom for both of them, and they find themselves struggling with the dueling demands of reason and romance.

[*A Small Death in the Great Glen*](#) by A.D. Scott

In the Highlands of 1950s Scotland, a boy is found dead in a canal lock. Two members of the local newspaper staff set out to investigate the crime. Together, these very different Scots harbor deep and troubling secrets underneath their polished and respectable veneers.

[*Still Missing*](#) by Chevy Stevens

On the day she was abducted, Annie O'Sullivan, a thirty-two year old realtor, had three goals—sell a house, forget about a recent argument with her mother, and be on time for dinner with her ever-patient boyfriend. The open house is slow, but when her last visitor pulls up in a van as she's about to leave, Annie thinks it just might be her lucky day after all. Interwoven with the story of the year Annie spent as the captive of psychopath in a remote mountain cabin, which unfolds through sessions with her psychiatrist, is a second narrative recounting events following her escape—her struggle to piece her shattered life back together and the ongoing police investigation into the identity of her captor. The truth doesn't always set you free.

[*The Tower, the Zoo, and the Tortoise*](#) by Julia Stuart

Balthazar Jones has lived in the Tower of London with his loving wife, Hebe, and his 120-year-old pet tortoise for the past eight years. That's right, he is a Beefeater (they really do live there). It's no easy job living and working in the tourist attraction in present-day London. Among the eccentric characters who call the Tower's maze of ancient buildings and spiral staircases home are the Tower's Rack & Ruin barmaid, Ruby Dore, who just found out she's pregnant; portly Valerie Jennings, who is falling for ticket inspector Arthur Catnip; the lifelong bachelor Reverend Septimus Drew, who secretly pens a series of principled erotica; and the philandering Ravenmaster, aiming to avenge the death of one of his insufferable ravens. When Balthazar is tasked with setting up an elaborate menagerie within the Tower walls to house the many exotic animals gifted to the Queen, life at the Tower gets all the more interesting. Penguins escape, giraffes are stolen, and the Komodo dragon sends innocent people running for their lives. Balthazar is in charge and things are not exactly running smoothly.

Non-Fiction

[*The Poisoner's Handbook: Murder and the Birth of Forensic Medicine in Jazz Age New York*](#) by Deborah Blum

In the early 20th century, Dr. Charles Norris and Alexander Gettler, medical examiner and toxicologist, respectively, in New York City, had to devise their own methods to uncover cause of death in the city's dead. Blum focuses on various poisons, their effects on the body, and murder cases that were solved by the skills of Norris and Gettler.

[*At Home: A Short History of Private Life*](#) by Bill Bryson

Bill Bryson and his family live in a Victorian parsonage in a part of England where nothing of any great significance has happened since the Romans decamped. Yet one day, he began to consider how very little he knew about the ordinary things of life as he found it in that comfortable home. To remedy this, he formed the idea of journeying about his house from room to room "to write a history of the world without leaving home." The bathroom provides the occasion for a history of hygiene; the bedroom, sex, death, and sleep; the kitchen, nutrition and the spice trade; and so on, as Bryson shows how each has figured in the evolution of private life. Whatever happens in the world, he demonstrates, ends up in our house, in the paint and the pipes and the pillows and every item of furniture.

[*The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*](#) by Nicholas Carr

Drawing on neuroscience and computer science, Carr supports the argument that digital technology is reversing the "deepening of thought" that the printed word launched, and Kubrick's vision that humans and computers are switching roles.

[*The Family Dinner: Great Ways to Connect with Your Kids, One Meal at a Time*](#) by Laurie David

The new mission of the producer of "An Inconvenient Truth" is to help America's overwhelmed families sit down to a family dinner. David provides all the reasons, recipes, and fun tools to do so.

[*Delivering Happiness: A Path to Profits, Passion, and Purpose*](#) by Tony Hsieh

Hsieh, CEO of the online retailer Zappos.com, discusses Zappos' rise to profitability and its unique company culture that has been an integral part of its success. This is a great read whether you know anything about business or not. Zappos' core values can be applied to life in general and not just management.

[*Every Day in Tuscany: Seasons of an Italian Life*](#) by Frances Mayes

In this sequel to her bestsellers *Under the Tuscan Sun* and *Bella Tuscany*, Mayes lyrically chronicles her continuing, two decades-long love affair with Tuscany's people, art, cuisine, and lifestyle.

[*Crisis Economics: A Crash Course in the Future of Finance*](#) by Nouriel Roubini

This myth-shattering book reveals the methods Roubini used to foretell the current crisis before other economists saw it coming and shows how those methods can help us make sense of the present and prepare for the future. Bringing lessons of earlier episodes to bear on our present predicament, Roubini shows how we can recognize and grapple with the inherent instability of the global financial system, understand its pressure points, learn from previous episodes of "irrational exuberance," pinpoint the course of global contagion, and plan for our immediate future.

[*The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*](#) by Rebecca Skloot

Henrietta Lacks died in 1951, but not before a sample of her cancer cells was taken. Since then her cells have been part of scientific discoveries including gene mapping and the development of the polio vaccine. Skloot's book details how the taking of Henrietta's cells affected the scientific community and her family who was unaware that the cells were taken.

[*The Kids Are All Right: A Memoir*](#) by Diana Welch

An exceptional and eloquent story of courage, survival, and unconditional love, *The Kids Are All Right* celebrates with openness, candor, and humor the fierce power of sibling love.

[*The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of the Great Migration*](#) by Isabel Wilkerson

In this epic, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Wilkerson chronicles one of the great untold stories of American history: the decades-long migration of black citizens who fled the South for northern and western cities, in search of a better life. From 1915 to 1970, this exodus of almost six million people changed the face of America. Wilkerson compares this epic migration to the migrations of other peoples in history. She interviewed more than a thousand people, and gained access to new data and official records, to write this definitive and vividly dramatic account of how these American journeys unfolded, altering our cities, our country, and ourselves.

[*97 Orchard: An Edible History of Five Immigrant Families and One New York Tenement*](#) by Jane Ziegelman

This delicious saga of how immigrant food became American food follows European immigrants on a remarkable journey from the Ellis Island dining hall to tiny tenement kitchens, from Lower East Side pushcart markets and delicatessens out into the wider world of American cuisine.