

January 2025 Book Recommendations

1. **American By Day: A Novel** by Derek B. Miller

A gripping and timely novel that follows Sigrid—the dry-witted detective from Derek B. Miller’s best-selling debut *Norwegian by Night*—from Oslo to the United States on a quest to find her missing brother. She knew it was a weird place. She’d heard the stories, seen the movies, read the books. But now police Chief Inspector Sigrid Ødegård has to leave her native Norway and actually go there; to that land across the Atlantic where her missing brother is implicated in the mysterious death of a prominent African American academic—America. Sigrid is plunged into a United States where race and identity, politics and promise, reverberate in every aspect of daily life. Working with—or, if necessary, against—the police, she must negotiate the local political minefields and navigate the backwoods of the Adirondacks to uncover the truth before events escalate further.

2. **Akin** by Emma Donoghue

Noah Selvaggio is a retired chemistry professor and widower living on the Upper West Side, but born in the South of France. He is days away from his first visit back to Nice since he was a child, bringing with him a handful of puzzling photos he's discovered from his mother's wartime years. But he receives a call from social services: Noah is the closest available relative of an eleven-year-old great-nephew he's never met, who urgently needs someone to look after him. Out of a feeling of obligation, Noah agrees to take Michael along on his trip. Much has changed in this famously charming seaside mecca, still haunted by memories of the Nazi occupation. The unlikely duo, suffering from jet lag and culture shock, bicker about everything from steak frites to screen time. But Noah gradually comes to appreciate the boy's truculent wit, and Michael's ease with tech and sharp eye help Noah unearth troubling details about their family's past. Both come to grasp the risks people in all eras have run for their loved ones, and find they are more akin than they knew. Written with all the tenderness and psychological intensity that made *Room* an international bestseller, *Akin* is a funny, heart-wrenching tale of an old man and a boy, born two generations apart, who unpick their painful story and start to write a new one together.

3. **The House on Tradd Street** by Karen White, 329 pages

Practical Melanie Middleton hates to admit she can see ghosts. But she's going to have to accept it. An old man she recently met has died, leaving her his historic Tradd Street home, complete with housekeeper, dog, and a family of ghosts anxious to tell her their secrets. Enter Jack Trenholm, a gorgeous writer obsessed with unsolved mysteries. He has reason to believe that diamonds from the Confederate Treasury are hidden in the house. So he turns the charm on with Melanie, only to discover he's the smitten one... It turns out Jack's search has caught the attention of a malevolent ghost. Now, Jack and Melanie must unravel a mystery of passion, heartbreak, and even murder.

4. **The CrazyLadies of Pearl Street** Trevanian, 384 pages

Six-year-old Jean-Luc LaPointe, his little sister, and his spirited but vulnerable young mother have been abandoned--again--by his father, a charming con artist. With no money and nowhere else to go, the LaPointes create a fragile nest in a tenement building at 238 North Pearl Street in Albany, New York. For the next eight years, through the Great Depression and Second World War, they live in the heart of the Irish slum, surrounded by ward heelers, unemployment, and grinding poverty. Pearl Street is also home to a variety of "crazyLadies" Miss Cox, the feared and ridiculed teacher who ignites Jean-Luc's imagination; Mrs. Kane, who runs a beauty parlor/fortune-telling salon in the back of her husband's grocery store; Mrs. Meehan, the desperate, harried matriarch of a thuggish family across the street; lonely Mrs. McGivney, who spends every day tending to her catatonic husband, a veteran of the Great War; and Jean-Luc's own unconventional, vivacious mother. Colorful though it is, Jean-Luc never stops dreaming of a way out of the slum, and his mother's impossible expectations are both his driving force and his burden. As legendary writer Trevanian lovingly re-creates the neighborhood of his youth in this funny, deeply moving coming-of-age novel, he also paints a vivid portrait of a neighborhood, a city, a nation in turmoil, and the people waiting for a better life to begin. It's a heartfelt and

unforgettable look back at one child's life in the 1930s and '40s, a story that will be remembered long after the last page is turned.

5. Frozen River by Ariel Lawhon. 448 pages

Maine, 1789: When the Kennebec River freezes, entombing a man in the ice, Martha Ballard is summoned to examine the body and determine cause of death. As a midwife and healer, she is privy to much of what goes on behind closed doors in Hallowell. Her diary is a record of every birth and death, crime and debacle that unfolds in the close-knit community. Months earlier, Martha documented the details of an alleged rape committed by two of the town's most respected gentlemen—one of whom has now been found dead in the ice. But when a local physician undermines her conclusion, declaring the death to be an accident, Martha is forced to investigate the shocking murder on her own.

Over the course of one winter, as the trial nears, and whispers and prejudices mount, Martha doggedly pursues the truth. Her diary soon lands at the center of the scandal, implicating those she loves, and compelling Martha to decide where her own loyalties lie.

Clever, layered, and subversive, Ariel Lawhon's newest offering introduces an unsung heroine who refused to accept anything less than justice at a time when women were considered best seen and not heard. *The Frozen River* is a thrilling, tense, and tender story about a remarkable woman who left an unparalleled legacy yet remains nearly forgotten to this day.

6. The Lost Bookshop -Eve Woods. 448 pages

On a quiet street in Dublin, a lost bookshop is waiting to be found...

For too long, Opaline, Martha and Henry have been the side characters in their own lives.

But when a vanishing bookshop casts its spell, these three unsuspecting strangers will discover that their own stories are every bit as extraordinary as the ones found in the pages of their beloved books. And by unlocking the secrets of the shelves, they find themselves transported to a world of wonder... where nothing is as it seems.

7. The Things We Leave Unfinished - Rebecca Yarros. 400 pages

Twenty-eight-year-old Georgia Stanton has to start over after she gave up almost everything in a brutal divorce—the New York house, the friends, and her pride. Now back home at her late great-grandmother's estate in Colorado, she finds herself face-to-face with Noah Harrison, the bestselling author of a million books where the cover is always people nearly kissing. He's just as arrogant in person as in interviews, and she'll be damned if the good-looking writer of *love stories* thinks he's the one to finish her grandmother's final novel...even if the publisher swears he's the perfect fit.

Noah is at the pinnacle of his career. With book and movie deals galore, there isn't much the "golden boy" of modern fiction hasn't accomplished. But he can't walk away from what might be the best book of the century—the one his idol, Scarlett Stanton, left unfinished. Coming up with a fitting ending for the legendary author is one thing, but dealing with her beautiful, stubborn, cynical great-granddaughter, Georgia, is quite another.

But as they read Scarlett's words in both the manuscript and her box of letters, they start to realize why Scarlett never finished the book—it's based on her real-life romance with a World War II pilot, and the ending isn't a happy one. Georgia knows all too well that love never works out, and while the chemistry and connection between her and Noah is undeniable, she's as determined as ever to learn from her great-grandmother's mistakes—even if it means destroying Noah's career.

8. James by Percival Everett. 320 pages

When the enslaved Jim overhears that he is about to be sold to a man in New Orleans, separated from his wife and daughter forever, he decides to hide on nearby Jackson Island until he can formulate a plan. Meanwhile, Huck Finn has faked his own death to escape his violent father, recently returned to town. As all readers of American literature know, thus begins the dangerous and transcendent journey by raft down the Mississippi River toward the elusive and too-often-unreliable promise of the Free States and beyond.

While many narrative set pieces of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* remain in place (floods and storms, stumbling across both unexpected death and unexpected treasure in the myriad stopping points along the river's banks, encountering the scam artists posing as the Duke and Dauphin...), Jim's agency, intelligence and compassion are shown in a radically new light.

Brimming with the electrifying humor and lacerating observations that have made Everett a "literary icon" (*Oprah Daily*), and one of the most decorated writers of our lifetime, *James* is destined to be a cornerstone of twenty-first century American literature..

9. The Price of Bread and Shoes: A Novel by Lonormi Manuel 367 pages

When nineteen-year-old Alafair Sizemore Slone journeys to Chemame Creek, West Virginia to join her husband, Travis, in the coal camp where he's working, she carries with her a history of loss and the hope of a secure future. She knows that making a home in a coal camp will be difficult and different from life on her family's farm in Washington County, Virginia; but she's certain that she and Travis are equal to any challenge that will come their way.

Travis, however, has changed during the four weeks they've been apart. He goes out after supper and stays out late. He no longer talks about buying a small farm of their own, preferring to spend money as quickly as he earns it. When a mine accident leaves Travis injured with no income and no savings, Alafair is coerced into a decision that will affect her life, her marriage, and the lives of other women in Chemame Creek forever.

Based upon oral histories from women who lived in West Virginia's coal camps during the 1920s and their descendants, *The Price of Bread and Shoes* examines a controversial piece of West Virginia history through the lens of fiction.

10. The Goddess of Warsaw by Lisa Barr. 368 pages

The Goddess of Warsaw is an enthralling tale of a legendary Hollywood screen goddess with a dark secret about her life in the Warsaw Ghetto. When the famous actress is threatened by someone from her past, she must put her skills into play to protect herself, her illustrious career, and those she loves, then and now.

Los Angeles, 2005. Sienna Hayes, Hollywood's latest It Girl, has ambitions to work behind the camera. When she meets Lena Browning, the enormously mysterious and famous Golden Age movie star, Sienna sees her big break. She wants to direct a picture about Lena's life—but the legendary actor's murky past turns out to be even darker than Sienna dreamed. Before she was a Living Legend, Lena Browning was Bina Blonski, a Polish Jew whose life and family were destroyed by the Nazis.

Warsaw, 1943. A member of the city's Jewish elite, Bina Blonski and her husband, Jakub, are imprisoned in the ghastly, cramped ghetto along with the rest of Warsaw's surviving Jews. Determined to fight back against the brutal Nazis, the beautiful, blonde Aryan-looking Bina becomes a spy, gaining information and stealing weapons outside the ghetto to protect her fellow Jews. But her dangerous circumstances grow complicated when she falls in love with Aleksander, an ally in resistance—and Jakub's brother. While Lena accomplishes amazing feats of bravery, she sacrifices much in the process.

Over a decade after escaping the horrors of the ghetto, Bina, now known as Lena, rises to fame in Hollywood. Yet she cannot help but be reminded of her old life and hungers for revenge against the Nazis who escaped justice after the war. Her power and fame as a movie star offer Lena the chance to right the past's wrongs . . . and perhaps even find the happy ending she never had.

11. The Heaven and Earth Grocery Store by James McBride

In 1972, when workers in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, were digging the foundations for a new housing development, the last thing they expected to uncover was a human skeleton. Who the skeleton was and how it got buried there were just two of the long-held secrets that had been kept for decades by the residents of Chicken Hill, the dilapidated neighborhood where immigrant Jews and African Americans lived side by side, sharing ambitions and sorrows.

Chicken Hill was where Moshe and Chona Ludlow lived when Chona ran the Heaven & Earth Grocery Store, which served the neighborhood's quirky collection of blacks and European immigrants, helped by her husband, Moshe, a Romanian-born theater owner who integrated the town's first dance hall. When the state came looking for a deaf black child, claiming that the boy needed to be institutionalized, Chicken Hill's residents—roused by Chona's kindness and the courage of a local black worker named Nate Timblin—banded together to keep the boy safe.

As the novel unfolds, it becomes clear how much the people of Chicken Hill have to struggle to survive at the margins of white Christian America and how damaging bigotry, hypocrisy, and deceit can be to a community. When the truth is revealed about the skeleton, the boy, and the part the town's establishment played in both, McBride shows that it is love and community—heaven and earth—that ultimately sustain us.

12. Still Life by Sarah Winman

Tuscany, 1944: As Allied troops advance and bombs fall around deserted villages, a young English soldier, Ulysses Temper, finds himself in the wine cellar of a deserted villa. There, he has a chance encounter with Evelyn Skinner, a middle-aged art historian who has come to Italy to salvage paintings from the ruins and recall long-forgotten memories of her own youth. In each other, Ulysses and Evelyn find a kindred spirit amongst the rubble of war-torn Italy, and set off on a course of events that will shape Ulysses's life for the next four decades.

As Ulysses returns home to London, reimmersing himself in his crew at The Stoat and Parrot -- a motley mix of pub crawlers and eccentrics -- he carries his time in Italy with him. And when an unexpected inheritance brings him back to where it all began, Ulysses knows better than to tempt fate, and returns to the Tuscan hills.

With beautiful prose, extraordinary tenderness, and bursts of humor and light, *Still Life* is a sweeping portrait of unforgettable individuals who come together to make a family, and a richly drawn celebration of beauty and love in all its forms.