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## An Unnecessary Woman Rabih Alameddine

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*The Wrong End of the Telescope* Simon and Schuster

'In this delightful novel, Alameddine takes his greatest risks yet, and succeeds brilliantly, in a work that while marked by radical formal innovation, manages to be warm, sad, funny and moving' Michael Chabon Named by her grandfather after 'the Divine' Sarah Bernhardt, Sarah Nour El-Din grows up in Beirut against the tense background of civil war. But the young Sarah finds pleasure in the everyday - her first cigarette, first kiss, seeking revenge on her tight-lipped stepmother. Then, with adulthood, comes an awareness of the fragility of life. After two failed marriages, the loss of her son, the death of one sister and the imprisonment of another, Sarah begins to tell her story. But this story is not so easy to tell. A novel written entirely in first chapters, I, THE DIVINE is an

honest and touching story of one woman's struggle to come to terms with her past.

Your Face Tomorrow Europa Editions UK  
A provocative first collection of stories by the author of Koolhaas Following the publication of his critically acclaimed first novel, Koolhaas, Rabih Alameddine offers a collection of stories that explores the experience of a number of Lebanese characters - men and women, gay and straight--whose lives have been blown apart by a disastrous civil war and the resulting international diaspora. Daring in style as well as content, these tales explore the relationships that anchor our hearts to the world -- father and son, grandson and grandmother, pedophile and 12-year-old boy, young man and woman of the streets, sister and sister, daughter and father, gay man and heterosexual, the quick and their dead. Suffused by a yearning for what has been lost, these narratives are both experimental and traditional, humorous and disturbing, and confirm without doubt that Alameddine is one of the most original and accomplished young writers to emerge in some time.

Stork Mountain Open Road + Grove/Atlantic  
Stork Mountain tells the story of a young Bulgarian immigrant who, in an attempt to escape his mediocre life in America, returns to the country of his birth. Retracing the steps of his estranged grandfather, a man who suddenly and inexplicably cut all contact with the family three years prior, the boy finds himself on the border of Bulgaria and Turkey, a stone's throw

away from Greece, high up in the Strandja Mountains. It is a place of pagan mysteries and black storks nesting in giant oaks; a place where every spring, possessed by Christian saints, men and women dance barefoot across live coals in search of rebirth. Here in the mountains, the boy reunites with his grandfather. Here in the mountain, he falls in love with an unobtainable Muslim girl. Old ghosts come back to life and forgotten conflicts, in the name of faith and doctrine, blaze anew. *Stork Mountain* is an enormously charming, slyly brilliant debut novel from an internationally celebrated writer. It is a novel that will undoubtedly find a home in many readers' hearts.

**The Perv** HMH  
 A New York Times Notable Book for 2011 A Boston Globe Best Fiction Book of 2011 The great panoramic social novel that Los Angeles deserves—a twenty-first century, West Coast Bonfire of the Vanities by the only writer qualified to capture the city in all its glory and complexity With *The Barbarian Nurseries*, Héctor Tobar gives our most misunderstood metropolis its great contemporary novel, taking us beyond the glimmer of Hollywood and deeper than camera-ready crime stories to reveal Southern California life as it really is, across its vast, sunshiny sprawl of classes, languages, dreams, and ambitions. Araceli is the live-in maid in the Torres-Thompson household—one of three Mexican employees in a Spanish-style house with lovely views of the Pacific. She has been responsible strictly for the cooking and cleaning, but the recession has hit, and suddenly Araceli is the last Mexican standing—unless you count Scott Torres, though you'd never suspect he was half Mexican but for his last name and an old family photo with central L.A. in the background. The financial pressure is causing the kind of fights that even Araceli knows the children shouldn't hear, and then one morning, after a particularly dramatic fight, Araceli wakes to an empty house—except for the two Torres-Thompson boys, little aliens she's never had to interact with before. Their parents are unreachable, and the only family member she knows of is Señor Torres, the subject of that old family photo. So she does the only thing she can think of and heads to the bus stop to seek out their grandfather. It will be an adventure, she tells the boys. If she only knew . . . With a precise eye for the telling detail and an unerring way with character, soaring brilliantly and seamlessly among a panorama of viewpoints, Tobar calls on all of his experience—as a novelist, a father, a journalist, a son of Guatemalan immigrants, and a native Angeleno—to deliver a novel as broad, as essential, as alive as the city itself.

*A Heart So White* Corsair  
 "Daring, dazzling . . . A tough, funny, heart-breaking book" by the National Book Award-nominated author of *An Unnecessary Woman* (The Seattle Times). Detailing the impact of the AIDS epidemic in America and the Lebanese civil war in Beirut on a circle of friends and their families during the 1980s and 1990s, this "absolutely brilliant" novel mines the chaos of contemporary experience, telling the stories of characters who can no longer love or think except in fragments (Amy Tan). Clips and quips, vignettes and hallucinations, tragic news reports and hilarious short plays, conversations with both the quick and the dead, all shine their combined lights to reveal the way we experience life today in the debut novel of the author Michael

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Chabon calls "one of our most daring writers." "A provocative, emotionally searing series of connected vignettes . . . For a nonlinear novel the images chosen retain a remarkable cohesion. Often sexually frank or jarringly violent, they merge into a graphic portrait of two cultures torn from the inside." -Publishers Weekly

"[A] refreshing statement of honesty and endurance . . . Funny, brave, full of heart and willing to say things about war and disease, sexual and cultural politics that have rarely been said so boldly or directly before." -The Oregonian

"Rabih Alameddine is one rare writer who not only breaks our hearts but gives every broken piece a new life." -Yiyun Li

### **The Hakawati** Farrar, Straus and Giroux

In *The Cinnamon Shops* and *Other Stories*, Bruno Schulz describes in fantastical, mythologised terms the cloth merchant's shop where he grew up and the bizarre antics of his father, such as turning the attic into an aviary and expounding strange theories on mannequins. Two sides of the Galician town of Drohobycz are seen: the old town full of ancient mystery is contrasted with newer districts that have sprung up in response to oil mining in the area. The language is poetic, heady and oneiric, employing a rich system of imagery incorporating books and labyrinths.

### **I Love You but I've Chosen**

### **Darkness** Picador

Osama al-Kharrat left Lebanon at 16 to escape the civil war. He returns after some years, much changed, to find his father bedridden and his family, friends and enemies gathered close, gossiping, making peace, and above all telling stories. Hakawati means storyteller, and Osama's grandfather was one of the best. From Uncle Jihad to the family doctor Tin Can, each member of Osama's circle is joined in a vigil that crosses continents, spans centuries, celebrates love, recounts war, and creates an epic picture of the region: one that is both mythic and painfully real. "Listen. Let me take you on a journey beyond imagining. Let me tell you a story..."

### Up High in the Trees Ballantine Books

Award-winning novelist and poet Gayle Brandeis's wrenching memoir of her complicated family history and her mother's suicide. Gayle Brandeis's mother disappeared just after Gayle gave birth to her youngest child. Several days later, her body was found: she had hanged herself in the utility closet of a Pasadena parking garage. In this searing, formally inventive memoir, Gayle describes the dissonance between being a new mother, a sweet-smelling infant at her chest, and a grieving daughter trying to piece together what happened, who her mother was, and all she had and hadn't understood about her. Around the time of her suicide, Gayle's mother had been working on a documentary about the rare illnesses she thought ravaged her family: porphyria and Ehlers-Danlos syndrome. In *The Art of Misdiagnosis*, taking its title

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from her mother's documentary, Gayle braids together her own narration of the charged weeks surrounding her mother's suicide, transcripts of her mother's documentary, research into delusional and factitious disorders, and Gayle's own experience with misdiagnosis and illness (both fabricated and real). Slowly and expertly, *The Art of Misdiagnosis* peels back the complicated layers of deception and complicity, of physical and mental illness in Gayle's family, to show how she and her mother had misdiagnosed one another. Gayle's memoir is both a compelling search into the mystery of one's own family and a life-affirming story of the relief discovered through breaking familial and personal silences. Written by a gifted stylist, *The Art of Misdiagnosis* delves into the tangled mysteries of disease, mental illness, and suicide and comes out the other side with grace.

*An Unnecessary Woman* New Directions Publishing

"A richly imagined novel about a half-Russian, half-Sudanese professor whose studies of a 19th-century Muslim leader become a portal into his world." —Travel + Leisure It's 2010 and

Natasha, a half-Russian, half-Sudanese professor of Islamic studies, is researching the life of Imam Shamil, the nineteenth-century Muslim leader who led the anti-Russian resistance in the Caucasian War. When shy, single Natasha discovers that

her star student, Oz, is not only descended from the warrior but also possesses Shamil's priceless sword, the Imam's story comes vividly to life. As Natasha's relationship with Oz and his alluring actress mother intensifies, Natasha is forced to confront issues she had long tried to avoid—that of her Muslim heritage. When Oz is suddenly arrested at his home one morning, Natasha realizes that everything she values stands in jeopardy. Told with Aboulela's inimitable elegance and narrated from the point of view of both Natasha and the historical characters she is researching, *The Kindness of Enemies* is both an engrossing story of a provocative period in history and an important examination of what it is to be a Muslim in a post 9/11 world. "A versatile prose stylist . . . [Aboulela is] a voice for multiculturalism."

—The New York Times

### **The Barbarian Nurseries**

Penguin

??WINNER OF THE IMPAC DUBLIN AWARD • Widely considered a masterpiece, a breathtaking novel about family secrets that chronicles the relentless power of the past—from the award-winning author of *The Infatuations* and "Spain's best writer"

(Roberto Bolaño, national bestselling author of *The Savage Detectives*). Juan knows little of the interior life of his father Ranz; but when Juan marries, he begins to consider the past anew, and begins to ponder what he doesn't really want to know. Secrecy—its possible convenience, its price, and even its civility—hovers throughout the novel. *A Heart So White* becomes a sort of anti-detective story of human nature. Intrigue; the sins of the father; the fraudulent and the genuine; marriage and strange repetitions of violence: Mariás elegantly sends shafts of inquisitory light into shadows and onto the costs of ambivalence.

The Old Woman and the River  
Picador

After the ceasefire in 1988, the devastation to the landscape of Iraq wrought by the longest war of the twentieth century—the Iran-Iraq War—becomes visible. Eight years of fighting have turned nature upside down, with vast wastelands being left behind. In southeastern Iraq, along the shores of the Shatt al-Arab River, the groves of date palm trees have withered. No longer bearing fruit, their leaves have turned a bright yellow. There, Iraqi forces had blocked the entry points of the river's tributaries and streams, preventing water from flowing to the trees and vegetation. Yet, surveying this destruction from the sky, a strip of land bursting

with green can be seen. Beginning from the Shatt al-Arab River and reaching to the fringes of the western desert, several kilometers wide, it appears as a lush oasis of some kind. The secret of this fertility, sustaining villages and remaining soldiers, is unclear. But it is said that one old woman is responsible for this lifeline.

*All My Puny Sorrows* Createspace Independent Publishing Platform  
NAMED A BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR  
BY THE WASHINGTON POST, VOGUE,  
ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY, NPR,  
ESQUIRE, AND KIRKUS "There's

some kind of genius sorcery in this novel. It's startlingly original, hilarious and harrowing by turns, finally transcendent. Watkins writes like an avenging angel. It's thrilling and terrifying to stand in her wake." —Jenny Offill, author of *Dept. of Speculation* and *Weather* A darkly funny, soul-rending novel of love in an epoch of collapse—one woman's furious revisiting of family, marriage, work, sex, and motherhood. Since my baby was born, I have been able to laugh and see the funny side of things. a) As much as I ever did. b) Not quite as much now. c) Not so much now. d) Not at all.

Leaving behind her husband and their baby daughter, a writer gets on a flight for a speaking engagement in Reno, not carrying much besides a breast pump and a spiraling case of postpartum depression. Her temporary escape from domestic duties and an opportunity to

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reconnect with old friends mutates into an extended romp away from the confines of marriage and motherhood, and a seemingly bottomless descent into the past. Deep in the Mojave Desert where she grew up, she meets her ghosts at every turn: the first love whose self-destruction still haunts her; her father, a member of the most famous cult in American history; her mother, whose native spark gutters with every passing year. She can't go back in time to make any of it right, but what exactly is her way forward? Alone in the wilderness, at last she begins to make herself at home in the world. Bold, tender, and often hilarious, *I Love You but I've Chosen Darkness* reaffirms Watkins as one of the signal writers of our time.

**Letters to Montgomery Clift**

Vintage

Austerlitz, the internationally acclaimed masterpiece by "one of the most gripping writers imaginable" (*The New York Review of Books*), is the story of a man's search for the answer to his life's central riddle. A small child when he comes to England on a Kindertransport in the summer of 1939, one Jacques Austerlitz is told nothing of his real family by the Welsh Methodist minister and his wife who raise him. When he is a much older man, fleeting memories return to him, and

obeying an instinct he only dimly understands, he follows their trail back to the world he left behind a half century before. There, faced with the void at the heart of twentieth-century Europe, he struggles to rescue his heritage from oblivion.

**The Art of Misdiagnosis**

Grove/Atlantic, Inc.

During WWII, a teenage boy finds his voice, the courage of his convictions, and friends for life in an emotional and uplifting novel by the New York Times and #1 Amazon Charts bestselling author. 1941. Steven Katz is the son of prosperous landowners in rural California. Although his parents don't approve, he's found true friends in Nick, Suki, and Ollie, sons of field workers. The group is inseparable. But Steven is in turmoil. He's beginning to acknowledge that his feelings for Nick amount to more than friendship. When the bombing of Pearl Harbor draws the US into World War II, Suki and his family are forced to leave their home for the internment camp at Manzanar. Ollie enlists in the army and ships out. And Nick must flee. Betrayed by his own father and accused of a crime he didn't commit, he turns to Steven for help. Hiding Nick in a root cellar on his family's farm, Steven acts as Nick's protector and lifeline to the outside world. As the war escalates, bonds

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deepen and the fear of being different falls away. But after Nick unexpectedly disappears one day, Steven's life focus is to find him. On the way, Steven finds a place he belongs and a lesson about love that will last him his lifetime.

*Blogging My Religion* Pan Macmillan

A gay poet is haunted by war and the AIDs crisis in this "sprawling fever dream of a novel" by the Dos Passos Prize-winning author of *An Unnecessary Woman* (NPR.org). Set over the course of one night in the waiting room of a psych clinic, *The Angel of History* follows Yemeni-born poet Jacob as he revisits the events of his life. His memories take him from his maternal upbringing in an Egyptian whorehouse to his adolescence under the aegis of his wealthy father and his life as a gay Arab man in San Francisco at the height of AIDS. Haunted by an alluring, sassy Satan, who taunts Jacob to remember his painful past, and by dour, frigid Death, who urges him to forget and give up on life, Jacob is also attended to by fourteen saints. With Jacob recalling his life in Cairo, Beirut, Sana'a, Stockholm, and San Francisco, Alameddine gives us a charged philosophical portrayal of a brilliant mind in crisis. This is a profound story that "marks the triumph of memory over oblivion" (Bookforum).

Cruddy Farrar, Straus and Giroux

An obsessive introvert in Beirut, eschewed by her family and neighbors for her divorced status and lack of religious reverence, quietly

translates favorite books into Arabic while struggling with her aging body until an unthinkable disaster threatens what little life remains to her. By the best-selling author of *The Hakawati*. 20,000 first printing.

*The Woman Next Door* Modern Library

In 1943, Lebanon gained its formal political independence from France; only after two more decades did the country finally establish a national central bank. Inaugurated on April 1, 1964, the Banque du Liban (BDL) was billed by Lebanese authorities as the nation's primary symbol of economic sovereignty and as the last step towards full independence. In the local press, it was described as a means of projecting state power and enhancing national pride. Yet the history of its founding—stretching from its Ottoman origins in mid-nineteenth century up until the mid-twentieth—tells a different, more complex story. Banking on the State reveals how the financial foundations of Lebanon were shaped by the history of the standardization of economic practices and financial regimes within the decolonizing world. The system of central banking that emerged was the product of a complex interaction of war, economic policies, international financial regimes, post-colonial state-building, global currents of technocratic knowledge, and private business interests. It served rather than challenged the interests of an oligarchy of local bankers. As Hicham Safieddine shows, the set of arrangements that governed the central bank

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thus was dictated by dynamics of political power and financial profit more than market forces, national interest or economic sovereignty.

The Cinnamon Shops and Other

Stories Bloomsbury Publishing USA

An American woman determined to learn the Arabic language travels to the Middle East to pursue her dream in this "witty memoir" (Us Weekly). The shadda is the key difference between a pigeon (hamam) and a bathroom (hammam). Be careful, our professor advised, that you don't ask a waiter, 'Excuse me, where is the pigeon?'—or, conversely, order a roasted toilet . . . If you've ever studied a foreign language, you know what happens when you first truly and clearly communicate with another person. As Zora O'Neill recalls, you feel like a magician. If that foreign language is Arabic, you just might feel like a wizard. They say that Arabic takes seven years to learn and a lifetime to master. O'Neill had put in her time. Steeped in grammar tomes and outdated textbooks, she faced an increasing certainty that she was not only failing to master Arabic, but also driving herself crazy. She took a decade-long hiatus, but couldn't shake her fascination with the language or the cultures it had opened up to her. So she decided to jump back in—this time with a new approach. In this book, she takes us along on her grand tour through the Middle East, from Egypt to the United Arab Emirates to Lebanon and Morocco. She's packed her dictionaries, her unsinkable sense of humor, and her talent for making fast friends of strangers. From quiet,

bougainvillea-lined streets to the lively buzz of crowded medinas, from families' homes to local hotspots, she brings a part of the world thousands of miles away right to your door—and reminds us that learning another tongue leaves you rich with so much more than words. "You will travel through countries and across centuries, meeting professors and poets, revolutionaries, nomads, and nerds . . . [A] warm and hilarious book." —Annia Ciezadlo, author of *Day of Honey* "Her tale of her 'Year of Speaking Arabic Badly' is a genial and revealing pleasure." —The Seattle Times

The Last Watchman of Old

Cairo Simon and Schuster

An NPR Best Book of the Year Winner of the 2017 Prix Goncourt, this behind-the-scenes account of the manipulation, hubris, and greed that together led to Nazi Germany's annexation of Austria brilliantly dismantles the myth of an effortless victory and offers a dire warning for our current political crisis. February 20, 1933, an unremarkable day during a harsh Berlin winter: A meeting of twenty-four German captains of industry and senior Nazi officials is being held in secret in the plush lounge of the Reichstag. They are there to extract funds for the accession to power of the National Socialist Party and its Chancellor. This opening



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scene sets a tone of consent that will lead to the worst possible repercussions. March 12, 1938, the annexation of Austria is on the agenda: A grotesque day intended to make history—the newsreels capture a motorized army on the move, a terrible, inexorable power. But behind Goebbels’s splendid propaganda, an ersatz Blitzkrieg unfolds, the Panzers breaking down en masse on the roads into Austria. The true behind-the-scenes account of the Anschluss—a patchwork of minor flourishes of strength and fine words, fevered telephone calls, and vulgar threats—all reveal a starkly different picture. It is not strength of character or the determination of a people that wins the day, but rather a combination of intimidation and bluff. With this vivid, compelling history, Éric Vuillard warns against the peril of willfully blind acquiescence, and offers a reminder that, ultimately, the worst is not inescapable.

*An Unnecessary Woman*

MacAdam/Cage Publishing

A “captivating, perceptive, and empathic novel of New York” told with “panache and mischievous ebullience”

(Booklist, starred review). In this retelling of Balzac’s Parisian classic *Cousin Bette*, Sarah Shulman spins her revenge story in Mad Men-era New York

City. Bette, a lonely spinster, has worked as a secretary at an ad agency for thirty years. Her only real friend is her apartment neighbor Earl, a black, gay actor with a miserable job in a meatpacking plant. Shamed and disowned by their families, both find refuge in New York and in their friendship. Everything changes when Hortense, Bette’s wealthy niece from Ohio, moves to the city to pursue her own acting career. Her arrival reminds Bette of her scandalous past and the estranged Midwestern family she left behind. When Hortense’s calculating ambitions cause a rift between Bette and Earl, Bette uses her connections in the television ad world to destroy those who have wronged her. Textured with the grit and gloss of midcentury Manhattan in the days before the Civil Rights and Feminist Movements, *The Cosmopolitans* “balance[s] the hopes of an entire era on the backs of a fragile relationship. . . . Jarring and beautiful, this is a modern classic” (Kirkus Reviews, starred review).