

to her parents, "He's a good listener.... You should see him with children. You should hear him play the guitar." On the day of their engagement, he had told her, "I realize you're getting the raw end of this deal." And she had replied, "I'm getting you."

Years later, when Maggie's uncle dies and leaves her a million dollars, the family moves to Nashville, where Thomas enrolls in grad school and Maggie begins corresponding with a brash, established Chicago-based poet named James, whose work she admires. Almost a year goes by before they meet at a conference. "James saw me first.... I was wearing a scoop neck blouse, long skirt, flip-flops. My hair pulled back, no makeup.... He stood waiting.... I felt he wanted to watch me approach, to study the way I moved; I imagined he felt that any movement on his end would dull his pleasure in watching. The look on his face was one I would become familiar with, whenever we were together: amusement on the surface, admiration beneath. A kind of ease, something already understood. *We belong to one another.*" James asks Maggie if she's coming to his talk. "Of course. I wouldn't miss it." And after? She says, "I'm free all afternoon, I said. What's on your agenda? 'You're my agenda,' he said."

What Maggie can share with James—that she can't achieve with her husband—includes ecstatic sex ("He entered me three ways at once. Cock in my mouth, tongue in my front, fingers in my back"); heady postcoital talk about literature and art; and, at least for Maggie, a feeling of divine union with Christian mystics like St. John of the Cross, who wrote of how it is possible to be "sexually aroused in the middle of spiritual acts, such as prayer, or communion, because when the spirit is moved to pleasure it drags the body up with it."

Quatro's special magic as a writer is her ability to illuminate and intensify Maggie's secret (and ultimately finite) love affair so that it seems to resonate across decades of Maggie's life, continuing to shape and inform her even as her marriage endures, her career thrives, and her children grow into adulthood.

Incorporating a mix of narrative styles from epistolary to confessional to flashback, *Fire Sermon* is a virtuosic portrait of flesh-and-blood sensuality and the mystery of salvation.—L.S.

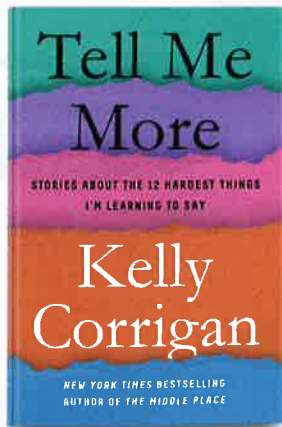
TRUST US BOOKS

Radical heroines, an opus on color, and more

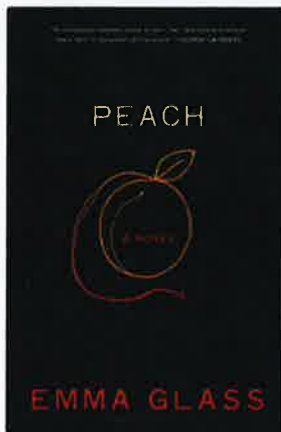


If you're game for a slim, stylish novel set in New York City's risky demi-monde—to which a kick-ass feminist fatale has just returned after a decade abroad ("I left in Dubai a closet of beautiful dresses")—read Katherine Faw's fearless *Ultraluminous* (MCD). Similarly captivating is British writer Hermione Hoby's debut novel, *Neon in Daylight* (Catapult), about an offbeat, smartly observant heroine newly arrived in New York City during the sultry summer before Hurricane Sandy; Ann Patchett calls Hoby "a marvel."

If you need a double dose of sage advice, this month two wise women have your back: "Poet Laureate of the Ordinary" Kelly Corrigan's *Tell*

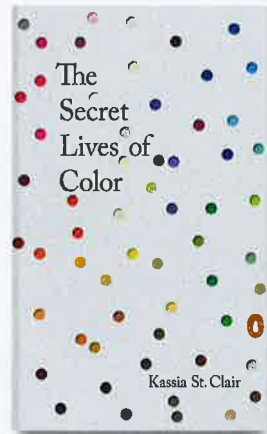


Me More: Stories About the 12 Hardest Things I'm Learning to Say (Random House) includes chapters on how to say no—because "no makes room for yes"—and on how saying yes allows for "a second chance, but maybe not a third." And "Science Advice Goddess" Amy Alkon's practical and hilarious *Unf*ckology: A Field Guide to Living With Guts and Confidence* (St. Martin's Griffin) begins: "You can't order a lightly used spine off eBay. There's no Find My Balls cousin of Find My iPhone.... All you actually have to do to change is behave like the confident person you want to be."



If you enjoy fiction that breaks new ground, British author Emma Glass's debut, *Peach* (Bloomsbury)—about a girl experiencing the aftermath of a sexual assault—is a must-read: "I sit in the sun and look up at the sky and count the clouds. One is a cat. Two is a toad. Three is a tree. Four. My eyes are sore from staring. I look down at the grey ground. A shadow stops the sun from shining on my face. His twig-thin fingers touch my cheek." Another original, from National Book Award winner Denis Johnson, who died last year, is the transcendent posthumous story collection *The Largesse*

of the Sea Maiden (Random House), the author's first since his canonic *Jesus' Son* rocked readers 25 years ago.



If you adore color, you'll love Kassia St. Clair's *The Secret Lives of Color* (Penguin Books). This passionate and majestic compendium of the origin stories of 75 shades, ranging from Naples Yellow to Scarlet to Heliotrope to Celadon to Jet—"Some are artists' colors, some are dyes"; others are akin to "sociocultural creations"—will leave you bathed in the gorgeous optics of light.

If you're in the mood for a cautionary work of farsighted fiction à la Margaret Atwood, try Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks* (Little, Brown). In an Oregon fishing town, the fates of five courageous women—a single high school teacher and a historic female polar explorer she's writing a biography about; a mother of two stuck in a static marriage; an adopted daughter who accidentally gets pregnant; and a woods-dwelling homeopathic healer—converge in a spooky-good novel of ideas about the power of collective resistance against the tyranny of rights and freedoms denied, from the author of *The Listeners* and *Farewell Navigator*.—L.S.