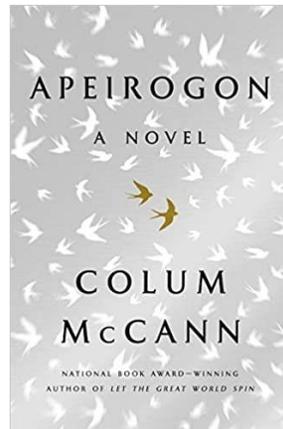


## Book Reviews

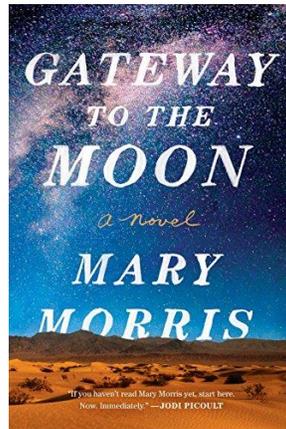
**Are you looking for a good book? Look no further.  
Tracy Safron, reader extraordinaire and congregant member,  
writes reviews of books from our library that she recommends**

### *Apeirogon* by Colum McCann



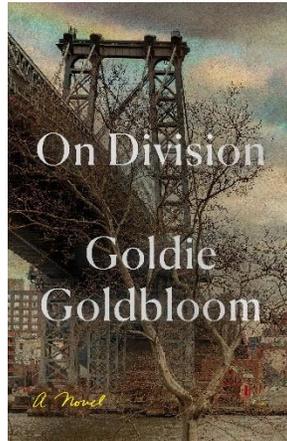
***Apeirogon*** is a masterpiece written by National Book Award winner Colum McCann. This book is so powerful it could possibly change your view of the world. In geometry, apeirogon is defined as a shape with a countably infinite number of sides. McCann's novel is told in short chapters, and there are many parts to the plot. The core of McCann's story is true and it revolves around Rami Elhanan, an Israeli and Bassam Aramin, a Palestinian. The men are great friends and they are linked in two ways. They each had a young daughter violently murdered and they both work to encourage peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Bassam co-founded Combatants for Peace in 2005, two years before his daughter Abir was killed by a rubber bullet outside of her school. Rami's daughter Smadar fell victim to suicide bombers in 1997 while shopping for books in Jerusalem. This novel is about much more than the central stories. *Apeirogon* is like a collage of ideas in which McCann has artfully combined fascinating insights and intricate details. The reader receives multiple sides of the story, and it is this compelling style that proves McCann's genius. *Apeirogon* must be read and discussed. And you can look forward to a movie version. Steven Spielberg's film production company has acquired the rights to the novel.

## ***Gateway to the Moon*** **by Mary Morris**



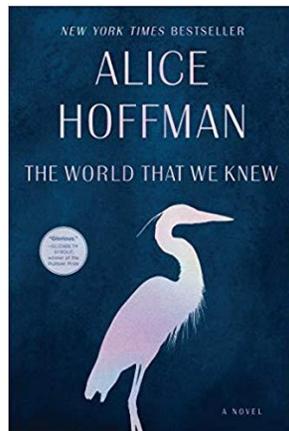
***Gateway to the Moon*** is a remarkable novel by Mary Morris. The story begins with two characters separated by 500 years. It is 1492 Spain and the Spanish Inquisition rages on. Most Jews convert to Christianity, but as crypto-Jews they put their lives in peril by continuing the practices of Judaism in secret. Columbus is setting sail for the New World and he hires Luis de Torres as his interpreter. Luis, a crypto-Jew, accompanies Columbus and prays that his departure will protect his beloved wife and two young sons. In 1992 Miguel Torres is a gifted fifteen-year-old living in run down Entrada, New Mexico. Everyone in Entrada is probably related, and most people can't wait to leave. Astronomy is the focus of Miguel's life and he gazes at the stars with wonder through his homemade telescope. He ponders many things including why does his mother, like most people in Entrada, light candles and say prayers on Friday nights? Turmoil is added to Miguel's world when he meets Rachel Rothstein, a recent transplant from New York and is hired as a babysitter for her sons. Miguel is confused when he notices similarities in their cultures. Morris' thrilling plot follows de Torres' descendants as they travel from Spain and Portugal to Mexico and finally New Mexico. The character's stories of struggle and endurance are what make *Gateway to the Moon* a thrilling masterpiece. Reading Morris' captivating novel is like opening the door to a fantastic discovery.

## ***On Division*** **by Goldie Goldbloom**



Author Goldie Goldbloom is a Chasidic woman. Her captivating new book, ***On Division***, gives readers an intimate look inside Brooklyn's Chasidic community. The heart of the novel's fascinating plot is Surie Eckstein. Surie is 57 and she has been married to her beloved husband Yidel for 41 years. Her ten children range in age from 13 to 39 and she has 32 grandchildren. Yidel will soon retire and they are looking forward to a more relaxed life. Surie is shocked to discover she is pregnant-with twins. She is mortified that her pregnancy will publicly display that she and Yidel still have marital relations. What will her children think? Shame stifles her judgement. She tells know one and since she is obese her obvious weight gain doesn't seem startling. Ironically, only her blind mother-in-law detects Surie's condition. As her pregnancy progresses, Surie's secrets grow as well. Surie's pregnancy is high risk and Surie's midwife demands that she see her weekly at a local clinic. Surie lies to Yidel about her time away and fumes that he doesn't notice she is pregnant. A rift develops between them. As Surie maintains her secret and spends more time in the "outside" world her loyalties become divided. *On Division* is a suspenseful and perceptive novel that should not be missed. It will definitely command your complete attention.

## ***The World That We Knew*** by Alice Hoffman



Alice Hoffman's new novel, ***The World That We Knew***, is possibly her best work. The story begins in 1941 Berlin. Hanni Kohn's husband has recently been murdered in a riot outside of the hospital where he worked. Hanni is realistic about her future. She knows she must save the life of her twelve-year-old daughter Lea and she seeks the best way to secure Lea's future. Hanni's prayers are answered by Ettie, a rabbi's disgruntled seventeen-year-old daughter. Ettie longs to prove her worth in the male orthodox world. Ettie once secretly observed her father making a golem and she is able to craft Ava, a female golem, from clay. Ava appears to be a woman, but she has no heart and possesses supernatural skills. She is created solely to replace Hanni in Lea's life and ensure her safety. Hanni pays Ettie with her remaining jewels and train tickets that allow Ettie and her sister to flee Berlin. Hanni sends Lea and Ava to the home of distant cousins in Paris. As the years progress Lea finds love and Ava becomes more woman than a golem. Ava continuously protects Lea from harm. Ettie joins the resistance movement, fulfilling her desire to do the same important work as a man. Hoffman's plot is constantly in motion between many intriguing settings. The story moves among inspiring characters and surprising connections. *The World That We Knew* is Hoffman's amazing creation and a book that should not be missed.

## ***The Mistress of the Ritz*** **by Melanie Benjamin**



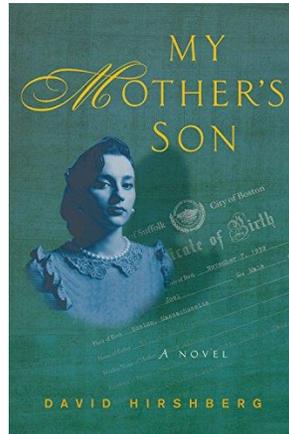
***Mistress of the Ritz*** by Melanie Benjamin is a captivating novel based on the true story of Blanche and Claude Auzello. Benjamin's unique story brings World War II into the luxurious Hotel Ritz on the Place Vendome in Paris. It is 1923 when Blanche Ross, a stunning American woman and aspiring actress, travels to Paris with a friend. There she meets debonair Frenchman Claude Auzello. Claude is immediately taken with the beautiful blond and soon they are married. When Claude is hired as hotel director of the Ritz the couple is allowed to reside there. Blanche spends her days holding court with the many famous hotel guests and becomes known as the Mistress of the Ritz. Her marriage is troubled, but the lavishness of Blanche's lifestyle keeps her mostly content. In June 1940 the German army sets up their headquarters at the Ritz. The Auzellos find themselves living among and serving Nazis. Claude's job is in jeopardy and he must walk a fine line between pleasing the Nazis and aiding them. Without each other's knowledge Blanche and Claude become immersed in separate clandestine activities. Yet it's the one secret they alone share that threatens to destroy them both. *Mistress of the Ritz* is carefully crafted by juxtaposing the glamour of the Ritz with the despair of World War II. It is the depth of Benjamin's fascinating plot that illuminates the Auzellos were much more than hotel fixtures.

## ***Kaddish.com*** **by Nathan Englander**



Nathan Englander has been called one of the most celebrated fiction writers of his generation and his latest novel, ***kaddish.com***, definitely supports this claim. At just 200 pages, *kaddish.com* is the perfect blend of humor, introspection and suspense. It is 1999 when we meet Larry, the secular black sheep of his Orthodox family. Sitting shiva for his father at his sister's home in Memphis is torture for him. Larry was close to his father, but he reluctantly admits to his sister he cannot fulfill his obligation to say kaddish for him. While surfing the internet Larry discovers kaddish.com, a website based in Jerusalem. For a fee, the mourner is matched with a yeshiva student that will say kaddish daily for the deceased. Larry's prayers have been answered when he is matched with a student named Chemi. This transfer of responsibility is halachically allowed. Not long after the end of the mourning period Larry gradually returns to his Orthodox roots. He becomes Reb Shuli, a respected teacher, husband and father of two. Twenty years post shiva Shuli is racked with guilt for shirking his responsibility. He feels that there was a contract (kinyan) with Chemi and with that contract his rights were transferred. The likelihood of locating Chemi is tenuous but Shuli won't be deterred in his quest to reclaim what is his. Englander admits he doesn't take sides in his writing. This refreshing stance, and Shuli's endearing adventures, are what make reading *kaddish.com* a thought-provoking delight.

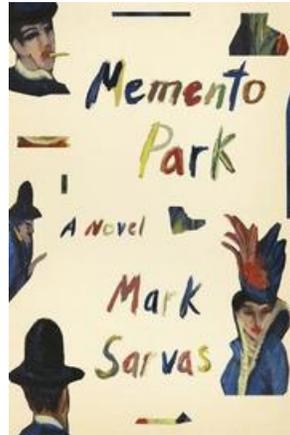
## ***My Mother's Son*** **by David Hirshberg**



***My Mother's Son*** by David Hirshberg tells the fascinating story of Jewish life in 1952 Boston. The novel is written as a memoir from the viewpoint of 13-year-old Joel. Joel greets his reader with this warning, "When you're a kid, they don't always tell you the truth." While growing into manhood and pursuing his family's narrative, Joel and his 15-year-old brother Steven become central figures in a stunning series of events. Closest to Joel are his Mother and Dad, his Papa, Aunt Rose, and Rose's husband Uncle Jake. Papa is an immigrant and a self-made man of influence. He owns a furniture store, finances political campaigns, runs a betting ring and oversees other shady dealings. Papa has a crew of colorful friends that constantly interact with Joel and Steven. The Korean war is raging, and the polio epidemic hits close to home. Their beloved baseball team, the Boston Braves is rumored to be moving to Milwaukee. And a young Irish congressman is running for a Senate seat against a long serving, well connected Senator. Joel and Steven are part of it all.

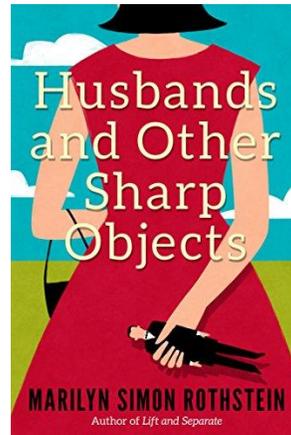
Hirshberg's characters and their stories are stunning. Reading this novel is like opening a time capsule full of the most interesting mementos. *My Mother's Son* offers the chance to travel back to 1952. This opportunity should not be missed.

## **Memento Park** by Mark Sarvas



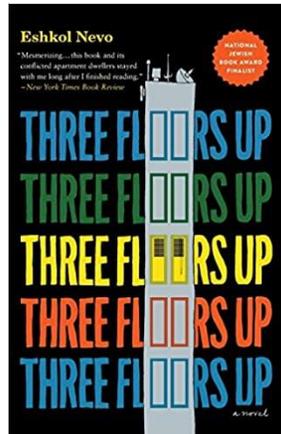
**Memento Park** is a fascinating novel by Mark Sarvas that has been described as part history, part mystery. Matt Santos is a second-generation Hungarian American living comfortably in Los Angeles. He works steadily as a B-list actor and lives with Tracy, a spirited fashion model. Matt's world is upended when he receives an unexpected phone call from the Australian consulate. An important painting, presumably looted from his family's home in Budapest during WWII, may soon come into Matt's possession. He is assigned a lawyer, Rachel, and the restitution process begins. Matt is plagued with questions about this masterpiece. Primarily he thinks his father knows more about the work of art than he is willing to reveal. Matt becomes obsessed with the painting. His work suffers, and his love life is a mess. He is torn between Tracy and Rachel. Rachel is an observant Jew and spending time with her causes Matt to grapple with his own tepid connection to Judaism. When a rabbi in Chicago makes a competing claim for the masterpiece Rachel and Matt must travel to Budapest. There he hopes to learn the truth about the painting and ultimately, his family. *Memento Park* is as much a story about relationships as it is about art. The painting is the catalyst that causes Matt to examine his family bonds and question his identity. Through the process of restitution Matt learns to make amends. Sarvas's story is a multifaceted masterpiece.

## ***Husbands and Other Sharp Objects*** by Marilyn Simon



***Husbands and Other Sharp Objects***: A Novel by Marilyn Simon Rothstein is the hilarious story of Marcy Hammer and her life in transition. Marcy has lived a “careful” life in Connecticut for over thirty years. She was married to the same man, living in the same house and even using the same brands of detergent, deodorant and toilet paper since leaving her parents’ home. Marcy is now separated from Harvey and she has no plans to reconcile with him. Harvey fathered a child with another woman and that is the catalyst for their impending divorce. Marcy’s mother has recently passed away, and her three adult children are ensconced in their own lives. On the bright side, she has two very good friends, an interesting job, and a wonderful new man in her life. Marcy has no idea her daughter Amanda is dating anyone and suddenly Amanda is engaged. The family becomes absorbed with wedding tumult. Adding to the mayhem Amanda longs to see her parents back together. Harvey wants that too. Can he win Marcy over? Marcy is a strong and thoughtful woman and her experiences are relatable and endearing. Rothstein’s novel is comical and also thought provoking. This is a story about family, friendship and life’s ups and downs. Laughter pulls the reader in but it’s Rothstein’s amazing characters and plot that make *Husbands and Other Sharp Objects* difficult to put down.

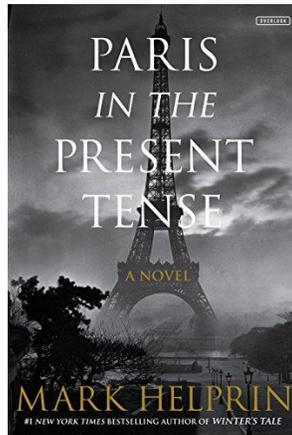
## ***Three Floors Up*** by Eshkol Nevo



***Three Floors Up*** is a mesmerizing novel by best-selling Israeli author, Eshkol Nevo. The plot focuses on three characters who live on one of three floors in the same apartment building in suburban Tel Aviv. Each of these self-absorbed people is making a confession to someone, so the reader becomes a listener. Arnon lives with his family on the first floor. He is a retired officer tormented by his experiences fighting in the First Intifada. He is racked with guilt for leaving his young daughter alone with the elderly and slightly unstable man across the hall. He obsesses over the consequences for his daughter and his shaky marriage. Above Arnon lives Hani. Hani is isolated at home with two young children while her husband constantly travels the world for his lucrative job. When her estranged brother-in-law appears at her door asking for protection from police and loan sharks she agrees. She chooses the excitement this situation brings to her monotonous life over the risk she is inflicting on her family. Devora, a widow, lives alone in the top floor in the apartment she once shared with her husband and troubled son. As a recently retired judge she longs to add meaning to her life. Devora gets involved with a social movement and is energized by helping the young leaders of the group. This interaction leads her to a meeting with a man who intrigues her but also arouses her suspicions.

Reading Nevo's words are reminiscent of having a conversation with an old friend. This story about stories makes the reader feel like another neighbor in the author's fictional building. It is this impression that makes *Three Floors Up* difficult to put down.

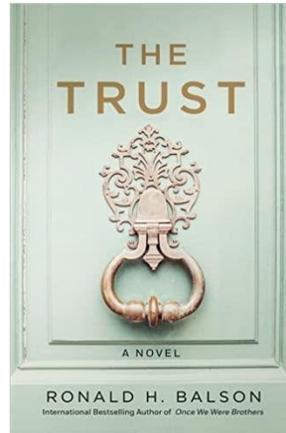
## ***Paris in the Present Tense*** **by Mark Helprin**



***Paris in the Present Tense*** is Mark Helprin's masterful new novel. The plot revolves around Jules Lacour, an epic character. Jules was born in 1940, while his parents were hiding in an attic in Reims. Until he was four Jules spoke only in a whisper and when he was seven he was thrust into life in Paris. The story is set in present-day Paris, a beautiful city plagued by violent unrest. Jules's mood mirrors that of his beloved Paris, and at 74, his world is turbulent. His two-year-old grandson Luc has leukemia and the prognosis is bad. Jules is determined to provide money that will allow Luc the best treatment available in the world. Jules is a talented cellist, but stage fright prevented him from achieving fame and fortune. He makes his living teaching cello and piano at the Sorbonne and maintains great physical shape by rowing on the Seine. Recently widowed, Jules longs for his wife Jacqueline. He faces many challenges, but his desire to save Luc's life surpasses them all.

*Paris in the Present Tense* is a fascinating novel because of the attention Helprin gives to all of his characters. The intertwining stories and beautiful writing are what make the novel difficult to describe, but a pleasure to read. Full of love, compassion and humanity, *Paris in the Present Tense* is a contemporary masterpiece.

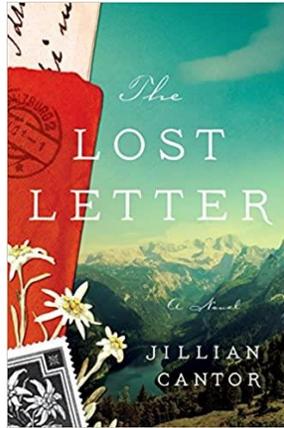
## ***The Trust*** **by Ronald H. Balson**



***The Trust*** is the latest spellbinding thriller by Ronald H. Balson. Balson reunites his readers with private investigator Liam Taggart and his wife, attorney Catherine Lockhart. They are now proud parents of baby Ben. This novel removes Taggart from his family in Chicago and returns him to his roots in Northern Ireland, where he was born and lived until he was 10. Liam's Uncle Fergus has died in Ireland under suspicious circumstances. Liam's cousin pleads with him to return for the funeral. Although Uncle Fergus was like a father to him, Liam has not spoken to him for 16 years. Liam moved back to Northern Ireland in 1994 and worked there for five years. During this time he became engaged to Annie, one of only 600 Jews in Northern Ireland. He treasured being surrounded by his family, but Liam was living a lie. He left Northern Ireland in 1999, estranged from Fergus and maligned by his relatives.

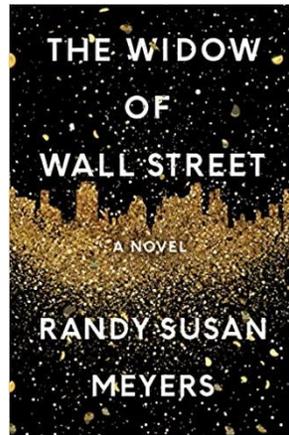
Liam reluctantly returns for the funeral and is shocked to discover Fergus named him trustee of his trust. Fergus specified if he died in any way other than by natural causes his assets would remain in trust until the person responsible for his death was apprehended and prosecuted. How did Fergus know he would be murdered? In his instructions he implores Liam to trust know one. Liam begins his investigation and suddenly everyone is at risk and every person is a suspect. No one is safe, including Catherine and Ben. While proceeding with the investigation, Liam is stunned to learn the truth about his personal history. The Taggart family is full of captivating characters and Liam and Catherine remain appealing. *The Trust* is an enthralling novel and convincing proof that Balson's storytelling can be relied on for hours of enjoyment.

## ***The Lost Letter*** **by Jillian Cantor**



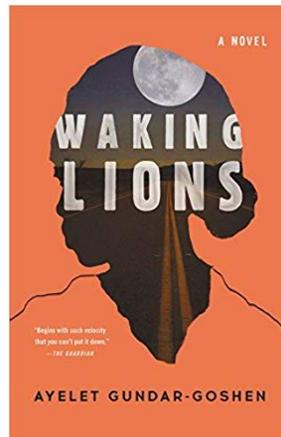
***The Lost Letter*** by Jillian Cantor is an exceptional novel that is both heartbreaking and heartwarming. The story begins in 1938 Grotzburg Austria. A young man named Kristoff has come to live and apprentice with famed stamp maker Frederick Faber. Kristoff quickly becomes part of the Faber family, even learning their Jewish customs. He falls in love with the eldest Faber daughter, fiery Elana. Kristallnacht brings an end to their idyllic life. Frederick is presumed dead, Elana's mother has disappeared and Kristoff is forced to make stamps for the Germans. Because of his artistic skills, Kristoff is brought into the Jewish underground where he works alongside Elana. Together they risk their lives forging documents for Jews. While he continues to work for the Germans, Kristoff plans his escape. He insists that he and Elana falsify papers for themselves so they can immigrate to America together. Kate Nelson lives in Los Angeles. It is 1989 and her life is a mess. She is going through a divorce and she has recently moved her father into an Alzheimer's facility. She is thinking of selling her father's massive stamp collection so she brings it to Benjamin, a stamp appraiser. Benjamin finds a remarkable WWII Austrian stamp placed on an old, sealed, love letter. An unusual detail on the stamp is an edelweiss—symbolizing proof of unusual daring. The mysterious missive sends Kate on a life-altering journey. Cantor's plot is exciting and her characters are fascinating. The messages Cantor's story sends will resonate with the reader. *The Lost Letter* deserves a five star stamp of approval.

## ***The Widow of Wall Street*** **by Randy Susan Meyers**



***The Widow of Wall Street*** by Randy Susan Meyers is a fascinating and entertaining novel. The story begins in 2009 with Phoebe visiting her husband, Jake Pierce, in jail. Jake is imprisoned for an elaborate Ponzi scheme, a la Bernie Madoff. Could Phoebe really be ignorant of Jake's deceit? Phoebe has loved Jake since they were teenagers in Brooklyn in 1960 and she trusts him without hesitation. As he builds a financial dynasty Jake uses Phoebe to help him land clients from within their social set. He scripts her words and teaches her techniques to lure investors. Almost all of their friends and family are members of Jake's "Club", and everyone is amazed at his investing skills. No one wonders how the Club numbers are never down, although most other investment groups are losing money. Jake's son and daughter work with him, but only on the brokerage side of the firm. Jake meticulously hides the Club's finances from them. Phoebe's mother has never liked Jake and warns Phoebe that she fears he is "the sneaky kind". Even though Phoebe is living a life of luxury in Greenwich her mother constantly implores her to keep a knippel, a cache of money for herself. Phoebe's rise and fall makes for riveting reading. Being disgraced is terrible for Phoebe, but even worse is the intolerable ultimatum given to her by her children. They will have no contact with her if she stands by their father's side. Meyers' writing is clear and expressive. The depth of the characters in *The Widow of Wall Street* provides a fresh perspective to a familiar story.

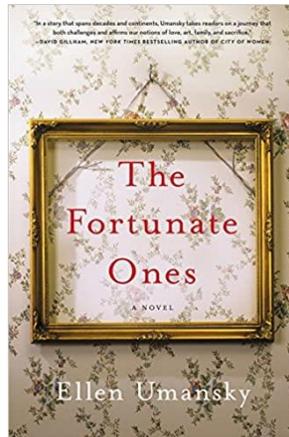
## ***Waking Lions*** by Ayelet Gundar-Goshen



***Waking Lions*** is a fascinating book written by Israeli novelist and screenwriter, Ayelet Gundar-Goshen. Neurosurgeon Eitan Green is on his way home after a nineteen-hour shift at a Beersheba hospital. He decides to unwind by testing the high-speed performance of his new SUV. Speeding in the moonlit desert he doesn't see the Eritrean refugee before he hits him. Eitan examines his victim's injuries and decides that he cannot be saved. He flees the scene, and tries to remain calm. His wife Liat is a local police detective and he cannot arouse her suspicions. The next day the victim's widow, a stunning Eritrean refugee, appears at Eitan's door. She is holding Eitan's wallet that was left at the scene. Her husband is dead and she knows he is responsible. She plans to blackmail Eitan, but not with money. She demands Eitan commit to her in a way that will turn his life into a world of deceit and lies. Liat is assigned to the hit and run case and is intent on bringing the driver to justice. When she tells Eitan they have made an arrest and secured a confession Eitan is faced with yet another dilemma.

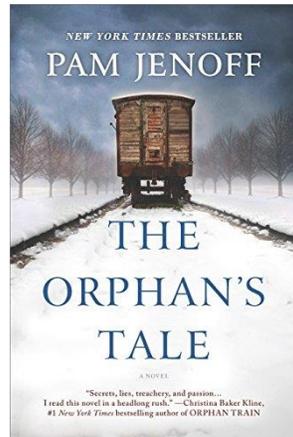
Gundar-Goshen has a degree in clinical psychology and her education is reflected in the depths of her characters. *Waking Lions* has been described as part psychological thriller and part morality play. The author combines these halves together into an outstanding novel that leaves the reader with a lot to think about. *Waking Lions* is undeniably stirring and impossible to forget. TV executives agree on the allure of this story. *Waking Lions* is the basis of a pilot that is being developed by NBC.

## **The Fortunate Ones** by Ellen Umansky



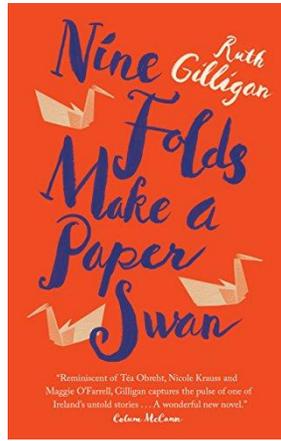
***The Fortunate Ones*** is a riveting debut novel by Ellen Umansky. The story moves from World War II Vienna to contemporary Los Angeles. The core of Umansky's plot is a beautiful painting that is looted during the war. Eleven-year-old Rose Zimmer is forced to leave her parents behind in 1939 Vienna when they put her on a kindertransport to live with strangers in England. Her life is saved, but her parents do not survive the war. Rose is filled with grief and guilt. As she tries to build a life for herself in London Rose is desperate to find a missing piece of her childhood. She diligently searches for the Chaim Soutine painting, *The Bellhop*, that her mother owned and loved. Rose marries and moves to Los Angeles, but she never gives up hope of being reunited with *The Bellhop*. Lizzie Goldstein is thirteen when she arrives in Los Angeles in 1982 to live with her father following her mother's death. She sees *The Bellhop* hanging in her new home and its allure gradually eases her loneliness. Five years later the painting is stolen from the home and never recovered. Lizzie believes she is responsible for the theft and she cannot assuage her guilt. When Rose and Lizzie meet in 2005 they instantly bond. Their friendship forms the key that will unlock long held secrets. *The Fortunate Ones* is much more than a tale of lost art. It is a remarkable story of perseverance combined with fascinating characters. Umansky's clear prose and suspenseful plot will definitely make her readers feel that they are the lucky ones.

## ***The Orphan's Tale*** **by Pam Jenoff**



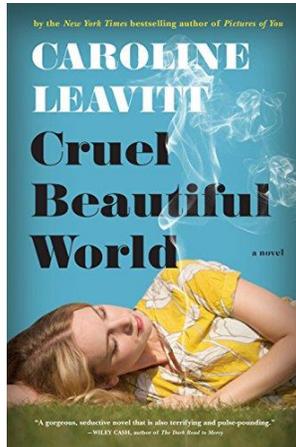
Pam Jenoff's latest novel, ***The Orphan's Tale*** is a fascinating story of friendship born of adversity in 1944 Germany. When seventeen-year-old Noa Weil becomes pregnant she is thrown out of her parent's home on the Dutch coast. After giving up her baby son she is fortunate to find a job cleaning a train station. One day she makes a horrifying discovery- a boxcar containing dozens of abandoned babies, many near death. She hastily rescues one boy, and soon realizes he is Jewish. She names the baby Theo and decides to call him her brother. After fleeing the train station Noa and Theo are found in a forest in the German countryside. They are brought to Herr Neuhoff, the owner of a travelling circus. Neuhoff offers the beautiful Noa lodging and a job as an aerialist, even though she has no experience. He pairs her with Astrid Sorrell, an older, expert aerialist. Astrid, formerly known as Ingrid Klemt, was born into a Jewish circus family that was generations in the making. She married a German soldier and lived with him in Berlin for almost five years. Once the war broke out her husband was ordered to divorce her. Stunned by her husband's betrayal Astrid recently returned home to discover her family was gone. Knowing her reputation as an amazing aerialist Neuhoff risks hiring Astrid and vows to protect her. Astrid is grateful to Neuhoff, but is displeased to be working with Noa. Training her will be demanding and Astrid doubts she can trust Noa. Eventually the rivalry between the women dissolves and a deep friendship develops. When the circus travels to France the perils of love and war test their relationship. Jenoff's unique plot combined with her skillful writing and intriguing characters work together like the three rings of a circus, making *The Orphan's Tale* an exceptional novel.

## ***Nine Folds Make A Paper Swan*** **by Ruth Gilligan**



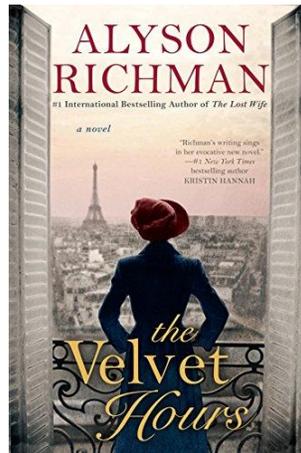
***Nine Folds Make A Paper Swan*** is Ruth Gilligan's captivating debut novel focusing on the experience of the Irish Jew. Storytelling and misunderstanding are at the heart of the plot. The sprawling saga is told from alternating perspectives of three main characters. Each of their viewpoints is separated by about fifty years. Eight-year-old Ruth and her family emigrate from Lithuania in 1901 on a ship bound for New York. When their boat docks in Cork they mistakenly disembark and Ireland becomes their home. Ruth's father is a struggling playwright and storytelling becomes an important part of Ruth's life. Shem is struck mute at his bar mitzvah. His desire to protect the mother he adores has rendered him speechless. He is institutionalized five years later, in 1958. Shem's salvation at the institution is documenting a mesmerizing story told to him by another patient. Aisling is an expat journalist living in London in 2011. She has been dating Noah for two years and is in love with him. He insists that she convert to Judaism so they can marry, but she is daunted by his request. When Noah gives Aisling a used copy of an Irish book about conversion the book overtakes her life. *Nine Folds Make A Paper Swan* is an extraordinary novel because of Gilligan's unique plot and how she unites the pieces of her story. Discovering the connections between the main characters is as rewarding as solving a difficult puzzle. Gilligan is like an origami artist. She has made the pages of her book into a work of art.

## ***Cruel Beautiful World*** **by Caroline Leavitt**



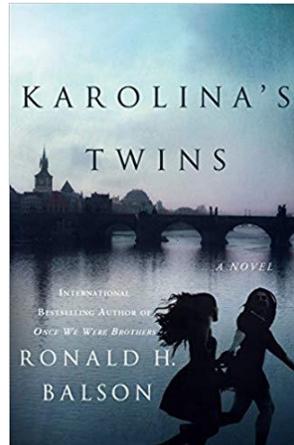
***Cruel Beautiful World*** is Caroline Leavitt's astonishing new novel. The story begins in suburban Boston in 1969. Sixteen-year-old Lucy Gold runs away to rural Pennsylvania with William, her 30-year-old English teacher. William convinces Lucy that they must keep their relationship a secret because of her age. She leaves a brief note, with no details, telling her family not to worry. Lucy has left behind her eighteen-year-old sister Charlotte and her much older aunt, Iris. Iris has been raising the sisters since their parents died ten years earlier. Charlotte has always been Lucy's protector and she is haunted by her sister's disappearance. Iris loves both girls intensely and is desperate to hear from Lucy. The reader is immersed into the three women's worlds as the narrative alternates among their voices. William and Lucy live on an isolated farm, and William teaches at a progressive school in the area. He leaves Lucy daily with no transportation and admonishes that she stay home. Lucy soon resents William's controlling ways and begs him, unsuccessfully, to expand her world. She reads the newspaper and becomes obsessed with the turbulent news of campus riots and Charles Manson. She fears she is losing her mind. *Cruel Beautiful World* is equally suspenseful and thought provoking. Leavitt's extraordinary plot and realistic writing are what make *Cruel Beautiful World* a remarkable novel. Although the title is contradictory, there is nothing puzzling about why this story is unforgettable.

## ***The Velvet Hours*** **by Alyson Richman**



***The Velvet Hours*** is a captivating new novel by Alyson Richman. The story begins in Paris towards the end of 1938. The threat of war is palpable and news of the anti-Semitism Hitler is inciting throughout Europe has Parisian Jews gravely concerned. Solange Beaugiron is 19 years old when she first meets her paternal grandmother, Marthe de Florian. Marthe, an elusive courtesan, is stunning and lives in an elegant Parisian apartment full of beautiful art and lush objects. Solange, a budding writer, is fascinated by Marthe's remarkable stories. Solange's deceased mother was Jewish, but Solange was baptized and raised Catholic. Solange's desire to learn about her mother's beloved Hebrew books leads her to a rare bookstore in the Jewish quarter of the Marais. Solange consults the owner of the store and feels an instant connection to this man and his adult son. When her father is drafted into the French army as a pharmacist, Solange moves in with Marthe. Although Marthe has lived a life sheltered from daily conflicts, she has learned to take care of herself. The help she provides and lessons she teaches Solange will shape Solange's future. *The Velvet Hours* is a fascinating story of love and survival. Richman's writing, like the magnificent ambiance of Marthe's home, is lustrous.

## ***Karolina's Twins*** by Ronald H. Balson



***Karolina's Twins*** is the fascinating new novel by Ronald H. Balson. It is based on a true story told to Balson by Fay, a Holocaust survivor. "What a magnificent, determined woman Fay was and what a story she had to tell," Balson wrote. Fay knew her account of two baby girls born during the horror of the Nazi occupation in Poland and what happened to them needed to be shared. She agreed to have her personal saga written as a novel and her story became the core of *Karolina's Twins*. Lena Woodward is a Holocaust survivor who lives alone in a condo on Chicago's Gold Coast. She hires attorney Catherine Lockhart and private investigator Liam Taggart because she is desperate to fulfill a promise. Lena longs to find twin girls that were born to her best friend Karolina in Nazi occupied Poland and have been missing since they were infants. Catherine becomes engrossed in Lena's story and is determined to help her. Liam is not optimistic that the women can be found. Lena's son thinks his mother's obsession is evidence of senility, and believes Catherine and Liam are taking advantage of her. He hires an attorney to help prove his mother is unfit. Balson recounts Lena's painful history with clarity and warmth. His skillful writing and interesting characters make *Karolina's Twins* difficult to put down. This substantial novel proves that Fay's trust in Balson as a storyteller was not misplaced.

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