

## General Fiction

### Ballroom.

By Alice Simpson.

Sept. 2014. 320p. Harper, \$25.99 (9780062323033).

Though the glory days of the Ballroom are long gone, some New Yorkers still make time for a trip to the faded dance hall. Young dancers with big dreams brush up on new steps, while others scan the room for ideal dance (and perhaps romantic) partners. The eternally suave Gabriel treats the Ballroom as his own private meat market, while elderly Harry only has eyes for one dancer. As the connections among the regular group of dancers begin to spill over into life outside the Ballroom, the ensemble realizes how sacred their Sunday time and space really is. Simpson has a clear and passionate eye for ballroom dance, peppering the novel with dance terminology and commonly used songs. Each chapter opens with a short passage from some of the earliest ballroom dance handbooks, highlighting the importance of social graces and traditions. Simpson's lush prose will envelop readers in the sights, sounds, and textures of the dance hall, though the novel isn't particularly plot-driven. Fans of Jennifer Haigh and those welcoming a many-voiced, richly drawn experience will enjoy the poignant and emotional *Ballroom*. —Stephanie Turza

### Barracuda.

By Christos Tsiolkas.

Sept. 2014. 448p. Crown/Hogarth, \$26 (9780804138420); e-book (9780804138437).

The water was like air to Danny Kelly. Thanks to his swimming ability, the working-class Australian boy earns a scholarship to an expensive school, but the life he was dreaming of is shattered when he performs poorly in his first big championship. His pain at losing is stinging and pervasive, and his struggle to find an identity out of the pool provides the grist for this physical coming-of-age tale. Tsiolkas (*The Slap*, 2010) perfectly captures the arrogance and agonies of youth, complete with profanity and locker-room mockery, the endless posturing of an all-boys school. So complete is the separation between Danny the swimmer and Dan the adult that Tsiolkas even uses different forms of narration for the two sides of his character as the story bounces back and forth. Stunned and adrift, Dan embarks on a search for meaning, as he slowly tries forgiving himself and his loved ones. His emotions hum mercilessly beneath the surface, and the novel, although slightly bloated, burns with razor-sharp insight. His is a ferocious failure, and it translates to engrossing reading—more so, in fact, than most tales of sporting triumph. —Bridget Thoreson

**YA/M:** *This powerful tale of the sometimes insurmountable barriers on the road to coming-of-age will draw teen and new adult readers. BT.*

### Bright Shards of Someplace Else.

By Monica McFawn.

Sept. 2014. 176p. Univ. of Georgia, \$24.95 (9780820346878).

In 11 short stories, McFawn explores the contradictions of varied characters and their skewed perspectives toward one another and themselves. In "Out of the Mouths of Babes," a nanny takes advantage of her young charge's unique negotiating skills to cancel overage fees on her cell phone bill. As the night progresses, however, she attempts to manipulate him into rectifying other burdens in her life. "Dead Horse Productions" presents a man in the unique predicament of disposing of his elderly mother's dead horse. In "Line of Questioning," a poetry professor is brought in for questioning over the murder of a former outspoken student. The standout, "The Chautauqua Sessions," finds songwriter Danny in remote Appalachia, commissioned to work on a new album with an old singing partner. The reunion, however, is hampered by the appearance of Danny's drug-addict son, Dee. While Dee claims he is sober, his presence makes it progressively difficult for Danny to separate fact from fiction. McFawn's tales shine when characters, both resolute and misguided, brace for the flawed truths of their predicaments. —Leah Strauss

### Driftwood Tides.

By Gina Holmes.

Sept. 2014. 300p. Tyndale, paper, \$14.99 (9781414366425).

Libby Slater has been living her life fulfilling the expectations of others, never quite sure of herself. When a routine blood test shatters the world she thought she knew, Libby decides to take matters into her own hands and discover who she truly is. Holton Creary is a man lost. After the death of his wife, he turned to the bottle and watched his life slowly turn to shambles. Libby's unexpected arrival on his doorstep is exactly what he needs to shake him back into reality. As Libby faces the fact that she was adopted, and Holton comes to terms with the secret his late wife never revealed, the two begin to grow out of the molds they had forced themselves into. Holmes' (*Dry as Rain*, 2011) novel moves like a serene sea: gentle, persuasive, and transformative. Much in the same way time and the elements turn driftwood into something beautiful, Libby and Holton learn that they, too, can change for the better. Readers will delight in this story of redemption and growth. —Carolyn Richard

### Faulty Predictions.

By Karin Lin-Greenberg.

Sept. 2014. 192p. Univ. of Georgia, \$24.95 (9780820346861).

The 10 luminous stories in Lin-Greenberg's masterful collection are united by her examination of the various and devious ways people try to put things into perspective. She also follows the development and resolution of questionable decisions, the avenues ensuing actions take, and their consequences. Set in diverse locations, from a high-school library

to a city art gallery to a small-town restaurant, the stories take universal human strengths and frailties writ large and reduce them to the most accessible and personal of encounters. Unrequited love induces a town's favorite young woman to volunteer with the Peace Corps in Mongolia in "Miller Duskman's Mistakes," while sisterly devotion gets tested in the "Half and Half Club." Chinese grandmothers fight over a statue of Jesus in "Prized Possessions," and vigilante justice takes a surprising turn in the sweetly succinct "Bread." A winner of the coveted Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction, Lin-Greenberg deservedly joins such past recipients as Ha Jin, Kellie Wells, and Antonya Nelson as she offers a piquant look at life's bittersweet moments. —Carol Haggas

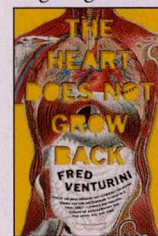
**YA/M:** *Many stories are set in high schools and colleges and explore questions of loyalty and choice that teens will find relevant. CH.*

### The Heart Does Not Grow Back.

By Fred Venturini.

Nov. 2014. 272p. Picador, paper, \$16 (9781250052216).

Dale Sampson has a superpower. His body has the ability to regenerate, a fact he discovers when his hand is virtually destroyed by a gunshot wound, and to his astonishment, his fingers grow back. Unfortunately, his memo-



ries, like his flesh, can't be destroyed, and he can't shake the memory of Regina, the girl he loved who was murdered by the same disaffected teen who had wounded him. Things become complicated when, several years later, he encounters Regina's identical twin sister, Raeanne, and is immediately smitten with her. But she's married and a future with her seems impossible, so with nothing to lose, Dale and his best friend, Mack, head to Hollywood, where Dale becomes the star of the successful reality TV show *The Samaritan*. Its premise: each week Dale donates an organ to a worthy recipient. Does this make him happy? Not at all. "There was no silver lining I couldn't strip away to find the darkness within," he thinks bleakly. Overwhelmed by memories and regrets, Dale seems, Hamlet-like, to be unable to act, until his love for Raeanne offers him an opportunity to seize the moment and make a soul-saving sacrifice. Venturini's melancholy but fascinating first novel is an invitation to think about altruism, ethics, and the tangled precincts of the human heart. —Michael Cart

**YA:** *Teens will be fascinated by Venturini's irresistible premise and challenged by the ethicality and morality of Dale's unique gift. MC.*

### The Hilltop.

By Assaf Gavron. Tr. by Steven Cohen.

Oct. 2014. 464p. Scribner, \$26 (9781476760438); e-book (9781476760452).

Israeli settler Othniel just wants to grow some arugula, some tomatoes, and keep a goat. He