The Almost Sisters: A Novel  
By Joshyl Jackson

(William Morrow Paperbacks, 9780062057627, $15.99)

"Leila Birch is pretty much a rock star in the comic world, but her personal life has taken over the drama of her heroines. Violet and Violence. Leila is pregnant with a biracial child after too much tequila and a one-night stand at Comic-Con, her sister's perfect marriage is imploding, and it appears her sweet, proper Southern grandmother has been hiding all kinds of improper things, including advancing dementia. As always, Jackson is witty and charming, and her characters are so wonderfully drawn, it's hard to believe you don't actually know these people. The Almost Sisters is a hopeful book about finding the dignity of one another while still helping them grow and change."

—Susan Thomas, CoffeeTree Books, Morehead, KY

The Last Ballad: A Novel  
By Wiley Cash

(William Morrow Paperbacks, 9780062313265, $15.99)

"Ella May has never had much of anything. She labors long hours in a textile mill in North Carolina trying to feed her four young children on nine dollars a week. When Ella sings one of her songs at a meeting of workers who are hoping to form a union, she finds herself something of a local celebrity. Written in beautifully evocative prose, this novel about bigotry and labor unrest in the 1930s exerts a powerful impact that pulls the reader into the vortex of the struggle for social justice. It deserves a place of honor in the canon of great Southern literature."

—Aiden Graves, Northshire Bookshop, Manchester, VT

Mississippi Blood: A Novel  
By Greg Iles

(William Morrow Paperbacks, 9780062311160, $17.99)

"Mississippi Blood is the culmination of the Natchez Trilogy, which follows characters who are trying to get to the bottom of brutal Civil Rights-era crimes. Penn Cage watches as the world around him calls into question everything he thinks he knows, including the moral fortitude of his father. Rippling with parallels to our everyday America, Mississippi Blood will, hopefully, push us all to recognize the truths about ourselves and our country."

—Veronica Brooks-Sigler, Octavia Books, New Orleans, LA

The History of Bees: A Novel  
By Maja Lunde

(Touchstone, 9781091547284, $16)

"Both heartbreaking and hopeful, The History of Bees by Maja Lunde looks from present day to the history and future of bees, pollination, and the effects of humankind on these vital insects. Told through the stories of three families of beekeepers and pollinators, Lunde beautifully weaves together separate stories into one epic novel that will hold the reader captive until the very last sentence."

—Mary O'Malley, Anderson's Books, Naperville, IL

Salt Houses: A Novel  
By Hala Alyan

(Mariner, 9781328915856, $14.99)

"Accomplished poet Hala Alyan exceeds the brilliance of her excellent collections of poems in her moving, deeply felt, powerfully realized first novel, Salt Houses. I can’t think of many writers who have so adeptly written of family relationships—here, spanning five generations, all against a vividly rendered backdrop of exile and migration. From Palestine to Jordan, Lebanon to Kuwait, Boston to New York, this is a story of people losing, finding, and making their way. Salt Houses gives voice, body, and love to people whose lives in this country tend, at most, to be featured anonymously in news accounts—and at that, the negative. This is real life, beautifully written and graciously enlarging the sense of who we are."

—Rick Simonson, The Elliott Bay Book Company, Seattle, WA

What We Lose: A Novel  
By Zinzi Clemmons

(Penguin Books, 9780735227134, $16)

"What We Lose is a quietly brilliant book detailing the way loss manifests itself in the life of its narrator, Thandi, and the reader, as Clemmons’ writing shines back on you, too. The death of Thandi’s mother brings about the loss of childhood innocence, her connection with her past, and her identity as a black woman. Clemmons’ book is told in vignettes, stories and thoughts, with the narrative of this time in Thandi’s life slowly swirling through it. It’s as powerful a meditation on grief as I’ve ever read."

—Stefanie Schmidt, Water Street Bookstore, Exeter, NH