

THE GIRLS: A Novel
By Emma Cline

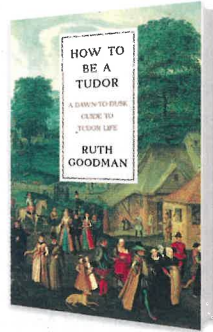
(Random House)

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Emma Cline's captivating debut novel retells a familiar story with new insight. The plot follows a lonely 14-year-old Californian named Evie who falls into a Manson Family-like cult in the summer of 1969. Evie is less drawn to the mysterious and

charismatic cult leader than she is to the mesmerizing Suzanne, an older teen who is in deep with him. From the prologue, where Cline memorably describes Suzanne and the other girls in the cult as sharks, the tension builds so slowly that when the violence comes, it feels inevitable.

Cline imagines the Manson Family story in a new way by focusing on the girlhood of the members and the societal influences that drove them into the arms of "an expert in female sadness." "I knew just being a girl in the world handicapped your ability to believe yourself," Cline writes in Evie's voice. Flash-forwards to the present show an older Evie interacting with a young teen in scenes that are less interesting than the cult story, but still drive home Cline's examination of the vulnerabilities and strengths of girlhood. —ERIKA W. SMITH



HOW TO BE A TUDOR:
A Dawn-to-Dusk Guide to Tudor Life
By Ruth Goodman

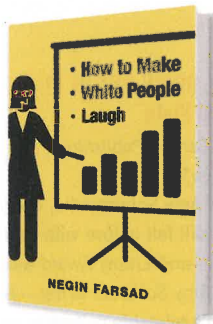
(Liveright)

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So much has been written on the Tudors, it's always a surprise when someone finds a fresh way to approach this fascinating time period. But badass historian Ruth Goodman does just that, taking

readers through a day in the life of a Tudor. She provides quotidian details from dress to food to popular forms of entertainment, divided into sections including "To Wash or Not to Wash," "And So To Bed," and, "A Time to Play." She also looks at all class levels and addresses lifestyle changes throughout the long Tudor period.

The intense focus of each section makes this book a good read both for those who like to go cover-to-cover and those who prefer to read a section here and there. What makes this book especially enjoyable is Goodman's enthusiasm for her subject matter; indeed, her life revolves around it. Besides her superior research and knowledge, Goodman also recounts her own attempts to "be a Tudor," by living in a recreation Tudor house, baking bread using a Tudor stove and recipe; and learning popular Tudor dances. —ANN MAYHEW



HOW TO MAKE WHITE PEOPLE LAUGH
By Negin Farsad

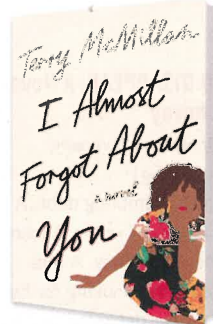
(Grand Central Publishing)

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Iranian-American-Muslim comedian Negin Farsad wants to make people laugh—and, despite her book's title, not just white people. She accomplishes this by talking about her immigrant parents, her complete

lack of gaydar growing up in Palm Springs, and her nearly female-less college improv experience. (Something she now jokingly calls a "glass is half empty...of vaginas" situation.) But Farsad, who has a master's degree in African-American studies, is also a social justice comedian who talks about what it means to "feel black" in a world defined by whiteness. She looks at what it's like to practice a religion that is seen as a terrorist threat, and discusses how it feels when your own people (Muslim females) don't support what you do.

These are serious topics, but she finds ways to instill humor in each lesson. Farsad compares being a woman and a person of color to always making a turducken for the holidays, instead of just keeping it simple and making a turkey. In other words, it's not easy being "other," but we can change this by laughing at ridiculous stereotypes instead of choosing to believe them. —SHANNON CARLIN



I ALMOST FORGOT ABOUT YOU:
A Novel
By Terry McMillan

(Crown)

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The latest offering from celebrated author Terry McMillan (*How Stella Got Her Groove Back*) begins with a cliché. It's Friday night and protagonist Georgia Young is home alone, bingeing on pizza and *Law & Order*. Never mind that she's a

successful optometrist with a supportive family and friends. Georgia is 53, single, and unfulfilled. It only takes four pages for her to declare "I am full of regret." The remedy? A strange quest to reconnect with former loves and confess the significance each had in her life. It's classic chick-lit, and McMillan hits you over the head with her message: you can find love again, no matter your age.

Georgia is likeable and her sexual encounters are fascinating. But *I Almost Forgot About You* is unevenly paced with a rushed rom-com ending. Also problematic are the story's gay stereotypes and unsettling homophobic quips. (In this regard, it's worth noting that after years of marriage, McMillan discovered her husband was gay, and her personal life may be responsible for these unfortunate narrative choices.) Fans of McMillan will likely enjoy this novel and others might find it a guilty pleasure. But its predictable—and stereotypical—pitfalls are off-putting. —HELEN MATATOV