

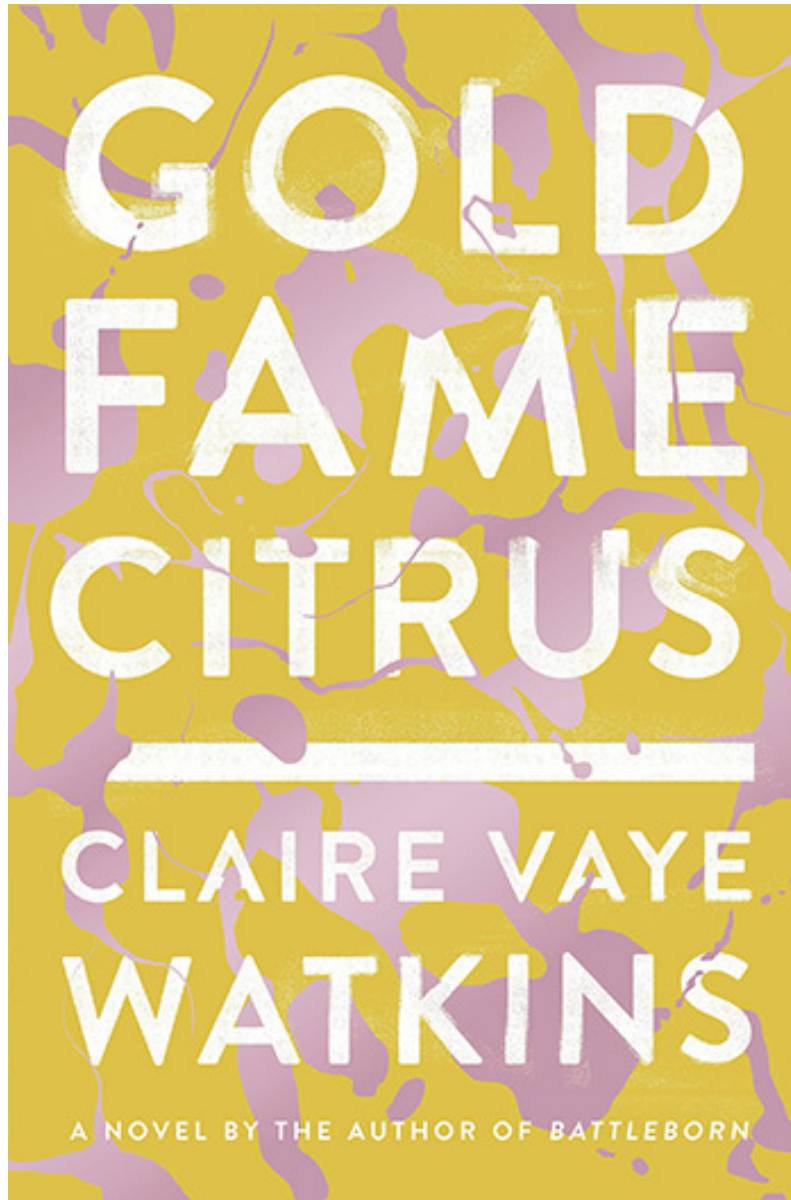
6 Books You Need to Read This September

What do George Carlin, Frank Gehry, a chicken advocate, and a Very Large Hole have in common? They all show up in this month's best books

[September 7, 2015 Thomas Harlander Books](#)

Best of the West

[Gold Fame Citrus](#)

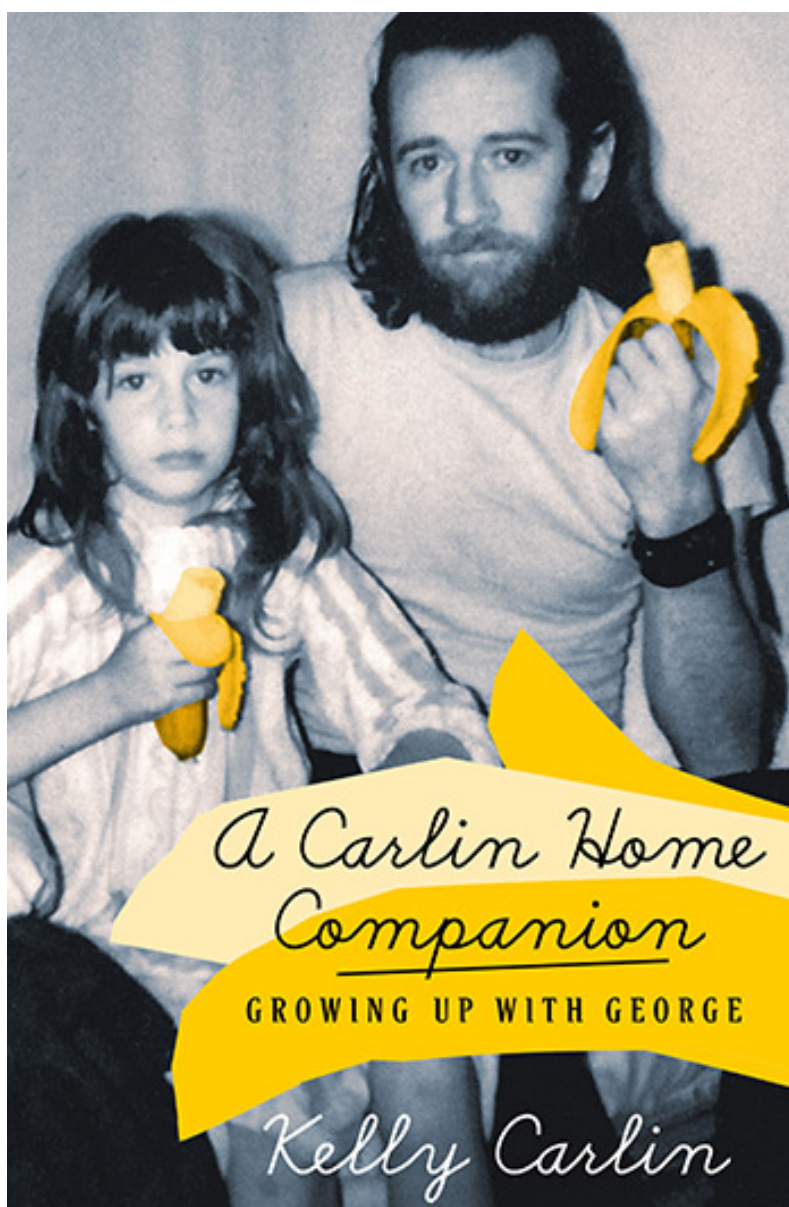


(Riverhead Books, \$27.95, out September 29) *By Claire Vaye Watkins*

In an arid near future, Los Angeles has dried up and been abandoned by all but squatters and scavengers. Luz and Ray have cobbled together a life in the midst of the ruin, and they've managed to keep one thing flourishing: their relationship. Holed up in a starlet's abandoned mansion, they maintain a livable status quo, until one night at a rain dance, a

mysterious child enters their lives and changes everything. *Gold Fame Citrus* is Watkins's debut novel (her 2012 story collection [Battleborn](#) was a feat), and in it she's sharp, at times merciless, and never above a little fun—halfway through the book we find a pamphlet, "Neo-Fauna of the Amargosa Dune Sea: a primer," complete with illustrations of the jelly scorpions and stiltwalker tortoises have adapted to the harsh landscape. The book is instantly entrancing, alluring as a mirage, and filled with peril, mystery, sandstorms, the occult, and a cast of nuanced characters you can almost (but never quite) root for.

[*A Carlin Home Companion: Growing up with George*](#)

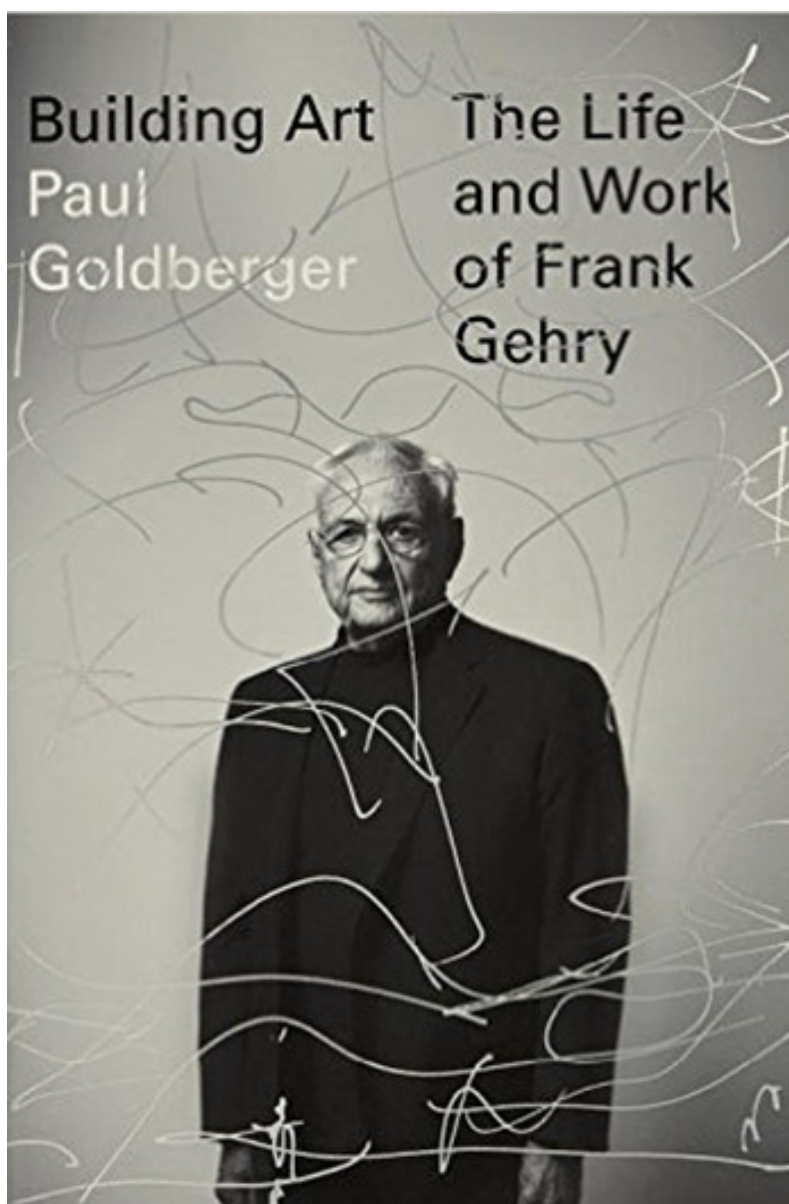


(St. Martin's Press, \$26.99, out September 15) *Kelly Carlin*

[Bullshit may be everywhere](#), but it's nowhere to be found in Kelly Carlin's examination of the life of her father, comedian George Carlin. The man was known for saying serious things in hilarious ways, teasing out humor from the bleakness of twentieth century living.

With similar ease, Kelly, his only child, has produced a book that provides a glimpse into the tumultuous world of the man behind the jokes. She was with him through the ups and downs of his comedy career, with him as he dealt with alcohol and drugs, debt, illness, and the death of his wife, and with him as he transitioned out of depression. She chronicles it all with love and wit, but the book is as much about daughter as it is about father. It's a coming of age tale, the story of Kelly's own journey out from under her father's shadow. Born of her one-woman show of the same name, *A Carlin Home Companion* takes on dysfunction and discouragement with all the wit and wisdom of George. [Get your copy signed by Kelly Carlin](#) at Barnes and Noble on September 17, and don't miss the [George Carlin exhibit at the Grammy Museum](#) starting September 30.

[Building Art: The Life and Work of Frank Gehry](#)



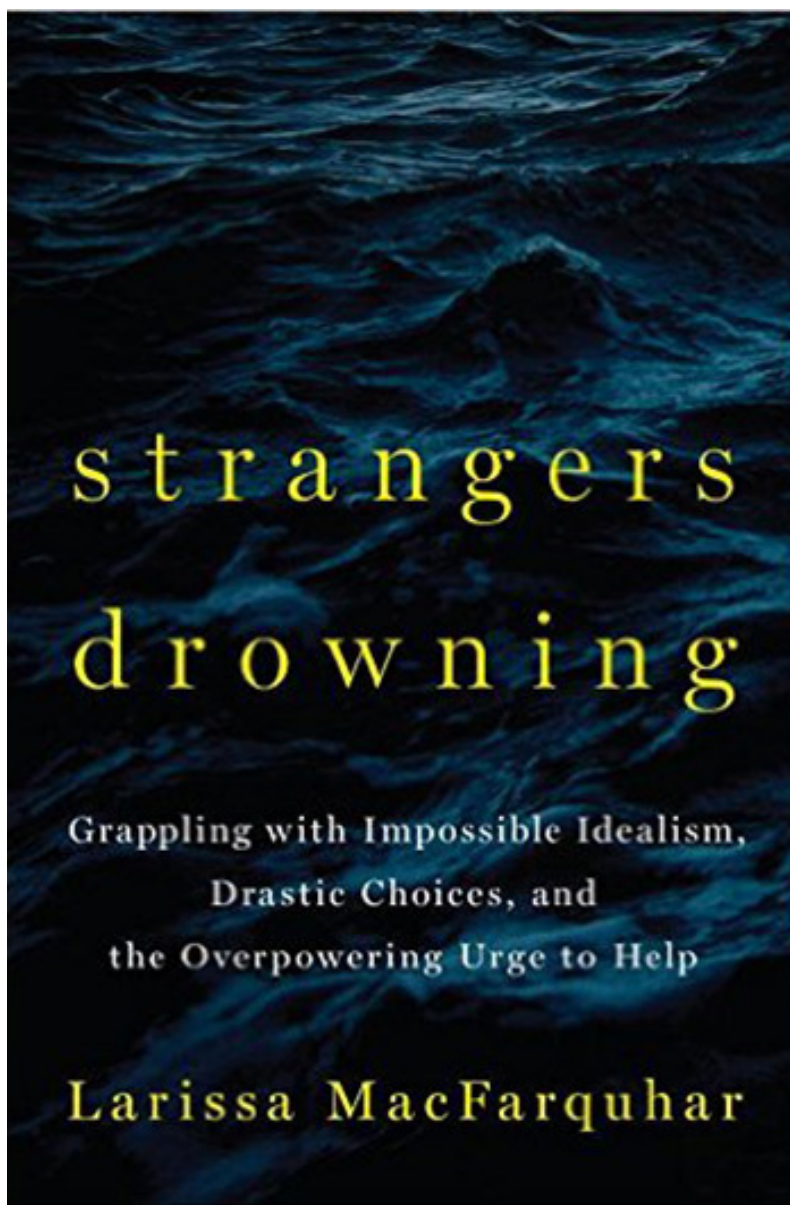
(Knopf, \$35, out September 15) *By Paul Goldberger*

[Just in time for the LACMA exhibition](#), Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture critic Paul

Goldberger has completed the task of biographizing the-man-the-myth-the-legend Frank Gehry. It's the first comprehensive biography of the brilliant (albeit [sometimes crotchety](#)) starchitect, and in it we learn the backstories of Gehry's iconic buildings—how his life influenced his work and vice versa. From the graceful Walt Disney Concert Hall to Gehry's own audacious home, the history of his varied projects proves fascinating, and Goldberger's insight into how the city of Los Angeles incubated the innovator's budding brilliance is spot on. With big plans on Gehry's end for [reviving the river](#) and [amping up Sunset Strip](#), this book couldn't be more timely. For an added bonus, slip in to [Goldberger's in-person discussion with Gehry](#) at LACMA on Sunday, September 13.

Best of the Rest

[*Strangers Drowning: Grappling with Impossible Idealism, Drastic Choices, and the Overpowering Urge to Help*](#)



(Penguin Press, \$27.95, out September 29) By Larissa MacFarquhar

What motivates the uber-selfless to sacrifice in ways that make the rest of us squirm? Who are the people who would choose the strangers in the classic thought experiment, “Should you save your mother from drowning, or two strangers”? In a series of sensitive case studies, acclaimed journalist MacFarquhar examines lives of the full-time do-gooders who give it their all and then some. There’s a man devoted to the welfare of chickens, a utilitarian philosopher, a nurse turned activist who fasts (almost to death) in protest of Cold War missiles. In the chapter “The Children of Strangers” (you can read it over at [The New Yorker](#)), Sue and Hector adopt and raise nine children to save the kids from the ills of the foster care system—but at what cost? MacFarquhar’s book is a careful meditation on what it means to fully commit to moral living—and whether the all-out commitments of this kind are, in the grand scheme of things, worth it.

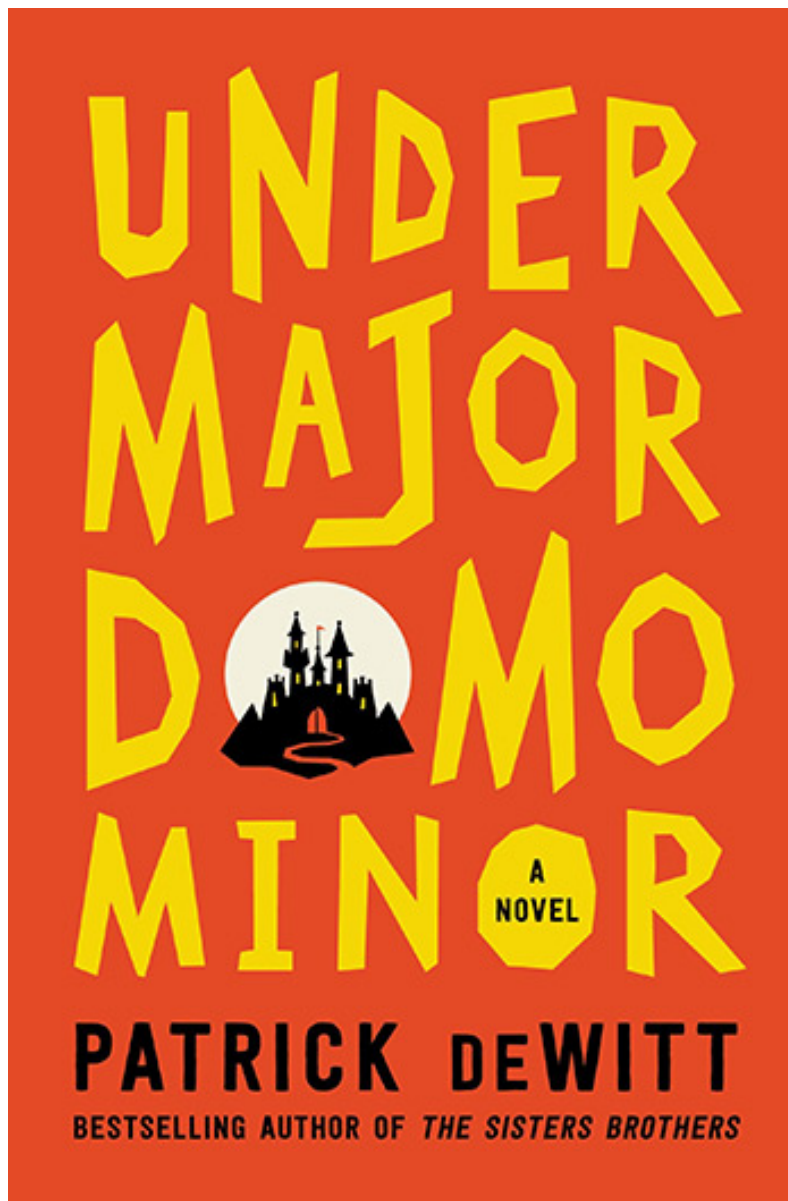
[The Wake](#)



(Graywolf Press, \$16, out September 1) *By Paul Kingsnorth*

Writing in what he calls a “shadow tongue” of Old English that replicates the spelling and flow of the pre-Norman English language, Kingsnorth has crafted a rich and surprisingly readable tale of courage, loss, and fury. When the fateful Norman conquest of England in 1066 ushers in the brutal oppression of William the Conqueror, freedom-loving Buccmaster fights to preserve everything he holds dear—his home, his land, his kin, and his freedom. But as he journeys, revenge-driven, across a ravaged land, he is overwhelmed by the enormity of the evil that has befallen his people. He laments, “*when i woc in the mergen all was blaec though the night had gan and all wolde be blaec after and for all time.*” Up front, *The Wake* may appeal more to Anglophiles and history buffs—the kids who relished reading *Beowulf* in high school—but this intensely human tale will richly reward anyone willing to commit. It’s linguistic revelry: dynamic, gripping, and masterful.

[Undermajordomo Minor](#)



(Ecco, \$26.00, out September 15) By Patrick deWitt

If it's irreverent whimsy you seek, a fairytale for adults, then you'll find yourself at home in the twisted fantasy land of deWitt's *Undermajordomo Minor*. In this wry subversion of the fable, the pathetic Lucien "Lucy" Minor leaves home to become the undermajordomo to the majordomo of the eerie Castle Von Aux (for those unfamiliar with the role of majordomo, think [Gustave H.](#) or *Batman's* Alfred). Once there, Lucy has a series of uncomfortable run-ins with madmen, petty thieves, dukes, duchesses, and lovely ladies. The land is rife with intrigue and oddities; there's a Very Large Hole, a disastrous love triangle, and the sage advice that "One doesn't have to smell like salami if one doesn't wish it." It's a fresh comedy of manners—farcical, funny, unsettling, and downright weird. You haven't had this much fun since *The Princess Bride*. Need convincing? Preview a chapter at [The National Post](#).

Tags: [Books](#), [Claire Vaye Watkins](#), [Frank Gehry](#), [George Carlin](#), [Kelly Carlin](#), [Literature](#)