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## Need a gift for a book lover this holiday? Your search ends here

By [DEBORAH DUNDAS](#) Books Editor  
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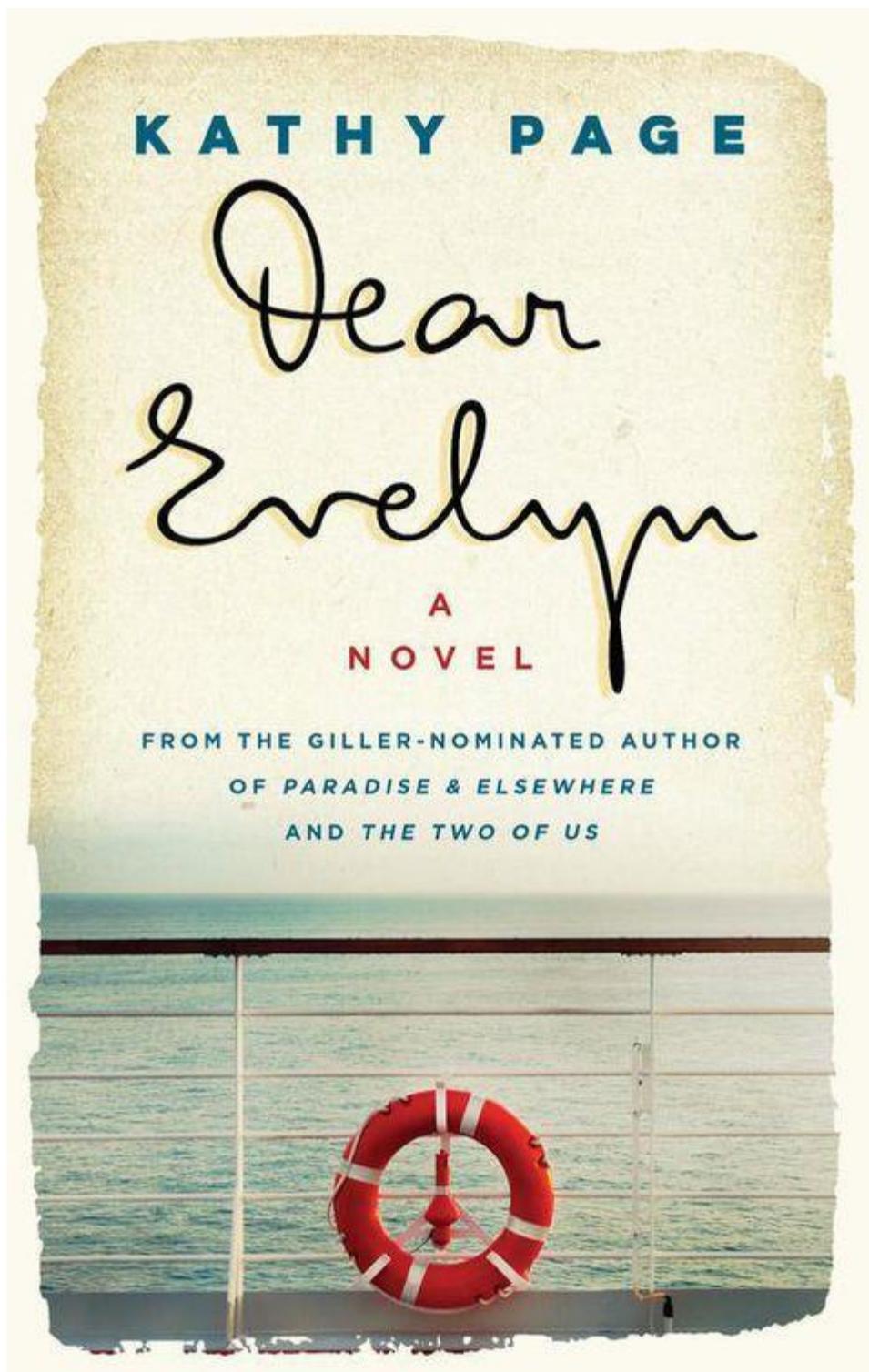
Books make the perfect present: they're thoughtful, they last, they're reasonably priced — and they open up worlds to everyone you give them to. What to choose? Look at award winners, look at bestseller lists and look at what we've picked out in the first instalment of our books gift guide.

## Big reads with something to say



Look at award winners, look at bestseller lists and look at what we've picked out in the first instalment of our books gift guide. (ANDREW FRANCIS WALLACE / TORONTO STAR)

1. *Washington Black*, Esi Edugyan (Harper Collins, \$33.99) An expansive tale that swept up nominations for the Man Booker Prize and the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, and won the Giller Prize. It's also highly readable, hitting the sweet spot between having some depth to it and being a page-turner.
2. *Dear Evelyn*, Kathy Page (Biblioasis, \$19.95) The story was inspired by letters sent by Page's own parents during the Second World War. Page's storytelling so captured the imagination that it won the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and was named a 2018 best book of the year by Kirkus. Readable and with something to say.



3. *Songs for the Cold of Heart*, Eric Dupont (Baraka, \$29.95) Here is a book that did fabulously well in Quebec, winning prizes and selling more than 60,000 copies. It was shortlisted for the Giller and the small,

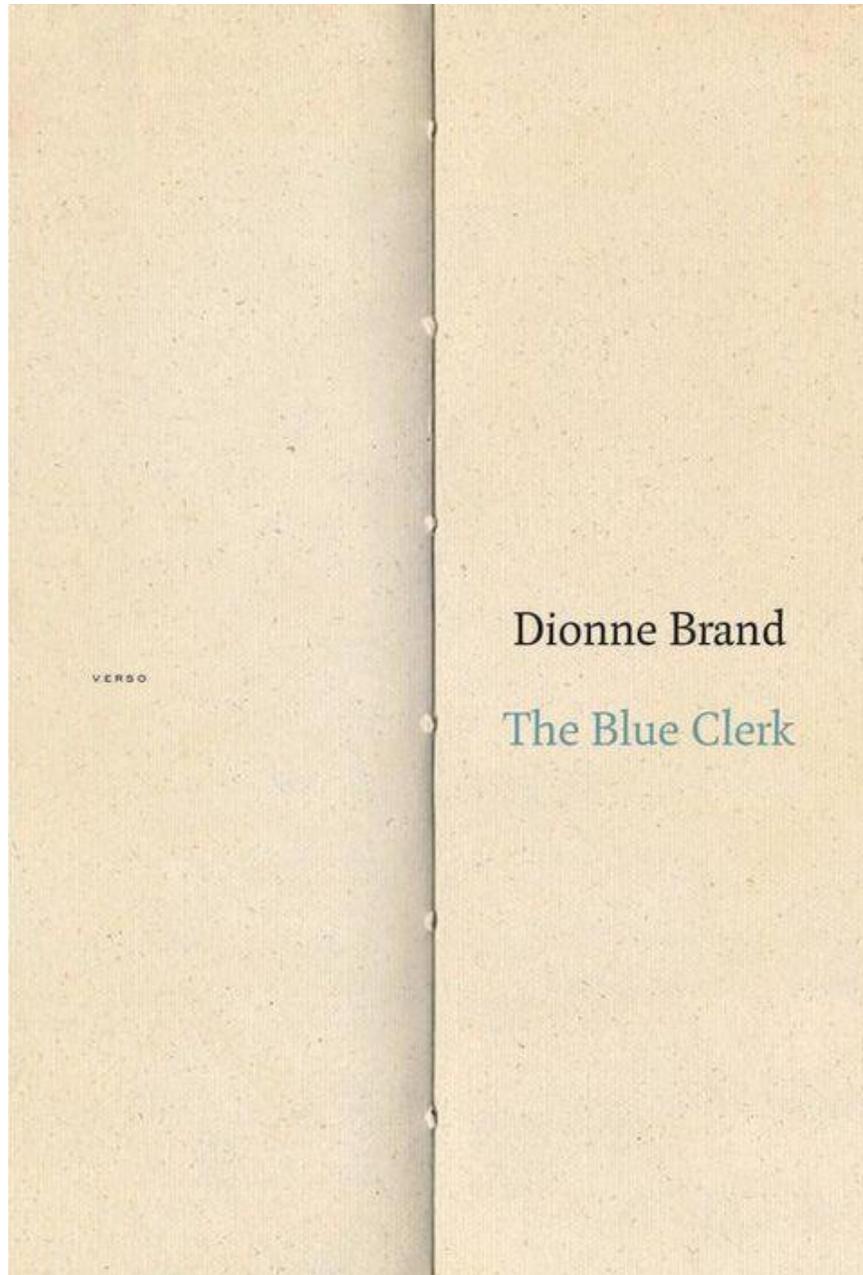
independent press that published this sweeping, saga of a page-turner printed tens of thousands more copies. Get your hands on one; we don't read enough books in translation.

4. *Trickster Drift*, Eden Robinson (Knopf Canada, \$32) *Son of a Trickster*, the first in this planned trilogy, took readers, the bestsellers lists and the publishing world by storm. In this second book, Jared returns: he's now 17 and sober. Plus: you can buy the first one, too, if you're ponying up for someone really special and Part 3 will make gift giving easy next time.

## Culture Vultures

1. *The Flame*, Leonard Cohen (McClelland & Stewart, \$32.95) We've been looking forward to this since it was [first announced](#) a year ago. Cohen was working on this collection when he died, so it's not merely a best of; it's filled with work the poet himself selected and ordered, along with writings from his notebooks, prose and illustrations. If you have a real Cohen fan on your list (or are one yourself), his publisher has also released all of his poetry and novels in a starkly beautiful new series.

2. *The Blue Clerk*, Dionne Brand (McClelland & Stewart, \$32.95) This is a beautiful volume as an object: it's bound such that it lays flat, leaving the folios and the threads holding them together exposed as the spine, a reminder that a book is constructed. Inside, the Blue Clerk guides us through the thoughts, snippets and bits of writing an author leaves behind when they choose what to put in a book.



3. *Buffy Sainte-Marie: The Authorized Biography*, Andrea Warner (Greystone Books, \$36) With a foreword by Joni Mitchell, and written by pop-culture expert Warner, this biography of the legendary singer looks at her music and career in the heart of the 1960s and '70s, her work as an activist, and intimate details of at times very difficult, traumatic and violent experiences in her personal life.

4. *Johnny Cash: The Life and Legacy of the Man In Black*, Alan Light (Smithsonian Books, \$54) Johnny Cash has a timelessness about him; he is cool and new generations are always rediscovering him. This book is sumptuous with early pictures of Cash, his family, memorabilia, and a narrative by Light that includes interviews with Cash and chronicles his life and musical legacy.

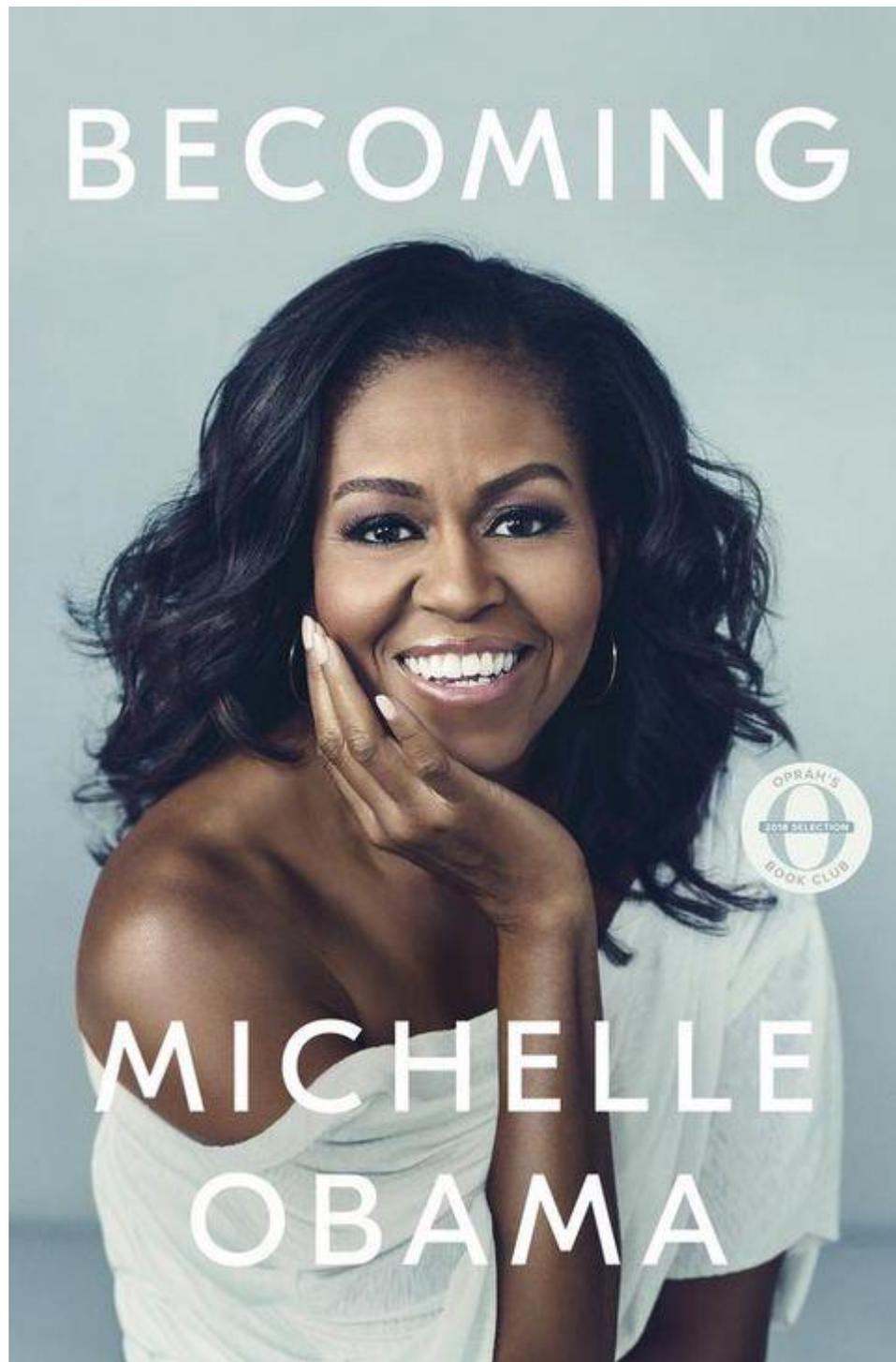
5. *I'm Afraid Of Men*, Vivek Shraya (Penguin Canada, \$17.95) Shraya, a transgender artist, is making a name for herself as a real cultural powerhouse. Part of the reason for that is undoubtedly her honesty and her hopefulness. This emotional and sometimes painful memoir explores how masculinity was imposed on her when she was a boy and shows us how we might learn to cherish everyone, no matter their differences.

### **Stories of people who are larger than life**

1. *Napoleon: A Life*, Adam Zamoyski (Basic Books, \$45) Every year there's a big biography of a historical figure that captures everyone's imaginations. This year, *Napoleon* is the one. It's readable, accessible and focuses less on dates and battles than it does on the man.

2. *Handel in London: The Making of a Genius*, Jane Glover (Macmillan, \$50.99) Again, this is not your typical biography. Rather it's written for music lovers by a music lover who knows her stuff — Jane Glover is also a veteran conductor — covers the composer's life, and gives us a real sense of who he was and how his music kept up with the times in which he lived.

3. *Becoming*, Michelle Obama (Crown, \$40) It sold 1.4 million copies in its first week, making this one of the must-read biographies of the season. Why? Probably because it's inspiring. Obama has a voice that resonates when she speaks; that same strong voice is heard here, and when she talks about the value in her own story she helps us understand the value in our own.



**What else would you get a book lover?**

**1.** *Women Who Write Are Dangerous*, Stefan Bollmann (Abbeville Press, \$29.99) For women who disrupt narratives — and those who admire them — this is both a powerful volume thanks to the foreword by

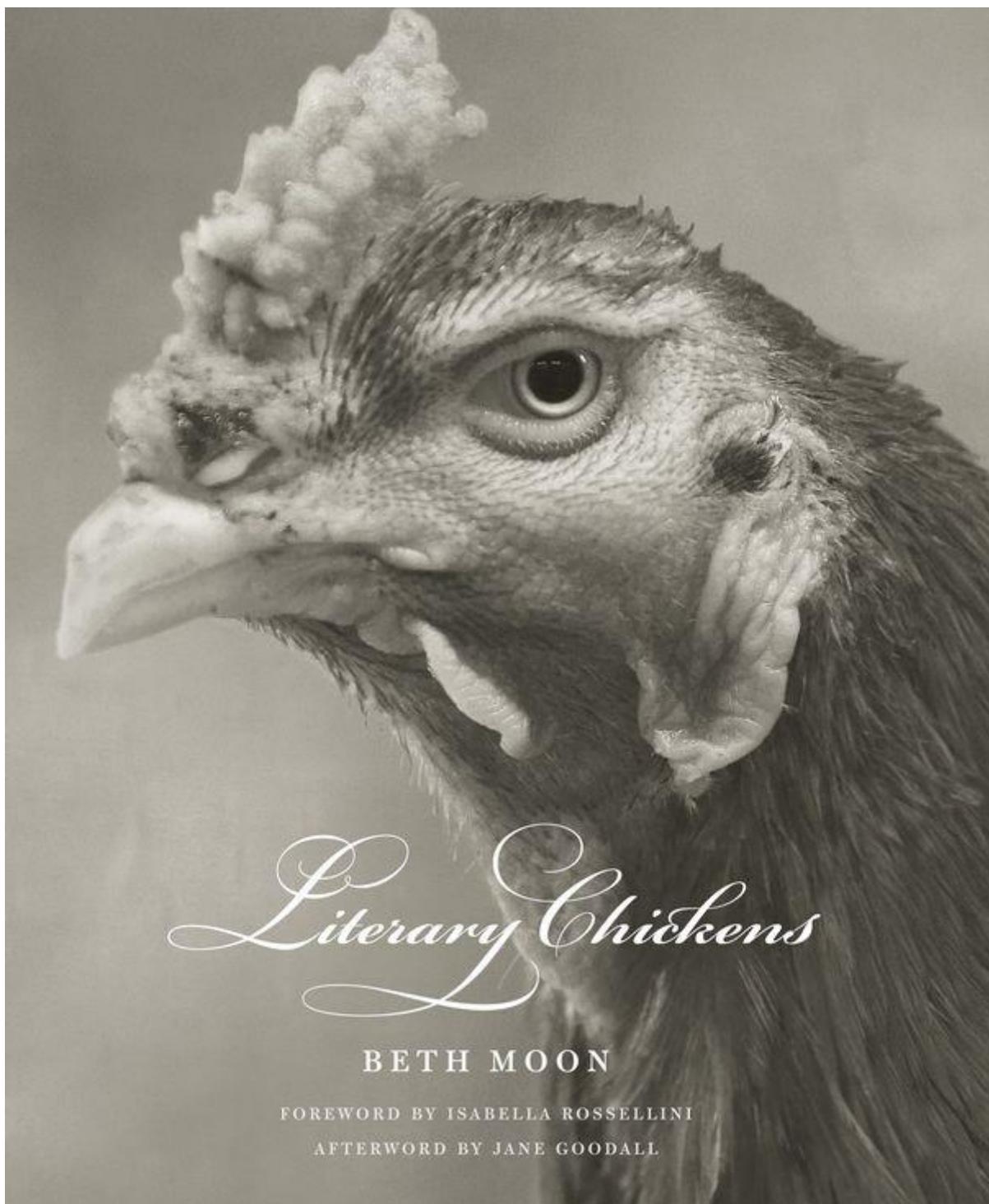
novelist Francine Prose and an introduction that explores how women have overcome obstacles to writing, and a lovely survey of just under 50 women writers from across the centuries, beginning with Hildegard of Bingen, born in 1098, to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, born in 1977, and our own Margaret Atwood.

**2. *Watch Your Tongue: What Our Everyday Sayings and Idioms Figuratively Mean*, by Mark Abley (Simon & Schuster, \$29.99)** For lovers of word play and of the English language — and for those who sometimes have a difficult time figuring it out — this is an exploration of where the idioms we use every day came from. Why, for example, do we get cold feet when we're scared?

**3. *The Daily Charles Dickens: A Year of Quotes*, edited by James R. Kincaid (The University of Chicago Press, \$20.95)** Dickens was a chronicler of Victorian times, an entertainer and a fighter for social justice. So what book lover wouldn't want a daily quote to chew on to start the day? That's the conceit of this book, a sweet stocking stuffer for book lovers.

**4. *1,000 books to Read Before You Die*, James Mustich (Workman, \$49.95)** With brief explanations of why they're important, Mustich rounds up books and organizers by author, from Margaret Atwood and Carol Shields to Ta-Nehisi Coates, and includes fiction, biography, children's books and more. Read this and you'll be able to dip into cocktail party conversations this holiday season and figure out what to read next the rest of the year.

**5. *Literary Chickens*, Beth Moon (Abbeville Press, \$45.50)** In one of the oddest but somehow most interesting books I've seen this season, the renowned photographer Beth Moon has taken black and white portraits of chickens and paired them with literary quotes — Dostoevsky, Virginia Woolf, Bram Stoker — that, somehow, impart their gravitas and individuality to the way we see the chickens. The whole point being that animals, even chickens, have personalities. With an introduction by Isabella Rossellini and an afterward from Jane Goodall, no less.



(ABBEVILLE PRESS VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS)

**'Tis The Season**

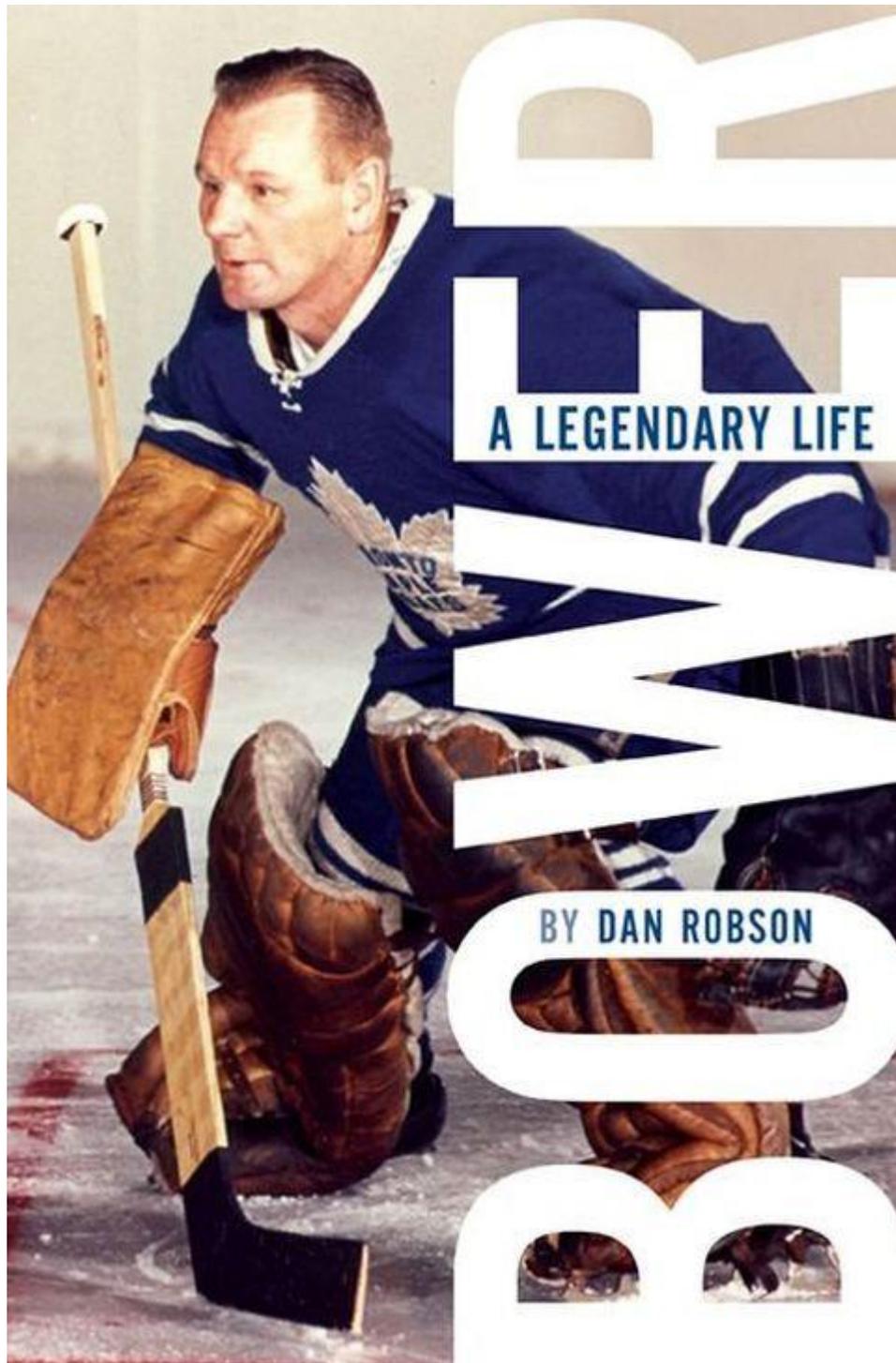
1. *Half Spent Was The Night, A Witches' Yuletide*, Ami McKay (Knopf Canada, \$20) A Christmas ghost story is a tradition that harkens back to pagan times and earlier. McKay's sweet little book about three witches makes a lovely stocking stuffer. See also Seth's *Christmas Ghost Stories* published by Biblioasis — they put out a couple of these small volumes every year, making them very collectible.

2. *The Deal of a Lifetime and Other Stories*, Fredrik Backman (Simon & Schuster, 24.99) *The Deal of a Lifetime* is a profound and moving novella set on Christmas Eve. It tells the story of the intertwining destinies of a man who has built a global business empire but lost his family in the process and a courageous little girl fighting for her life, and it asks the question: if you had the chance to change your legacy, would you take it?

3. *Guinness World Records Gamer's Edition* (Guinness World Records, \$18.99). This is a holiday stalwart, with expectations of it appearing gift-wrapped high across this land and others. The regular Guinness World Records 2019 is also out, but this new gamer's edition might appeal, too.

### **Winning picks for sports lovers**

1. *Bower*, Dan Robson (HarperCollins, \$32.99) Hockey legend Johnny Bower died on Boxing Day 2017, leading to a national outpouring of affection for the former Toronto Maple Leafs goalie. Dan Robson, who is quickly becoming the go-to guy for writing about sports legends, tells a lovely story that chronicles Bower's Canadian dream. There are plenty of other hockey books out there, too, for fans: *Cujo* by Curtis Joseph with Kirstie McLellan Day (HarperCollins); *Don Cherry's Hockey Greats and More* (Doubleday Canada); and *Bobby: My Story in Pictures*, by Bobby Orr (Viking), to name but a few.



2. *The League: How Five Rivals Created the NFL and Launched a Sports Empire*, John Eisenberg (Basic Books, \$39) Here in the Great White North, the sports league we most pay attention to is the NHL. But the story behind the creation of the NFL is equally intriguing. These days it

takes in \$14 billion (U.S.) a year, but it started with five guys in the 1920s.

**3. *Fishing the High Country: A Memoir of the River*, Wayne Curtis (Goose Lane, \$19.95)** A quiet, reflective, meditative book, this memoir from Curtis, who grew up on the Miramichi River, talks about the place and the place of fishing in it, on being a guide, on tying flies. It might encourage the telling of a dedicated fisher's own tall tales.

**4. *Born Into It: A Fan's Life*, Jay Baruchel (HarperCollins, \$22.99)** OK, one more hockey book. But this one's from a fan's perspective, specifically, a Montreal Canadiens fan. Even those who don't know their Bruins from their Sabres will enjoy this because the writing is really what it's about. He lived in both Montreal and Toronto so he has stories to tell and Baruchel's book is top notch.