



BARNES & NOBLE
RECOMMENDS

MAIN SELECTION

"Masterful . . . deftly rendered and deeply satisfying. For days on end, I
woke with this story on my mind." — DAVID WROBLEWSKI,
author of The Story of Edgar Sattelle

Crooked
Letter,
Crooked
Letter

(A NOVEL)



TOM FRANKLIN

Unputdownable.

This word is not in every dictionary, but it is one that booksellers often use—and the one we use to describe our Barnes & Noble Recommends Main Selections. Nothing gives us more pleasure than recommending books that we have read and loved, and finding unputdownable books gives us the greatest pleasure of all.

Barnes & Noble Recommends provides us with the opportunity to share the books we've enjoyed with you. Each of our Main Selections is chosen by a group of our discriminating and independent-minded booksellers from across the country, and all are riveting reads that are sure to provoke stimulating discussion. Every one of these novels is a book you'll want to recommend to another reader, including our newest selection: *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter* by Tom Franklin.

PREVIOUS SELECTIONS INCLUDE:

THE THIRTEENTH TALE
Diane Setterfield

THE DOUBLE BIND
Chris Bohjalian

THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST
Mohsin Hamid

STORMY WEATHER
Paulette Jiles

GARDEN SPELLS
Sarah Addison Allen

THE VANISHING ACT OF ESME LENNOX
Maggie O'Farrell

BELONG TO ME
Marisa de los Santos

CHILD 44
Tom Rob Smith

AMERICA AMERICA
Ethan Canin

THE GUERNSEY LITERARY
AND POTATO PEEL PIE SOCIETY
Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows

THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO
Stieg Larsson

DOG ON IT
Spencer Quinn

PRAYERS FOR SALE
Sandra Dallas

THE PHYSICK BOOK OF DELIVERANCE DANE
Katherine Howe

THE DAY THE FALLS STOOD STILL
Cathy Marie Buchanan

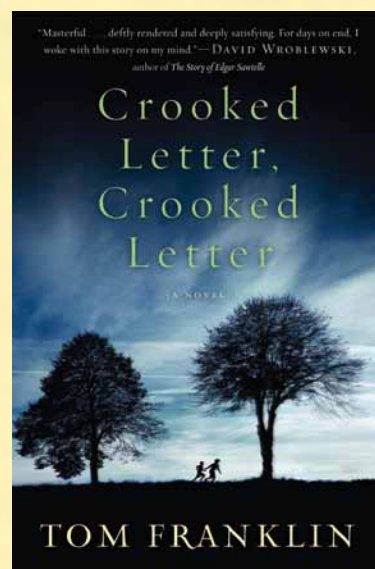
THE BRUTAL TELLING
Louise Penny

THE SCENT OF RAIN AND LIGHTNING
Nancy Pickard

A VINTAGE AFFAIR
Isabel Wolff

A Suspenseful Tale of Fate and Friendship.

When Larry Ott finds an intruder in his own home, the gun that's jammed into his chest seems like the last draw of his lonely destiny. Folks in Chabot, Mississippi, had wished him dead for more than 20 years—ever since he'd taken Cindy Walker for a date at the drive-in and she was never heard from again.



But growing up an unsure, book-loving boy in a culture of hunters and hard-drinking mechanics, Larry was something of an outcast long before Cindy disappeared. Even Larry's mother knew it, praying each night for God to send her son a "special friend." When Silas Jones and his mother moved from Chicago into an abandoned cabin on the Ott family's extensive property, Larry thought God might be listening. The boys were drawn together despite their differences: Silas was fascinated by Larry's gun collection and his retelling of Stephen King's horror stories; Larry was intrigued by the young black boy's prowess at baseball and his social ease. Yet with racism still rampant in the rural South in the late 1970s, family and peer pressure forced the boys to keep their relationship hidden, until Larry was suspected of killing the missing girl and their bond was irrevocably broken.

Years later, they're reunited by fate when another young girl disappears. While Larry lies in a hospital bed suspected of both murder and attempted suicide, Silas, now the town's constable, must plunge into the painful past and excavate a long buried secret to make peace with the man who was once his friend—before it's too late.

Richly evoking the claustrophobia of a stunted life and the stifling social atmosphere of a close-knit Southern community, Tom Franklin intricately charts a twisted web of disappointments, betrayals, and bewildered but surviving goodness. As each event leads to ever more startling disclosures, it becomes clear that even the most crooked paths can lead to forgiveness and redemption. A suspenseful and beautifully composed blend of crime drama and literary fiction, *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter* is a gripping revelation of human truths.

An Excerpt from *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter*

Out the row of windows in front of him were more tables and chairs and, beyond, the gully overflowing with kudzu, trash caught in it like bugs in a spiderweb. Silas remembered riding the school bus as a boy, after they'd left the cabin on the Ott land and moved to Fulsom, how the landscape blurred beyond the windows as you rode, him on his way to school, baseball, his future. Maybe, before its recruitment to bar service, he'd ridden this very bus. Now look out. Nothing but a gully full of weeds and garbage. Everything frozen. Was that what childhood was, things rushing by out a window, the trees connected by motion, going too fast for him to notice consequences? If so, what was adulthood? The bus stopping? A man in his forties, slammed with his past, the kudzu moving faster than he was?

About the Author

Tom Franklin's first book, the collection *Poachers*, featured an Edgar Award-winning title story and garnered considerable recognition. "I'm reminded, by the evocative strength of the prose and the relentlessness of the imagination, of Faulkner," said no less an authority than Philip Roth.

Franklin's first novel, *Hell at the Breech*, based on the true story of a feud in Clarke County, Alabama, in the 1890s, earned Franklin similar acclaim from the likes of Dennis Lehane and Rick Bragg, as well as wide readership. His second novel, *Smonk*, set in Alabama in 1911, continued his success; the *San Francisco Chronicle* called it "a David Lynch and Quentin Tarantino codirection of *Deadwood*."



While the heady comparisons his work has garnered—to Harper Lee, Cormac McCarthy, and Flannery O'Connor as well as the author of *The Sound and the Fury*—are appreciated by the native Alabaman, Franklin takes them in stride: "I don't think anyone should be compared to William Faulkner. He is the best writer in the last century." Nevertheless, Franklin's rhythmic, tempered prose combines with his deft exploration of human drama in situations fraught with violence and racial tension to establish its author as a singular and powerful voice in the rich tradition of Southern fiction. *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter* is his first novel with a contemporary setting.

Tom Franklin lives in Oxford, Mississippi, with his wife, the poet Beth Ann Fennelly, and their children, and teaches in the University of Mississippi's MFA program.

Get the most out of *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter* with these reading group discussion questions.

1. The epigraph reveals the origins of the novel's title. Why do you think Franklin chose to use "Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter" and what significance does the phrase have in the story?
2. With his interest in books and horror films, Larry set himself apart from his contemporaries. Could he have done anything to change people's opinions of him? Would you call Larry a loser? What about Silas?
3. When Larry is shot at the beginning of the novel, he is sympathetic to his attacker, thinking "all monsters were misunderstood." Why does he think this? Do you think Larry considers himself a monster?
4. Franklin goes back and forth between past and present to tell Larry's story. Are Larry and Silas prisoners of their childhoods?
5. Larry's relationship with his father, Carl, is strained even before Cindy disappears. How might things have been different if Larry knew the truth about his family sooner? Why did Carl force Larry and Silas to fight as boys? What impact did that fight have on their friendship?
6. When Silas visits Mrs. Ott, he's reminded of when he first arrived in town with his mother, both of them coatless in the cold. Larry's mother offered them coats but refused to invite them to ride in her car. Was this behavior cruel? Can you think of other parts of the novel that straddle the boundary between kindness and cruelty?
7. After the fallout with Silas, Larry considered Wallace Stringfellow to be his friend. What drew Wallace to Larry? How did Larry encourage the friendship? Were the two men really friends?
8. Silas left southern Mississippi, then returned, while Larry stayed put. How does the setting shape the novel? Could a similar tragedy have played out the same way in another small town?
9. Racism is an underlying theme throughout the novel. How does Franklin use his characters to illustrate the tension between black and white residents of the South in a post-Civil Rights era?

Further Reading:

Also by Tom Franklin:
POACHERS: STORIES
HELL AT THE BREECH
SMONK

Also:
TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD By Harper Lee
THE SCENT OF RAIN AND LIGHTNING By Nancy Pickard

Praise for *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter*

FROM OUR BOOKSELLERS

"Mesmerizing! The sights, the smells, even the sounds come alive as the story is unveiled, and what a story it is! Be prepared for a wild ride (and a good read)!"
Catherine Wareham, Blaine, MN

"Tom Franklin has created a story full of surprises, humor, and (in the end) compassion. Move over, Boo Radley, there's a new neighbor in town."
Rea Valenzuela, Houston, TX

"A literary mystery about the tragedy of the secrets we keep. I couldn't help but be reminded of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It kept me up late, and got me up early, to see what was around the next bend."
Jami Davis, Florence, KY

"It kept me awake until 3:00 a.m.! So well written, on par with Greg Iles and Dennis Lehane. I now have a new author to follow!"
Melissa Moore, Duluth, MN

FROM WRITERS

"Long after the other 75 novels of suspense you've read this year merge in your memory, you'll vividly recall this novel. Franklin has written not just a thriller of the first order, but a very fine novel, indeed."
Richard Russo

"A masterful performance, deftly rendered and deeply satisfying. For days on end, I woke with this story on my mind."
David Wroblewski

"Beautiful writing, a spot-on sense of place, wickedly funny dialogue, and an emotionally potent story charge this highly original, literary crime offering from master stylist Tom Franklin."
George Pelecanos

"A new Tom Franklin novel is always a reason to get excited, but *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter* is more—a cause for celebration."
Dennis Lehane

BARNES & NOBLE
RECOMMENDS

*Crooked Letter,
Crooked Letter*

Publisher Price \$24.99

B&N Price \$17.49

MEMBERS SAVE 40% IN STORE

BNeBook
also available



Join a Book Discussion

Ask a bookseller about discussions
and author appearances in your store.

Start Your Own Reading Group

Ask a bookseller for our free guide,
or visit BN.COM/recommends

Explore More Online

Learn more about the author and find other
Recommends selections at BN.COM/recommends

Prices effective through 11/1/10.