



2021 Reading List

Betty by Tiffany McDaniel (Knopf/PRH)

Born in a bathtub in 1954 to a white mother and a Cherokee father, Betty Carpenter is the sixth of eight siblings. Their life in Breathed, Ohio, is one of poverty and violence--both from outside and within. The lush landscape, rich with birdsong, wild fruit, and blazing stars, becomes a kind of refuge for Betty, but when her family's darkest secrets are brought to light, she has no choice but to reckon with the brutal history hiding in the hills, as well as the heart-wrenching cruelties and incredible characters she encounters. Based on the life of the author's mother.

Blacktop Wasteland: A Novel by S.A. Cosby (Flatiron Books/Macmillan Publishers)

Beauregard ("Bug") Montage has left behind a life of crime. He owns his own automotive business and supports his family. When financial pressures reach the breaking point, and he is offered a job as a getaway driver in a robbery, Beauregard decides that he has no choice but to accept and return to the crime world. However, the "job" goes wrong, and he must fix the damage to protect his family. This novel reads like a high-speed car chase.

The Book of Lost Friends by Lisa Wingate (Ballantine/PRH)

History is brought to life through the story of three young women in the post-Civil War era south and the modern-day teacher who connects her students to their shared stories. As the three young women head for Texas and hope for a new life, they struggle to survive the perilous journey and look for links to their families through the "Lost Friends" advertisements. In 1987, young teacher Benedetta Silva discovers their tale and a chance to make a difference in the tiny, rural town she has come to serve.

The Book of Lost Names by Kristin Hammel (Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster)

What connection does a semi-retired librarian living in Florida have with Nazi Germany? Think espionage, library looting, rescue of Jewish children and secret codes. This story is a roller coaster-love and loss, bravery and betrayal, secrets lost and secrets found. Readers will fall into the weaving of present-day and historical fiction as they make this redemptive journey with our librarian, Eva Traube Abrams

Darling Rose Gold by Stephanie Wrobel (Berkley/PRH)

A highly unusual mother-daughter relationship propels this tale of psychological suspense. Until she was eighteen, Rose Gold believed she was an invalid, constrained by illness and frequent hospital stays. She was actually a victim of her own mother, dosed with poison and lies. When her mother is released from prison and insists on reconciliation, everyone is surprised that she offers her a home. Now that Rose Gold is grown up, who will come out on top when it's time to settle the score?

Deacon King Kong by James McBride (Riverhead Books/PRH)

Picture this: September 1969, "a fumbling, cranky old church deacon known in the neighborhood as Sportcoat shuffles into the courtyard of the Causeway Housing Projects in south Brooklyn, pulls a .38 from his pocket, and in front of everybody shoots the project's drug dealer. The reasons for this

desperate burst of violence and consequences that spring from it lie at the heart of Deacon King Kong." Funny, sharp, and a surprising story of the shooting of a Brooklyn drug dealer and the people who witnessed it.

The Death of Vivek Oji by Akwaeke Emezi (Riverhead Books/PRH)

Kavita has always been protective of her sensitive son Vivek, but accepted the culture of her Nigerian husband and plans to help him become more tough. When her son's dead body is delivered to her front door, the entire family must solve the mystery not just of Vivek's death, but the mystery of Vivek's life and the role they played in the difficulties of that life. A heartbreaking story defined by memorable characters and the tremendous influence of family.

Eight Perfect Murders: A Novel by Peter Swanson (William Morrow/HarperCollins)

Does the perfect crime exist? A mystery bookstore owner has posted a blog entry that lists the crime novels with foolproof killings. Law enforcement officials suspect that a copycat is using this list to commit a string of homicides. Everyone tries to connect the crimes and identify the killer. However, in this book, no one is as innocent as they first appear!

Ghosts of Harvard: A Novel by Francesca Serritella (Random House/PRH)

Cadence Archer has been accepted into Harvard, and much to her parents' dismay, she makes the decision to attend knowing that her brother, Eric, a schizophrenic, committed suicide while at Harvard himself. Cadence seeks answers as she walks around campus, retracing Eric's steps, meeting his friends and a professor whom Eric revered. Her pursuit and grief becomes overwhelming, she finds herself hearing voices, and wonders if she will meet the same fate as Eric. This heart wrenching novel takes a deep dive into the world of schizophrenia and its impact on the lives of those it touches.

The God Game, A Novel by Danny Tobey (St. Martin's Press/Macmillan Publishers)

What happens in the virtual world stays in the virtual world, right? A group of high school friends accepts an invitation to play "The God Game": a virtual reality game that promises participants everything they want as long as they obey the game's orders and rules. However, the players soon discover that the Artificial Intelligence "God" is also unforgiving and punishes any acts that it judges as disobedient (including leaving the game).

The House in the Cerulean Sea by T.J. Klune (Tor Books/Macmillan Publishers)

Picture Mr. Linus Baker, living his quiet life as a case worker with the Department in charge of Magical Youth. His solitary by-the-book existence is turned upside down when he is assigned to a mysterious remote island to care for six unusual orphans including a gnome, a sprite, a wyvern, an unidentifiable green blob, a were-Pomeranian, and the Antichrist. With this cast of characters and more, Linus will never again be the same.

The Imperfects: A Novel by Amy Meyerson (Park Row-Harlequin/HarperCollins)

Meet the Miller's--siblings Ashley, Jake and Beck. This dysfunctional family is thrown together by the death of their grandmother, leaving them stewing with resentments, bitterness, and past betrayals. Into this setting, a bombshell is dropped! They discover an unexplainable rare priceless diamond in her possessions. Their journey to learn more about the diamond leads them on a journey to learn the truth of their grandmother's past and their way back together. Based on the true story of the Florentine Diamond, a 137-carat yellow gemstone that went missing from the Austrian Empire a century ago.

The Jane Austen Society by Natalie Jenner (St. Martin's Press/Macmillan Publishers)

In post-World War II England, in a small English village, a group of people get together to save Chawton, Jane Austen's home, as well as her legacy. Though the only thing they have in common is their love for Austen's work, that connection transcends their quest and brings warmth and love into their own lives. A charming tribute to a beloved author.

Mexican Gothic by Silvia Moreno-Garcia (Del Rey Books/PRH)

Genre-blending of fantasy, gothic, and horror in which a spirited young woman discovers the haunting secrets of an English-type mansion in 1950s Mexico. Upon her arrival to check on her cousin Catalina, Noemi finds a darkness within the walls and within the people who inhabit it...a darkness that begins to creep up and consume her. Our young flighty debutante deals with mind-blowing horrors with panache. This book creeps up on you!

Miss Benson's Beetle: A Novel by Rachel Joyce (Dial Press/PRH)

Spinster schoolteacher Marjorie Benson is struggling with life in post WWII England, lonely and alone. One day too many of this life and she snaps and decides to set out on a quest for a childhood dream-the golden beetle of New Caledonia. We are introduced to a crazy cast of characters as Ms. Benson prepares for her improbable journey including Enid Pretty, totally wrong for the role yet so right in many ways. We watch the two very different women share adventure, danger, sharing, and healing in a story that will steal your heart.

My Dark Vanessa: A Novel by Kate Elizabeth Russell (William Morrow/HarperCollins)

This timely debut novel explores what it means to examine your own past with clear eyes. When Vanessa Wye was 15-years-old, she had a relationship with her much older teacher that she considered her first love story. Seventeen years later, she is contacted by another woman who is accusing the teacher of sexual abuse and has to look back and ask herself if she was his beloved or his victim. Not a comfortable story, but gripping and thought-provoking.

The Roxy Letters: A Novel by Mary Pauline Lowry (Simon & Schuster)

Follow Roxy through this comic romp of a novel as she writes letters to her disappointing ex-boyfriend and sometimes roommate, Everett. Funny and endearing misadventures abound as she searches for a more meaningful job and creative inspiration, cares for her beloved pets and tries to save Austin, Texas from gentrification.

The Stone Girl: A Novel by Dirk Wittenborn (W.W. Norton & Company)

Evie, an art restorer, was raped by a member of an exclusive all-male club when she was a teenager. In revenge, she shot the man who did it, but it did not end there. Years later, when the same man re-appears in her life to threaten Evie and her family, Evie must prepare for the final battle. Can she win against the rich powerful brotherhood of the Lost Boys?

Transcendent Kingdom by Yaa Gyasi (Knopf/PRH)

Gifty prefers life in the lab to being around humans, spending her time studying the neuroscience of addiction. But she can't escape the pain of her beloved brother's death, her mother's addiction, her father's abandonment, and the racism her family endured in the United States. She will have to turn inward to decide the best tool to help her understand human suffering, the hard sciences or the faith of her childhood.

Valentine: A Novel by Elizabeth Wetmore (HarperCollins)

Set in West Texas 1976, a young Hispanic girl, Gloria Ramirez, is raped by a roughneck. Beaten and barefoot, she manages to get away and lands on the front porch of Mary Rose Whitehead, who works courageously to protect and find justice for Gloria. However, racism runs just as deep as the oil in the ground, and bravery comes at a very high price.

We Are All the Same in the Dark: A Novel by Julia Heaberlin (Ballantine Books/PRH)

A young girl is found abandoned at the side of the road in Texas. The man who finds her is a suspect in the disappearance of both his father and sister, a sister he still talks to even though she is not there. The sheriff has a history with the man and she longs to solve the case even though it endangers her marriage. Who is the girl? Why was the crime never solved? Who will ultimately find the answers?

Weather: A Novel by Jenny Offill (Knopf/PRH)

Lizzie works in a university library in Brooklyn, while caring for her husband and son and dealing with the problems of her mother and brother. A request from her former mentor to answer listener emails from her popular podcast showcases Lizzie's humor as she becomes the unofficial shrink for the world of doomsday preppers.

Where We Come From: A novel by Oscar Cásares (Vintage Books-Knopf/PRH)

In this beautifully written novel, Casares explores the emotional complexities of what it means to be bicultural and the power of compassion towards others. Twelve year old Orly is sent to spend the summer in Brownsville with his godmother Nina who has reluctantly become involved in smuggling immigrants. Tense and full of poignant moments, *Where We Come From* tells a story about the meaning of family and home.

A Witch in Time by Constance Sayers (Redhook Publishing/Hachette)

Juliet LaCompte lives in France in 1895 and begins an affair with a married painter. Her mother, a witch, puts a curse on the painter but unwittingly dooms her daughter to relive the affair and die tragically young over and over again. She is overseen by a demon named Luke while she lives on as Nora, Sandra and finally Helen - who finds a way to break the curse and the cycle- but at what cost?

You Had Me at Hola: A Novel by Alexis Daria (Avon Publishing/HarperCollins)

Romance and Hollywood are not always easy. Jasmine and Ashton are actors who are cast together in a new telenovela. As celebrities, they've already struggled with bad relationships and a lack of privacy. When they meet before the series starts shooting, they quickly discover a strong mutual attraction. As professionals, should they sensibly "cool it" and steer clear of temptation?