

# BookPage®

DISCOVER YOUR NEXT GREAT BOOK

DEC 2020

## Gifts galore

Fresh ideas for every reader on your list



## Best Books of 2020

Our editors choose the year's top titles

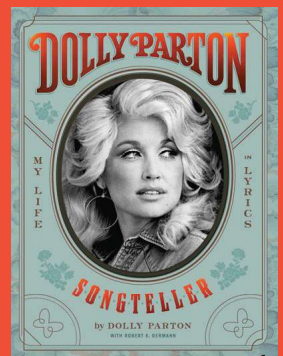
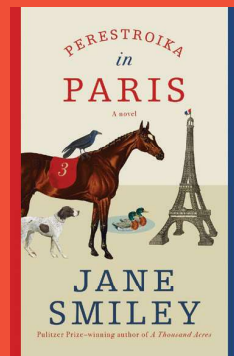
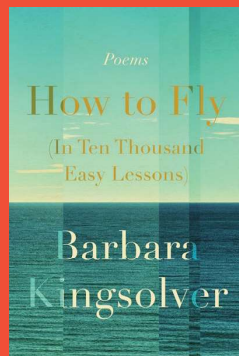
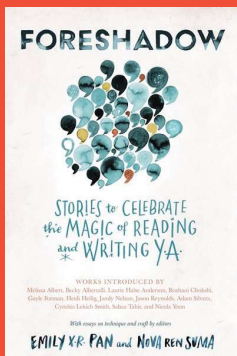
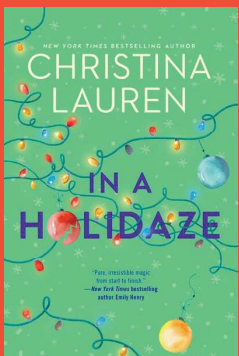


## Seasonal stories

Holiday picture books to share



Also inside



THE PERFECT GIFT TO GIVE

The epic new novel from

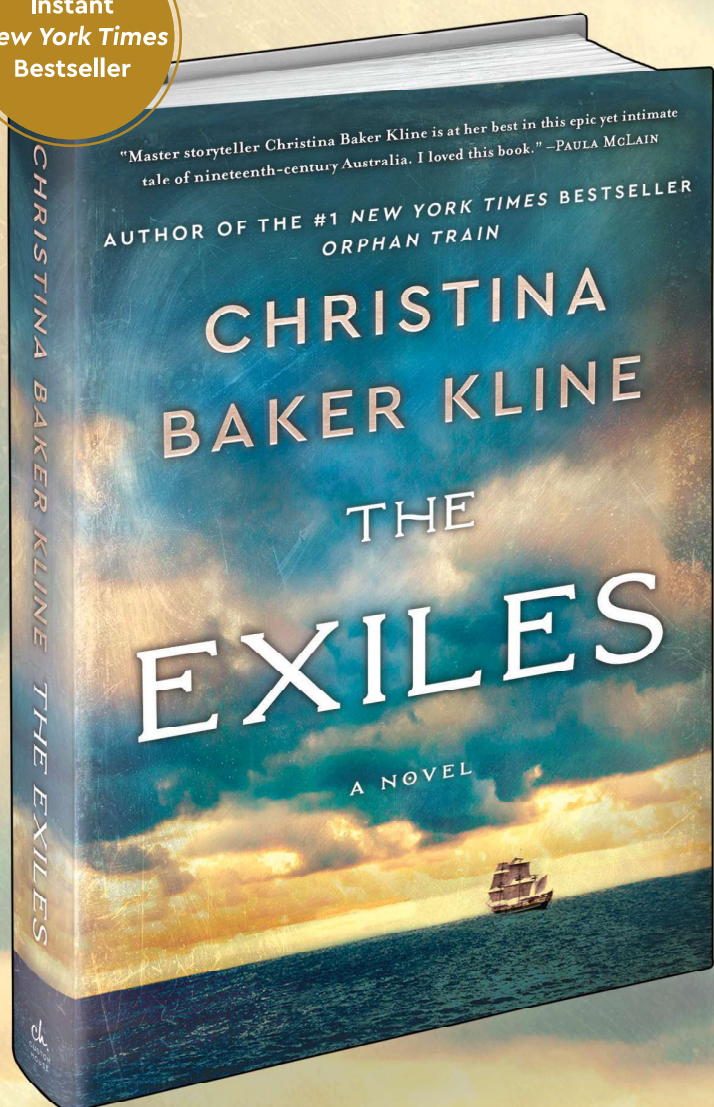
CHRISTINA BAKER KLINE

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of

ORPHAN TRAIN

A sweeping story based on true events that brings to life a trio of women's lives in 19th century Australia

Instant  
New York Times  
Bestseller



“Master storyteller Christina Baker Kline is at her best in this epic yet intimate tale — a vivid and rewarding feat of both empathy and imagination.

I loved this book.”

—PAULA McLAIN,  
bestselling author of *The Paris Wife*

“Monumental...

This episode in history gets a top-notch treatment by Kline, one of our foremost historical novelists.”

—KIRKUS REVIEWS (starred review)

“Both uplifting and heartbreaking, this beautifully written novel... celebrates the courage and resilience of both the first peoples and the settlers who came after, voluntarily or not.”

—LIBRARY JOURNAL (starred review)

“A tour de force of original thought, imagination and promise...

Kline takes full advantage of fiction — its freedom to create compelling characters who fully illuminate monumental events to make history accessible and forever etched in our minds.”

—HOUSTON CHRONICLE

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HOUSE

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CBakerKline

@BakerKline

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# BookPage®

DECEMBER 2020

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## HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

Suggestions for every reader on  
your list in 2020

pages 4–10

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### EDITORIAL POLICY

BookPage is a selection guide for new books. Our editors select for review the best books published in a variety of categories. BookPage is editorially independent; only books we highly recommend are featured. Stars are assigned by BookPage editors to indicate titles that are exceptionally executed in their genre or category.

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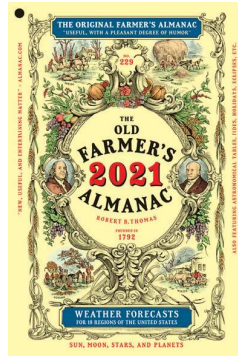
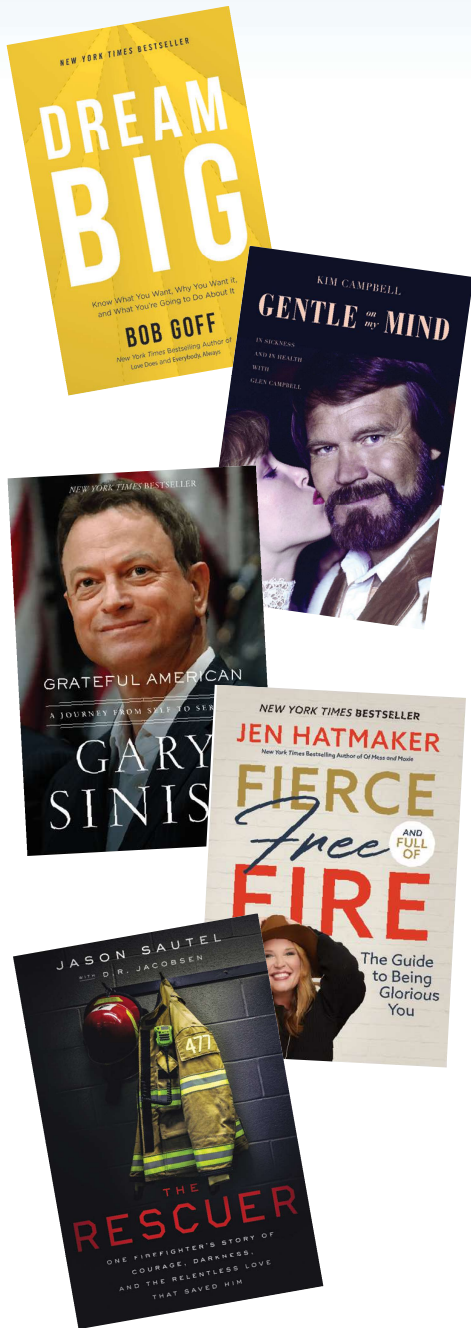
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### The best reads for quarantine

Cuddle up with a cup of tea or coffee, your favorite blanket and a comfy chair, then check out these picks for best quarantine reads!

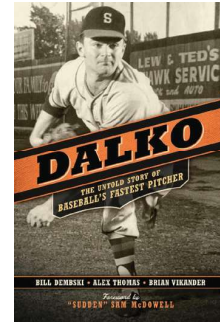
\$24.99–\$28.99 | Thomas Nelson



### The Old Farmer's Almanac 2021

Enjoy useful, fascinating and fun facts for an entire year! Available in hardcover, paperback and at [store.almanac.com](http://store.almanac.com).

\$8.95–\$16.95  
Old Farmer's Almanac

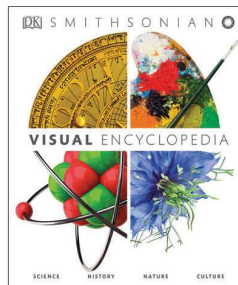


### Dalko

Bill Dembski, Alex Thomas & Brian Vikander

The fascinating and tragic story of baseball's fastest pitcher and the forces that kept ultimate greatness just beyond his reach.

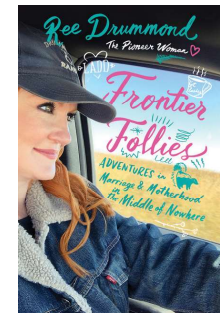
\$26.95  
Influence Publishers



### Visual Encyclopedia

Covering science, nature, space, history, the arts, technology and more, this landmark piece of reference publishing offers a reliable, visually stunning and family-friendly alternative to online information sources.

\$50 | DK

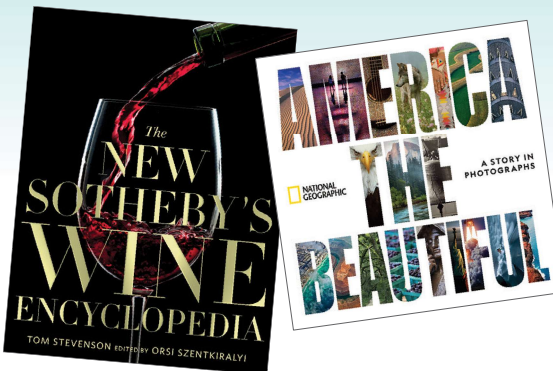


### Frontier Follies

Ree Drummond

The #1 bestselling author and star of the Food Network show "The Pioneer Woman," Drummond shares down-to-earth, hilarious stories and musings on marriage, motherhood and country life.

\$26.99  
William Morrow



### Two stellar gifts

Choose from the most up-to-date and comprehensive guide to the world of wine, boasting more than 400 photographs and 100 maps, or an inspiring collection of photography that includes more than 250 images of the beautiful USA.

\$40–\$75 | National Geographic



### The best gift books of the season

These great reads are perfect for everyone on your shopping list.

\$27.99–\$35  
Flatiron

## Great holiday gift books from Workman

This fantastic collection of books will appeal to every reader who hungers for interesting and thoughtful content. From astronauts to gorgeous car photography and inspiration for new hobbies, Workman has a book for everyone on your list!

\$15.95–\$75 | Workman | Artisan | Storey



## Weird is the new normal

The star of “Crazy Ex-Girlfriend” on her frank, funny memoir

Comedian, screenwriter, actor and show-runner Rachel Bloom adds “author” to her list of credentials with *I Want to Be Where the Normal People Are* (Grand Central, \$28, 9781538745359), a collection of personal essays and hilarious tidbits from her life and career.

**The title of your book is interesting since, if you actually were normal (whatever that means), you probably wouldn't have your extraordinary career. Do you still want to be where the normal people are?**

No, because \*spoiler alert\* there is no such thing as normal. And if I did consider myself normal, all evidence points to the fact that I would be a shallow and boring person.

**You write candidly about your experiences with mental health, specifically obsessive-compulsive disorder. Why was it important for you to share this part of your life?**

This was the most important thing for me to share because it's the biggest example of me feeling out of place and completely alone. For many years I didn't talk about this part of my life with anybody because I was really ashamed, and it weighed on me. So I always knew that, especially in a book about normalcy, this piece of my story was essential. The messages I hope to convey to readers are that you're not as weird as you think you are and you didn't do this to yourself.

**You've always been a theater kid. What was your best theater experience in high school?**

I was in *Honk!*, which is a musical about the ugly duckling, and it was the period of time when I fully found my group of friends and started to become way more confident as a person and performer. When *Honk!* ended, I actually fell into a mini-depression. I think I even said to myself, “The magic time is over.”

**You say fairly late in the book that “writing another book right now sounds like getting a pap smear in a World War I trench.” Was writing this book harder or easier than writing for TV?**

They were equally hard in different ways. The hard part about the book is that I had no one to bounce things off of in the process of writing a draft. There were long stretches of me putting stuff on paper and not knowing whether or not it was garbage. And also, to be scientific: A book is a lot of words, and a TV episode is less words.

**You share several stories about being bullied in school in this book. Have you gone back to any class reunions, and if so, did you bring your Emmy with you?**

I actually missed my 10-year reunion because it was in the thick of season one of “Crazy Ex-Girlfriend,” and I was just too tired, which is such a flex I guess. Not to be a downer, but high school was a lot better than middle school. So if I went back to a reunion, it wouldn't be as triumphant as you'd like because, unfortunately for the sake of my own narrative, people got way nicer.

—Amy Scribner

q&a | rachel bloom



Visit [BookPage.com](http://BookPage.com) to read an extended Q&A with Rachel Bloom and a review of *I Want to Be Where the Normal People Are*.



## The gifts they'll open over and over

These new titles from the bestselling series offer something for everyone. Learn how to use your dreams, celebrate life after 60 and feel that Christmas spirit!

\$14.95 each

Chicken Soup for the Soul

SHOP THESE TITLES AT [BOOKPAGE.COM/HOLIDAY](http://BOOKPAGE.COM/HOLIDAY)

### Fall in love with Virgin River

Have you watched the hit Netflix original series yet? Either way, you'll love these stories of small-town friendships, love and fresh starts.

\$9.99–\$27.99 | MIRA



### Have yourself a cowboy country Christmas

Get your jingle boots rocked this holiday season with page-turning reads that celebrate the home in down-home.

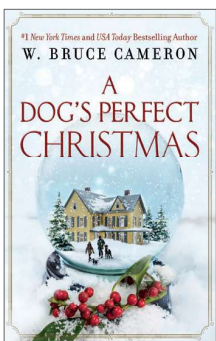
\$8.99–\$15.95  
Kensington | Zebra | Pinnacle



### Enrapturing Regency-era romance from Julie Klassen

A bestselling author with over 1 million copies sold, Klassen is the top name in inspirational Regency fiction. Her engaging tales will delight fans of "Poldark" and Jane Austen.

\$15.99–\$16.99 | Bethany House



### A Dog's Perfect Christmas

W. Bruce Cameron

This is the perfect feel-good holiday gift from Cameron, the #1 bestselling author of the A Dog's Purpose series.

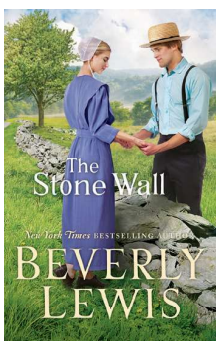
\$15.99 | Forge



### Gratitude, giving, togetherness and a touch of holiday magic

This trio of heartwarming reads is a gift you'll want to give and receive this Christmas season.

\$15.95–\$26 | Kensington | Dafina



### The Stone Wall

Beverly Lewis

With more than 17 million copies in print, "Beverly Lewis is the biggest name in Amish fiction" (*Newsweek*). This novel presents a heartwarming story of love and life-altering choices.

\$16.99  
Bethany House



### Murder, mayhem & Christmas cozy mysteries

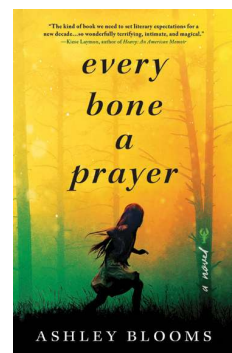
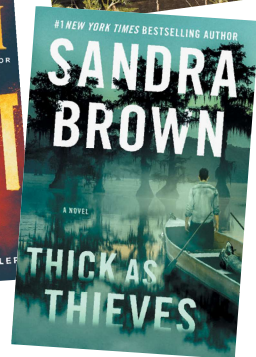
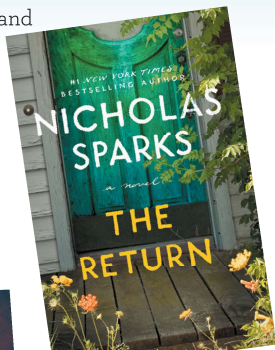
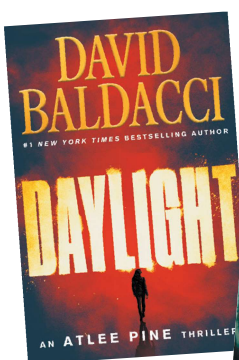
Kick back with something sweet and indulge in these holly-jolly Christmas capers from bestselling cozy mystery authors.

\$15.95–\$26 | Kensington

## Blockbuster authors at the top of their game

With romance, thrills and sexy suspense, three bestselling authors put a new twist on what it means to go home.

\$28–\$29  
Grand Central



### Every Bone A Prayer

Ashley Blooms

“Blooms has taken the voice and names of Appalachia, tended, and evolved them, and created a book that is at once haunting and hopeful.” —NPR

\$16.99 | Landmark



### The Haunting of Ashburn House

Darcy Coates

From the rising queen of atmospheric horror Coates comes a haunting story of intrigue, misery and fear. Ashburn’s dead are not at rest...

\$14.99  
Poisoned Pen

## A way with words

Each of these poetry books is a balm—for the soul and for the world.

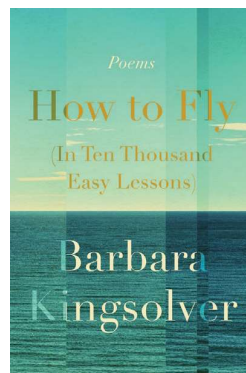
We’ve all experienced sudden changes this year. When focusing is difficult and time is moving in strange ways, poetry can be a perfect companion, offering a window into someone else’s world or reflecting your own. For readers looking to make sense of our present moment, there are no better gifts than these poetry collections.

**Make Me Rain** (William Morrow, \$19.99, 9780062995285) is a marvel of scale—global and local, private and political—as Nikki Giovanni invites us into her thoughts and experiences. Whether grieving personal losses or finding clever ways of expressing a shared sadness, her voice is powerful. With tributes to Toni Morrison and references to Beyoncé, Barack Obama and many more, public figures become familiar ones, and individual memory blends with collective.



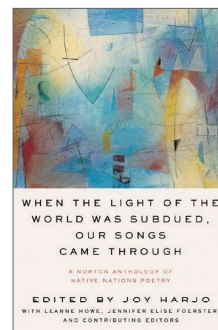
Giovanni’s deceptively simple language contrasts with complex, at times unanswerable questions. This celebration of a strong, compassionate voice in American poetry is a great gift for any reader who needs a deep breath after watching the news.

While better known for her novels and memoir, Barbara Kingsolver also brings her gifts of observation and reflection to her latest book of poems, **How to Fly (In Ten Easy Lessons)**



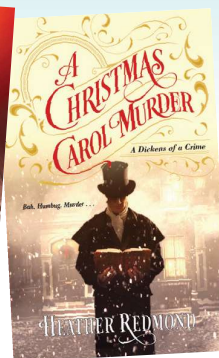
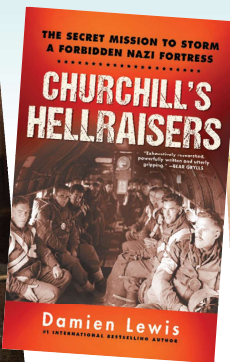
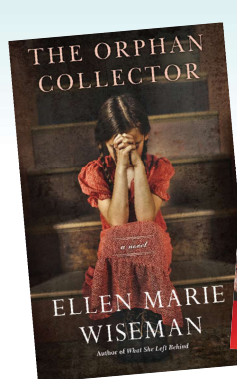
(Harper, \$24.99, 9780062993083). The book opens with a series of how-tos (“How to Have a Child,” “How to Cure Sweet Potatoes”) and from there shifts to memory and elegy, long poems and explorations of love and loss. My favorite section is the last, “The Nature of Objects,” in which Kingsolver shows how things work, making meaning of ephemera and taking the reader on “the risky road *yes* taken / to desire, escape.” For a reader wanting to escape, to fly while grounded, this book is a map that offers surprise and delight.

Native American poetry is American poetry, and it’s anthologized for the first time in the essential **When the Light of the World Was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through**



(Norton, \$19.95, 9780393356809), edited by current U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo. The collection is organized both geographically and chronologically, and as we read through each region, we see the landscape emerge, a sense of place made clearer and more complicated by the range of voices present, from early lyricists to some of today’s key poets, including Natalie Diaz and Tommy Pico. It is impossible to make sense of American literature without centering and highlighting Native voices. What a gift for this book to be in the world, an invitation for so much discovery.

—Freyja Sachs



## Books for history buffs

A moving tale set during the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic, the thrilling nonfiction narrative of a daring World War II raid and a Dickensian murder mystery in 1840s London—these stories from the past are perfect holiday gifts for history lovers.

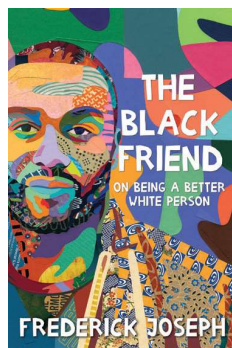
\$16.99–\$27  
Kensington | Citadel

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### Great gifts for the pop culture fan

Whether it's the best of manga or action role-playing games, these books will make the holidays special.

\$24.99–\$169.99 | VIZ

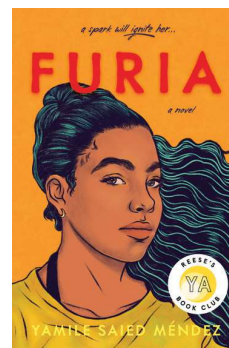


### The Black Friend

Frederick Joseph

Joseph offers candid reflections on his own experiences with racism and conversations with prominent artists and activists in this essential anti-racist read.

\$17.99  
Candlewick Press



### Furia

Yamile Saied Méndez

A Reese's Book Club YA Pick! Rising Argentinean soccer star Camila Hassan must risk everything—even a budding romance—to follow her dreams in this powerful, #ownvoices story.

\$17.95 | Algonquin

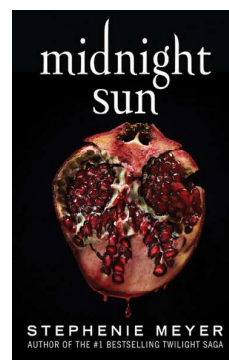


### Punching the Air

Ibi Zoboi & Yusef Salaam

This essential novel in verse tells the story of a boy wrongfully incarcerated who finds refuge in art while fighting for the truth.

\$19.99 | Balzer & Bray



### Midnight Sun

Stephenie Meyer

Return to the world of *Twilight* with this highly anticipated companion, which explores the iconic love story of Bella and Edward from the vampire's point of view.

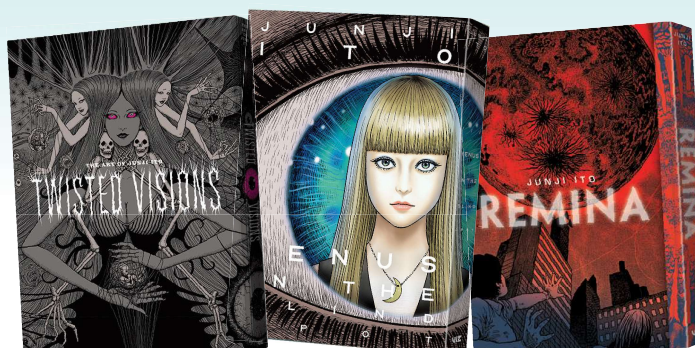
\$27.99 | Little, Brown



### Grab your signed copy of *The Cousins*

From the #1 bestselling author of *One of Us Is Lying* comes a new mystery about a family drowning in secrets and the cousins who will uncover everything.

\$17.99–\$19.99  
Delacorte

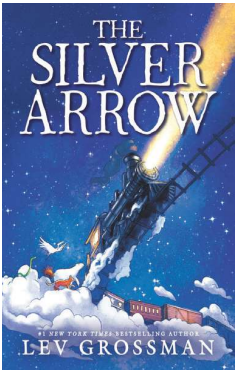


### Give the gift of Junji Ito this holiday season

Thrill to spine-tingling, chilling stories and stunning art from the master of horror manga and Eisner Award winner!

\$22.99–\$34.99  
VIZ Signature



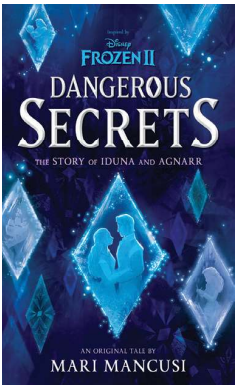


### The Silver Arrow

Lev Grossman

From the bestselling author of *The Magicians* comes a wholly original middle grade debut that's perfect for fans of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and Roald Dahl.

**\$16.99**  
Little, Brown

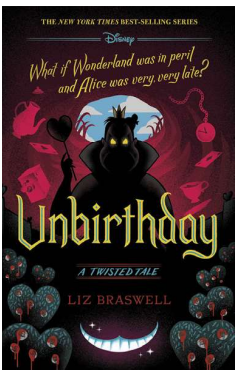


### Frozen II: Dangerous Secrets

Mari Mancusi

This prequel to *Frozen* and *Frozen 2* follows two teens—one learning what it means to be king, and one trying to survive with secrets that could lead to her doom.

**\$17.99** | Disney Press

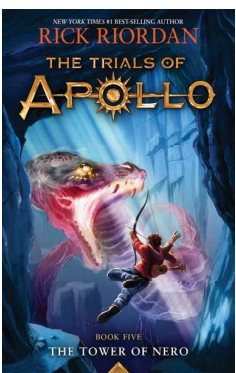


### A Twisted Tale: Unbirthday

Liz Braswell

What if Wonderland was in peril and Alice was very, very late? The 10th installment in this popular series puts a twist on the classic Disney film.

**\$17.99**  
Disney Hyperion



### The Trials of Apollo: The Tower of Nero

Rick Riordan

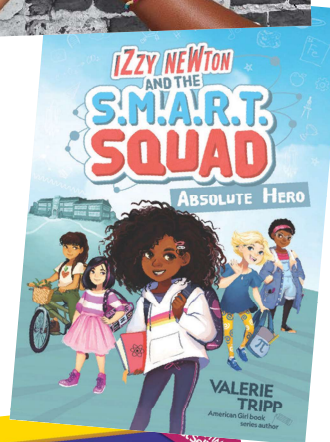
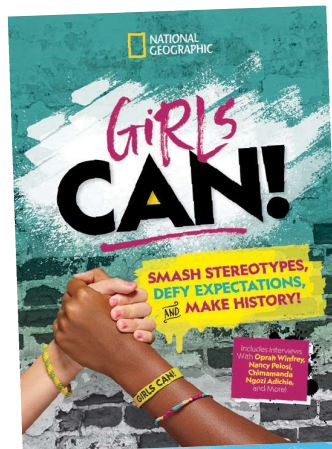
The fifth and final installment of Riordan's #1 *New York Times* bestselling *Trials of Apollo* series has Lester and Meg returning to where it all began: Camp Half-Blood.

**\$19.99**  
Disney Hyperion

## You've got the power . . . and the smarts!

Today's girls are showing that there's nothing they can't do! Celebrate can-do spirit, tackle science and middle school and dive into facts and fun with three great reads.

**\$12.99–\$14.99** | National Geographic Kids



## Comfort and fun for children

With faith-based classics and new favorites for kids to love, Zonderkidz brings inspirational books and Bibles from bestselling brands to families this holiday season.

**\$9.99–\$39.99** | Zonderkidz



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### Activity books for kids

In the Find Out Files activity and sticker book series, children will explore what it means to be themselves with fun activities, interactive crafts, humorous illustrations and loads of stickers!

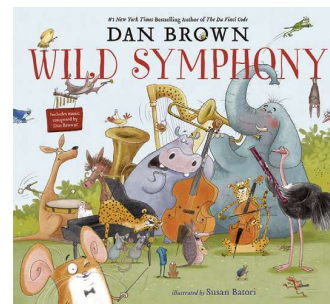
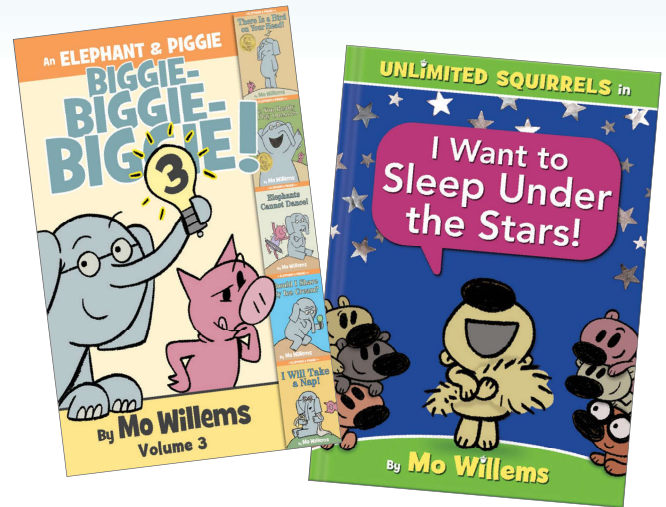
\$12.99 | Magination Press



### Read mo' Mo!

An *Elephant & Piggie Biggie! Volume 3* is the third volume in the popular Elephant & Piggie Biggie! five-book bind-up series from Mo Willems, who also delivers nutty laughs and facts in the Unlimited Squirrels series with *I Want to Sleep Under the Stars!*

\$12.99-\$16.99 | Hyperion Books for Children

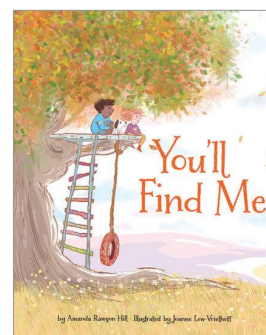


### Wild Symphony

Dan Brown

Internationally #1 bestselling author Brown makes his picture book debut with this new instant classic! Download the free app to hear the accompanying original music while you read.

\$18.99 | Rodale Kids



### You'll Find Me

Amanda Rawson Hill

Loss becomes remembrance in this soothing book that offers tender ways to remember those who may no longer be with us.

\$16.99 | Magination Press

# Brain Candy for the **HOLIDAYS!**

## AWESOME ADVENTURES

### EXPLORER ACADEMY

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## Tail as old as time

This one-of-a-kind history traces the partnership between humans and cats back to the foundation of civilization.

When I put Paul Koudounaris on speakerphone, my two cats appear from seemingly nowhere and settle in to listen to the sound of his voice. After a brief chat about the pleasant lack of fleas around his new home in Joshua Tree, California, the author of **A Cat's Tale: A Journey Through Feline History** chuckles approvingly when I pause to tell him that I had to move a cat off my notes.

Given that **A Cat's Tale**, a record of Felis history from ancient days to the present, is written in the voice of Koudounaris' talented tabby, Baba, and includes full-color photographs of her in period dress, one could be forgiven for mistaking this book for a piece of coffee table fluff. But Koudounaris boasts real academic cred, with a Ph.D. in art history and a well-known body of work covering chanel houses and ossuaries. The research in his fourth book is therefore substantial, including an impressive bibliography as well as reproductions of line drawings and text from the archives throughout.

But how did a noted death historian turn to the history of cats? "I had this idea that I wanted to write about pet cemeteries," he tells me. "I started collecting a massive amount of material to write this pet cemetery book . . . but all the stories about cats really stuck out to me because

nobody knows all the incredible things they've done." So his focus began to shift—with a little help from Baba. "At the same time, I'd been working on this photo series with my cat," he admits, "because, let's face it. She's a hell of a model."

Wearing handmade costumes and doll wigs cut to fit a feline, Baba winningly moves the reader from era to era. During the section on ancient Egypt, Baba balances an elaborate gold headdress as Cleopatra. A portrait of her in Navy dress whites introduces a chapter on seafaring cats. Throughout, her arch narrative voice (cultivated for her by her co-writer) engages readers through anecdotes both entertaining and, at times, tragic. "I think it's fairly well understood now that [during the witch trials] there was not a war on magic, there was a war on gender," Koudounaris says of one particularly dark period in our past. "The women who were being accused of witchcraft were always women who fell outside the accepted bounds of society. So it makes sense that cats were being burned as well, because they were gendered feminine, and anything that had to do with the feminine was under attack." **A Cat's Tale** identifies several such moments when cats were intrinsically linked with figures maligned by society, intensifying the interspecies bond.

After all this work, Koudounaris' choice to hand his book's byline over to Baba (who depicts Koudounaris as more of a research assistant in her acknowledgments) speaks to his affection for her. Baba adopted him when he visited a Los Angeles animal shelter, stretching out a paw to snag his pants leg as he passed. It was as if an occult hand had paired the two perfectly, and a one-of-a-kind relationship emerged.

When I ask what makes cat lovers so zealous about their mysterious and fleet-footed companions, Koudounaris waxes thoughtful. "Cats have this special thing that really can't be replicated in a relationship with any other animal, or even another person. The bond with a cat is really unique and poignant. It's kind of sublime." If this statement speaks to your heart, then Koudounaris and Baba have the perfect piece of scholarship for you.

—Anna Spydell

**A Cat's Tale**  
Holt, \$29.99, 9781250217721

**History**



### Baba, in her own words

The purported author of **A Cat's Tale** deigned to answer a few of our most pressing questions.

#### **Baba, if you could share a fillet with any cat from history, whom would you choose?**

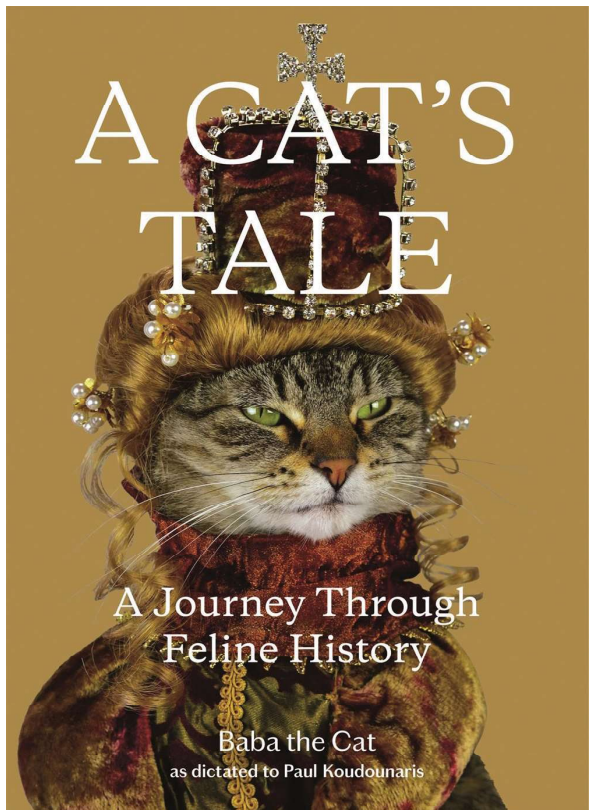
It's not very feline to share food, you know! So to split a fillet would take a very special circumstance indeed. I suppose I might make the sacrifice for one of those dashing sailor cats. Simon, who helped save the HMS *Amethyst*, was easily the finest naval cat in history. Or Trim, the great navigating cat who mapped Australia with Matthew Flinders and then circumnavigated the world.

#### **As you demonstrate in your book, cats have swayed many historical events. In these tumultuous times, what can humans learn from the cat community?**

That's an excellent question; to speak frankly, you humans are having a hard go of things nowadays, so indeed maybe it's time you looked to us as a model. I can certainly tell you one example feline society could set for you: We are completely devoid of discrimination and prejudice. The decision to like or dislike another cat is based on character and experience rather than coat color, breed or whether they have a pedigree as long as their tail—or no tail at all. To look beyond superficialities is nature's way.

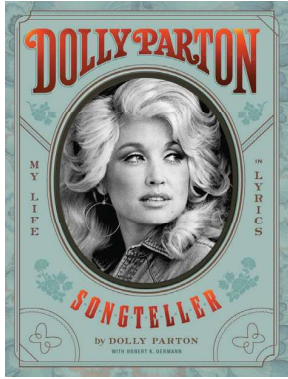
#### **Wet or dry?**

Wet. There is an immediacy to it. One must eat wet food quickly; to leave it out too long is to risk it spoiling. The choice between wet and dry becomes not so much about food but about attitude. Do you eat the wet, gobble it down and move on to the next adventure, or spend your day nibbling the dry? Cats who prefer wet food are cats who do things with immediacy, those with a zest for life and a love of spontaneity.



## Dolly Parton, Songteller

'Tis the season to be Dolly! In **Dolly Parton, Songteller: My Life in Lyrics** (Chronicle, \$50, 9781797205090), the lovable, candid, tell-it-like-it-is singer shares her own story through the lyrics of her songs. While fans love Parton for her crystal-clear vocals and her charming, witty stage presence, she's always thought of herself as a songwriter first, and this book



illustrates her deep devotion to music that captures a moment or tells a heart-rending tale. As she reveals, "I write a lot from my own heart. But I also just have a big imagination. When I was young, we didn't go to the movies, so I just created my own stories. It's kind of embedded in me to make up songs and stories."

Chock-full of never-before-seen photographs and memorabilia from Parton's archives, every chapter tells a portion of her biography. Using lyrics from 175 of her songs—including "Coat of Many Colors," "I Will Always Love You" and "Jolene"—she traces the journey from her Tennessee mountain childhood to her role on "The Porter Wagoner Show," her 9 to 5 days and her bluegrass albums. As she provides a glimpse into the origins of each song, Parton notes that she has "never shied away from any topic, whether it was suicide or prostitution or women's rights or whatever. . . . Whatever it is, I can say it in a song, in my own way."

Parton tells her stories with a grin and a twinkle in her eye. Her book invites us to sit a spell as she weaves her enchanting storytelling web around us, wrapping us in the warm, silky threads of her voice and comforting us with her presence.

—Henry L. Carrigan Jr.

## America the Beautiful

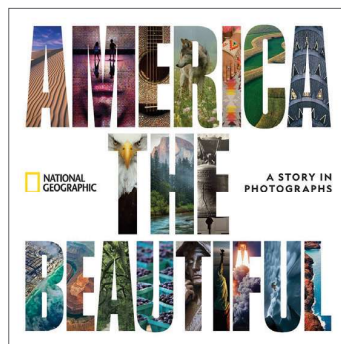
As the holidays approach, it may seem harder and harder for some of us to find the sense of easy joy we associate with this time of year. The discourse within our country feels more fraught than it's ever been, traveling for the holidays is out of the question for many families, and sometimes in our most frustrated moments, it can seem like there's little worth celebrating.

**America the Beautiful: A Story in Photographs** (National Geographic, \$40, 9781426221422) reminds us of the incredible landscapes and rich heritage that are more than worth holding on to.

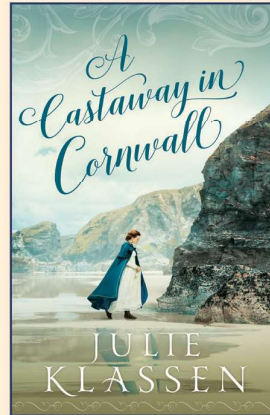
Photographs spanning decades have been pulled from National Geographic's vast archives to honor each American state and region, while beloved citizens as diverse as Maya Rudolph, Mitt Romney, Jewel and Nick Saban share statements and stories of how their home states have shaped them. Thick, glossy spreads showcase the mountains of Colorado and the white sands of New Mexico. On other pages, the lens closes in tight on a vineyard worker gathering grapes in Oregon, Tejano elementary school students smiling brightly into the camera in Texas and a pineapple harvester in Hawaii ending her day with a cigar.

This beautiful hardcover book feels like a loving reminder of the best our nation has to offer.

—Anna Spydell



# Riveting FALL FICTION for Your TBR List

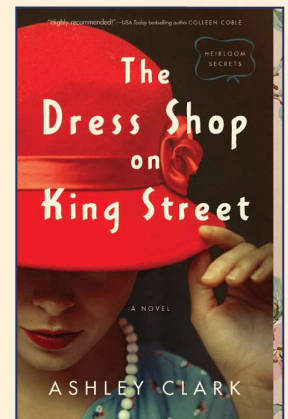


When a man with curious wounds is washed ashore, Laura cares for him while the mystery surrounding him grows. Can their budding attraction survive when danger pursues them from every side?

*A Castaway in Cornwall*  
by Julie Klassen

In 1946, a young woman left her hometown to keep her heritage hidden in pursuit of her dream. Years later, she's reunited with a girl from her past who helps her mend what is frayed between the seams.

*The Dress Shop on King Street*  
by Ashley Clark



In this epistolary novel from the WWII home front, the lines between compassion and treason are blurred, and a young translator must decide where her heart truly lies.

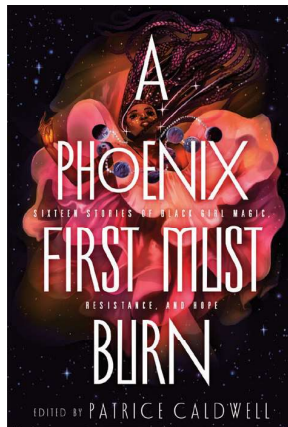
*Things We Didn't Say*  
by Amy Lynn Green

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# Short stories all the way down

Even the most particular teen reader won't be able to resist the varied charms of these YA anthologies.



## A Phoenix First Must Burn

Give this to a reader who believes in possibilities as boundless as their own imagination.

**A Phoenix First Must Burn: Sixteen Stories of Black Girl Magic, Resistance, and Hope** (Viking, \$18.99, 9781984835659) opens with a story of fresh beginnings, in which time-traveling Black girls become gods, and closes with a story of Black girls choosing their own destinies. All 16 of these tales feature fantastical universes, futuristic technologies and magic beneath the surface of our world.

From Elizabeth Acevedo's poetic "Gilded" to the modern vampire tale "Letting the Right One In" by the collection's editor, Patrice Caldwell, the stories provide space for Black girls to exist in their own narratives and explore what it means to seek peace in a world that perceives you as an enemy. A standout is Charlotte Nicole Davis' "All the Time in the World," in which Jordan learns that her neighborhood's contaminated water supply has given her the power to stop time. At a time when Flint, Michigan, has been without clean water for more than a decade, Davis reminds young readers of the strength to be found when hope seems lost.

This collection pulls no punches. You'll find yourself holding your breath between cheers for each and every one of these girls.

—Lane Clarke

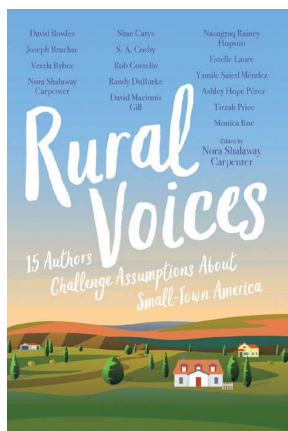
## Vampires Never Get Old

Give this to a reader who loves to fall under the thrall of a great supernatural story.

**Vampires Never Get Old: Tales With Fresh Bite** (Imprint, \$17.99, 9781250230010) is sure to start a new craze for YA's favorite fanged phenoms. These 11 stories preserve traditional undead lore while giving bloodsucking tropes a much-needed inclusivity makeover. The diverse teen vamps in this collection all share a common denominator: trying to survive their eternal adolescence.

Samira Ahmed's "A Guidebook for the Newly Sired Desi Vampire" takes the form of an acerbic advice column ("What should you eat? Your colonizer.") to offer a thoughtful treatise on the geopolitical ramifications of British rule. As haunting as it is beautiful, Heidi Heilig's "The Boy and the Bell" tells the story of a trans boy who digs up the wrong body in an old graveyard. And worth the price of admission is Victoria "V. E." Schwab's "First Kill," which has already received a limited series order from Netflix. It's a game of cat and mouse in which both cat and mouse have the hots for one another. Juliette, a vampire who hasn't yet experienced her first kill, is crushing on transfer student Calliope. Juliette's bloodlust combines with that classic teen party game, 60 seconds in a closet, to create a powder keg of emotion.

—Kimberly Giarratano



## Rural Voices

Give this to a reader who presses their nose to the window of every car, train and plane they ride in.

**Rural Voices: 15 Authors Challenge Assumptions About Small-Town America** (Candlewick, \$18.99, 9781536212105) offers brief but immersive glimpses into life in rural and small towns. Spanning 12 states, the vignettes include short stories, poems and even comics.

In S.A. Cosby's "Whiskey and Champagne," Juke uses his knack for murder mysteries to help his dad out of a sticky situation. A mysterious creature creeps around an Alaska cabin as a young trapper tries to stay calm in Inupiaq author Nasugraq Rainey Hopson's "The Cabin." And in David Bowles' "A Border Kid Comes of Age," a bisexual Texas boy fights for his family to accept not only himself but also his uncle Samuel, who is gay.

Monica M. Roe's engrossing "The (Unhealthy) Breakfast Club" is one of the collection's strongest offerings. Its carpooling teens have little in common besides their private school scholarships. Narrator Gracie captures a slice of life as she and her crew bond over the stereotypes they confront each day. Roe depicts ordinary realities, such as relying on the nearest McDonald's for the fastest Wi-Fi, and brings together a group of misfits to root for.

**Rural Voices** reveals how generalizations fail us, proving there is no such thing as a single rural American narrative.

—Annie Metcalf

## ★ Foreshadow

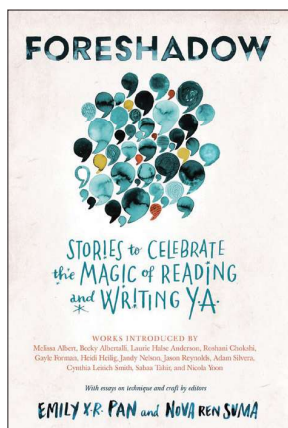
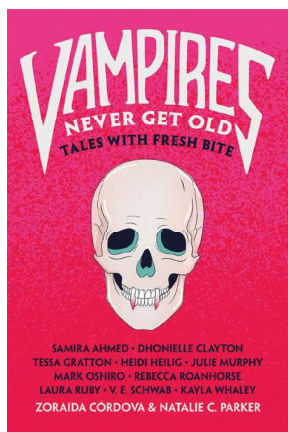
Give this to a reader who wants to dig deeply into the craft of storytelling.

Created by Emily X.R. Pan and Nova Ren Suma, **Foreshadow: Stories to Celebrate the Magic of Reading and Writing YA** (Algonquin, \$16.95, 9781643750798) grew out of an online initiative to showcase new and underrepresented voices. Established YA authors such as Jason Reynolds and Sabaa Tahir introduce 13 stories by emerging writers, and throughout the collection, playful experimentation alternates with contemporary takes on familiar formats.

Linda Cheng's "Sweetmeats," which Heidi Heilig calls "Hansel and Gretel" flavored with Guillermo del Toro and a dash of Miyazaki," exemplifies the creativity on display in every story here. Ever since friends Mei and Marlie were led astray by a witch bearing chocolate soufflé and blackberry soda, Mei's hunger has been insatiable. Parental pressure, a bully's cruel pranks and Marlie's increasingly disturbing behavior culminate in a night when power dynamics are upended and truths are revealed.

Each tale ends with an author's note that discusses an element of the writing craft, and exercises invite readers to create and refine their own stories.

—Jill Ratzan



Visit [BookPage.com](http://BookPage.com) for additional YA anthology recommendations.

# Wayfinders for Earth's recent arrivals

Four picture books that belong on every child's bookshelf take the big-picture view.

It's a big world out there, and it's easy to get lost as we try to find the right path. If we're lucky, we find special books that can show us the way. These four books shine like beacons, beaming out a simple message: "Here we are, together on Earth. This is a big place. Sometimes it can be scary. But there's always hope. And there is so much beauty."

Oliver Jeffers has a gift for crafting quirky stories that are deceptively straightforward and disarmingly moving. His talents are on full display in **What We'll Build** (Philomel, \$19.99, 9780593206751, ages 4 to 7), as a father and daughter envision the world they'll create together. Pages flooded with color capture the grand scope of their shared dreams, while poignant scenes set against white backdrops draw us close. Love and time, comfort and forgiveness take the forms of a clock, a teacup and a plush pig that appear throughout.

This may not seem like a typical bedtime book, but Jeffers' rhymes and near-rhymes have a propulsive forward motion, their imperfections perfectly suited to the story. Jeffers isn't interested in lengthy descriptions or flowery language. His uncomplicated sentences shoot straight while opening imaginative possibilities like doors in the mind, and waiting behind every door is love.

If someone asked you to write a book that explained the entire world, where would you start? When Caldecott Medalist Sophie Blackall met a child named Quinn while working with the nonprofit organization Save the Children, she knew she'd found her beginning. Told from Quinn's perspective, **If You Come to Earth** (Chronicle, \$18.99, 9781452137797, ages 5 to 8) is a letter to extraterrestrial visitors that takes an expansive but intimate look at life on planet Earth.

Blackall writes in honest, uncomplicated prose, her unpretentious statements all the more resonant for their frankness. She covers nearly every aspect of existence, from enormous mountains to creepy-crawly bugs, from the music we share with others to the feelings we keep deeply hidden. She leaves nothing out, even gently touching on difficult topics such as catastrophic weather, illness, war and displacement.

Blackall's colorful, clever illustrations feel as though she has focused a giant microscope on the planet. You could spend hours poring over the details on every page. A spread depicting humans on the move is a wry look at our brilliant yet convoluted modes of transportation. An overview of avian life is breathtakingly drawn inside the shape of a lark. Wearing a red cap, Quinn appears on most pages, providing a touchstone to seek out with every page turn. It all makes for a sprawling, ambitious take on some of life's biggest questions.

For every young person who asks those big questions, who dreams of flight and imagines themselves among the stars, **Child of the Universe**

(Make Me a World, \$17.99, 9781524717544, ages 3 to 7) brings the universe close enough to touch. In this astronomical lullaby, a father's words to his daughter inspire a journey to the place where all of this—and all of us—began.

Acclaimed astronomer Ray Jayawardhana infuses the book with scientific majesty as well as the adoration every parent feels for their child. As a nighttime read, its soothing song of stars and spiraling galaxies will send listeners drifting off to twinkling dreams, but by day, curious minds will demand answers to its fascinating ideas. Do we really have stars inside of us? Are there actually oceans on other planets? A comprehensive afterword provides just enough information to spark further inquiry—which is, of course, the point.

If Jayawardhana's words are a lullaby, then illustrator Raul Colón's colored pencil art is a vast symphonic underscore. Every page from edge to edge is awash with soft colors and almost imperceptible textures. Atoms and oceans and light waves and whales crash upon each other in gorgeous chaos. It's impossible not to lose yourself in it all. **Child of the Universe** is expansive, inspiring and full of radiant cosmic brilliance.

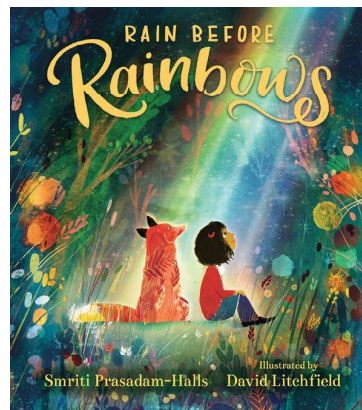
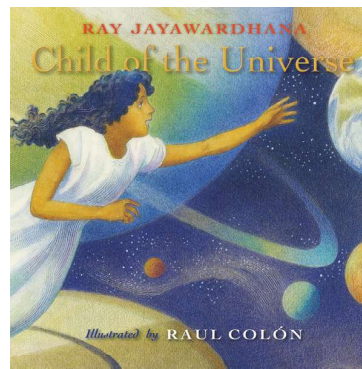
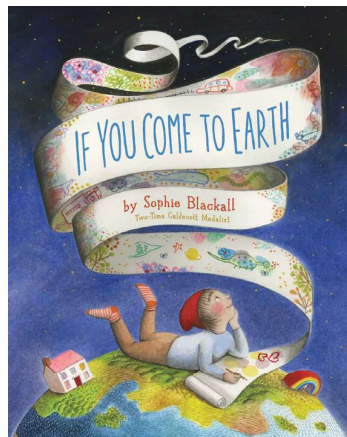
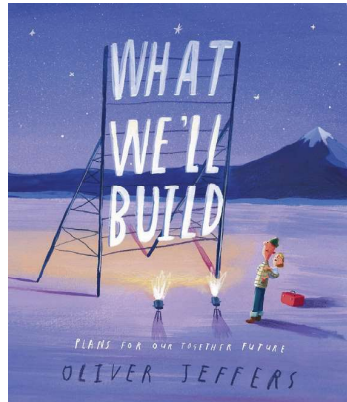
Perhaps the most affecting picture book of 2020, **Rain Before Rainbows** (Candlewick, \$16.99, 9781536212839, ages 3 to 7) grows in the heart like a seed of hope. It opens with a striking illustration of a castle in flames opposite the title page, immersing us in David Litchfield's art even before we meet our protagonist. Page by page, we follow a little red-cloaked girl and her fox companion on a journey out of the fog and

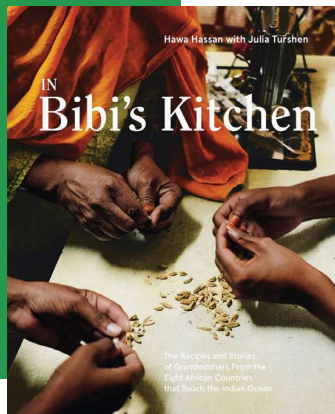
rain, through mist and shadow, over mountains and across raging seas, their odyssey chronicled in author Smriti Prasadam-Halls' spare couplets.

Litchfield's brushstrokes and textures create palpable emotions. We feel the numbing isolation of the rain, the heaviness of night, the shivers of smoky specters. Immense mountains loom, and crashing waves threaten. But even through the dark and the disquiet, friendship curls around the fox and the girl as they look out for each other. We crawl onto the shore with them, and we see hope on the wing with a flock of birds. We know, instantly, that bravery stands before us in the form of a majestic elk. As sunlight breaks through the forest trees and beams across the land and streams, the warmth it brings is overwhelmingly beautiful.

This is the image I want to leave you with: the girl and her forest companions walking toward the light to greet the new day. We don't know where they are going or why. All we know is that they are moving forward, together, with hope in their hearts. That, dear reader, is enough.

—Jill Lorenzini



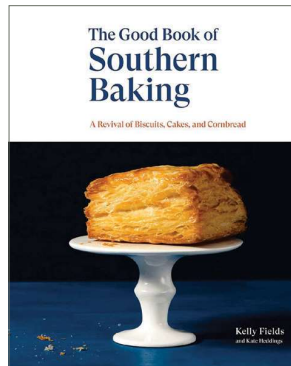


### ★ In Bibi's Kitchen

Perhaps the freshest cookbook of the season is **In Bibi's Kitchen** (Ten Speed, \$35, 9781984856739), even though “this is an old-fashioned cookbook that has nothing to do with trends or newness,” as editors Hawa Hassan and Julia Turshen write in their introduction. The book features recipes and stories from grandmothers (bibis) from eight African countries, all introduced through Q&A interviews. Each chapter shares basic information about one of the featured

countries, all of which touch the Indian Ocean (two are islands), and “offers a range of perspectives that clearly illustrate how food changes when it travels and how it can also help to keep a connection to home.” Don't feel the least bit wary of recipes featuring hard-to-find ingredients. Almost all the spices called for are readily available in American supermarkets, and many of the condiments included here (like Somali cilantro and green chile pepper sauce) can be used on nearly anything. A beautiful example of how food is culture, history and one of the most powerful forms of connection we have, **In Bibi's Kitchen** feels at once deeply familiar and powerfully eye-opening.

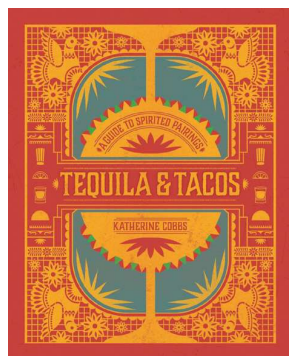
is a common refrain. There are even lots of shortcuts, such as brown-and-serve French bread (!) or pre-made pizza dough and puff pastry. If a famous French chef tells you to do it, it's totally OK, right? Packed with more than 200 recipes, this book would make a great resource for busy young people who are just beginning their kitchen adventures.



### The Good Book of Southern Baking

Kelly Fields brings 20 years of pastry chef know-how to the pages of **The Good Book of Southern Baking** (Lorena Jones, \$35, 9781984856227). She developed these recipes in restaurants, including her own New Orleans joint Willa Jean, and her thorough overview of baking ingredients—11 pages' worth!—signals that honed expertise. But it's her South Carolina upbringing that provides the bedrock for this sumptuous collection of

sweet treats. Fields' baking is deeply rooted in childhood experience, and she invokes her mama regularly in her treatment of classics like banana bread, haystack cookies and warm chocolate pudding. You'll be hard-pressed to find a traditional Southern dessert not covered here, and you'll want to devour every single one. (I'm especially drawn to the bourbon-butterscotch pudding, a twist on one of my own mama's favorites, and Grandma Mac's apple cake.) This is the perfect gift for the dessert person in your life.

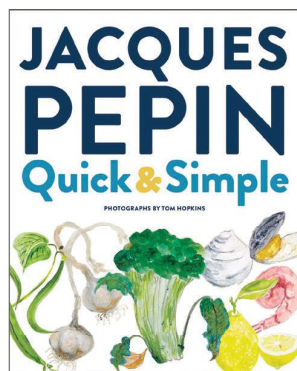


### Tequila & Tacos

Do I love **Tequila & Tacos** (Tiller, \$19.99, 9781982137595) because it's compact and bold in color, or do I love it because it's all about tacos? Yes. Katherine Cobbs' latest in the Spirited Pairings series is an irresistible tour de U.S. taco joints in points north, south, east and west. Each location reveals the recipe for one signature taco and cocktail, from cauliflower tacos with fennel and ramps (Salazar in Los Angeles) to a Monte Cristo taco (Velvet Taco in Atlanta) to a lamb carnitas taco (Quiote in Chicago),

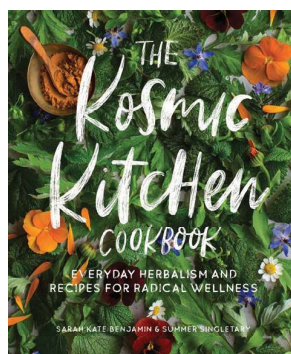
and on and on the delicious armchair exploring goes. You might feel a twinge of grief right now, thinking about all these beautiful restaurants and their brilliant creations—but then you get to make the tacos and agave-spirit libations at home, and you're sure to feel happier after that.

**With home cooking on the rise, has there ever been a better time to switch up the energy with a new cookbook? Here are five that breathe fresh life into kitchen duty.**



### Jacques Pépin Quick & Simple

Even if you're not a foodie, you've probably heard the name Jacques Pépin. The renowned French chef and TV personality has a wonderful smile, and as such, I take great joy in the many photographs of him sprinkled throughout **Jacques Pépin Quick & Simple** (HMH, \$35, 9780358352556), which has a pleasingly retro feel thanks to its cheerful illustrations, vintage typeface and decidedly unfussy recipes. These really are quick and simple dishes with common ingredients and instructions that rarely extend past a paragraph or two. In fact, “mix all the ingredients together”



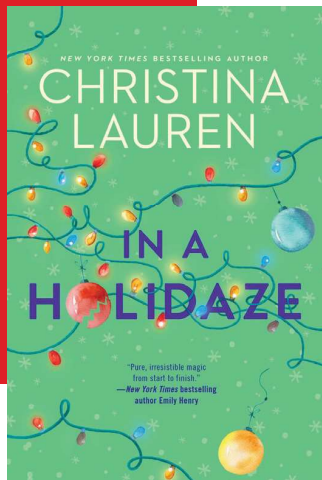
### ★ The Cosmic Kitchen Cookbook

**The Cosmic Kitchen Cookbook** (Roost, \$29.95, 9781611807141) cozies up at the three-way intersection of herbalism, ayurveda and seasonality, making it a fascinating, not to mention beautifully designed, guide for thinking about how to support your health holistically. Herbalists and pals Sarah Kate Benjamin and Summer Singletary ground the book in elemental theory, the idea that the five

elements—ether, air, water, fire, earth—must be balanced in our bodies. They connect this theory to the four seasons, helping the reader to identify how the elements are at play, inside and out. A section on herbal preps, such as herb-infused ghee, honey and turmeric tahini dressing, begins the culinary exploration, followed by seasonal recipes like lemon balm gazpacho and spiced mulled wine with hawthorn berries. If you're new to herbalism, it may seem like a lot to take in, but Benjamin and Singletary are wonderful guides, and the book also provides a link to their free online minicourse on the subject.

Susannah Felts is a Nashville-based writer and co-founder of The Porch, a literary arts organization. She enjoys anything paper- or plant-related.

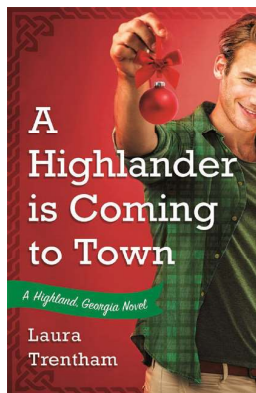




### ★ In a Holiday

A young woman gets a holiday do-over in **In a Holiday** (Gallery, \$28, 9781982163631) by author duo Christina Lauren. Maelyn Jones is looking forward to her annual Christmas celebration with family and friends, including her longtime crush, Andrew. But when it looks like she's ruined her chance with him, some magical force intervenes and she gets a replay . . . or two. Trapped in a time loop in which she experiences the same cabin vacation over and over, will she seize the opportunity to pursue her heart's desire? Lauren's first holiday romance is

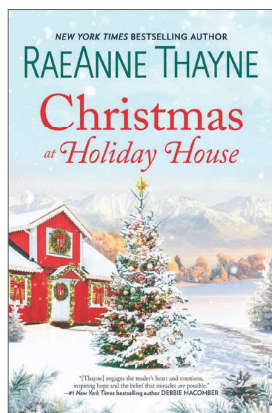
feel-good from the get-go. Set in Park City, Utah, there are snowball fights and games around the fire, along with a pair of protagonists who are reluctant to upend decades of conviviality by changing their relationship. The story and characters have a cozy, old-fashioned vibe, and the love scenes are warm but not too detailed. **In a Holiday** is an engaging and entertaining treat, with no sharp edges and plenty of seasonal sparkle.



### A Highlander Is Coming to Town

A small Southern town celebrates Christmas in **A Highlander Is Coming to Town** (St. Martin's, \$7.99, 9781250315052) by Laura Trentham. Highland, Georgia, has a genuine Highlander in its midst when traveling Scottish singer Claire McCreedy arrives in town. With her 25th birthday and a life-complicating inheritance looming, she hopes to lie low for the holidays while working as a live-in helper for a crotchety elderly woman. But despite her desire to stay attachment-free, Claire finds herself attracted to sexy neighboring farmer Holt Pierson. Claire plans to return home

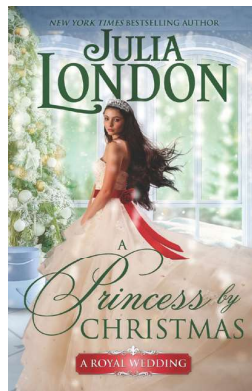
soon, so maybe they can indulge in their hot chemistry without anyone getting hurt. There are tropes on tropes in this charming story—the poor little rich girl, the fish out of water, the homebody vs. the wanderer—and readers will sink into this comforting read like it's a warm bath. Glimpses of characters from previous books in the series add to the cozy feel.



### Christmas at Holiday House

More than one heart finds its match in RaeAnne Thayne's **Christmas at Holiday House** (HQN, \$16.99, 9781335080639). For Abigail Powell and her young son, Christopher, the town of Silver Bells, Colorado, sounds like the perfect place to spend the month between Thanksgiving and Christmas. She can help her best friend Lucy's grandmother recover from a fall and give Christopher a snow-covered Christmas before they move to Texas. But she didn't count on the compelling attraction of Lucy's brother, Ethan. During the days of skiing,

baking and general holiday merriment, Abby and Ethan share tender embraces, even though he thinks he doesn't have the loving nature required to be her man. Meanwhile, Lucy struggles with similar self-doubts as she returns home to face an old friend who's no longer silent about his feelings for her. This is romantic fantasy, pure and simple. It shines with holiday cheer, but Thayne also makes the goodness of these characters feel true. This kisses-only story is perfect for lovers of Christmas and romance.



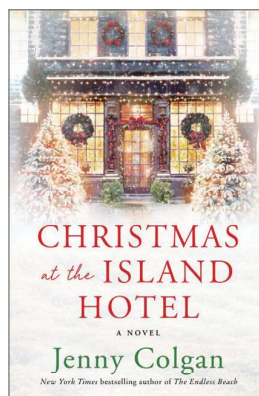
### A Princess by Christmas

Christmas comes to Victorian England in **A Princess by Christmas** (HQN, \$9.99, 9781335080615), the third installment in Julia London's Royal Wedding series. Young widow Hollis Honeycutt welcomes her sister and best friend—both married to foreign royals—to London while the queen hosts peace talks between the fictional countries of Wesloria and Alucia. Through the social events surrounding the occasion, Hollis meets the mysterious Marek Brendan, who is attached to Wesloria's trade delegation. Curious and clever, Hollis begins to investigate for the

biweekly ladies gazette she publishes and finds herself inexplicably drawn both to Marek and into the political intrigue surrounding the talks between the two rival countries. The unbending Marek makes an ideal foil for the ebullient Hollis, and they fall in love surrounded

**This sensual seasonal sampling of holiday romances has something for every reader.**

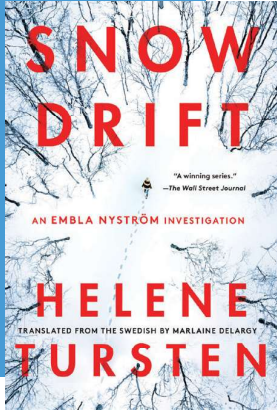
by the era's traditions, such as elaborate wreaths and a party to celebrate the newfangled German import of a seasonal tree. Author London pens an imaginative tale peopled with smart, well-drawn characters who feel genuine in their love for one another. This thoroughly enjoyable romance is a stylish, fabulous escape to another time and place.



### Christmas at the Island Hotel

Happy ever afters of all sorts abound in **Christmas at the Island Hotel** (William Morrow, \$15.99, 9780062911285) by Jenny Colgan. The author returns to the fictional and remote Scottish island of Mure, the setting of *Christmas on the Island* and *The Endless Beach*, where the impending holiday and the successful opening of a new hotel is critical to several residents: Fintan, a grieving widower who inherited the property; his sister, Flora, who finds her maternity leave a bit dull; Gaspard, a temperamental French chef; Konstantin, a playboy of a Norwegian

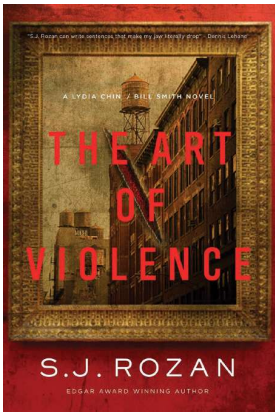
prince who's been ordered to work for the first time in his life; and Isla, a hardworking Mure native who is about to learn what love is. Told in the affectionate and understanding voice of an omniscient observer, this holiday tale sets readers smack-dab in the center of the island community, and it's a delightful place to spend the season. As there ought to be at any proper Christmas, there are dogs and children and family strife, not to mention a little melancholy, as well as good food and good times.



### Snowdrift

Nightmares about the abduction of her childhood best friend, Lollo, have bedeviled police officer Embla Nyström for half of her 28 years. One of those jarring nightmares opens Helene Tursten's latest thriller, **Snowdrift** (Soho Crime, \$27.95, 9781641291606). The dreams always follow the same script: Three shadowy figures huddle over a curled-up Lollo, then one turns and spots Embla, bolts across the room and hisses menacingly, "Say a word to anyone, you're dead." Fourteen years pass with no word about Lollo, until Embla gets a phone call from her missing friend. The connection is quickly broken, however, with no further contact. After a fitful night's sleep, Embla is summoned to the scene of a homicide. The victim turns out to be well known to her: It's one of the three brothers she believes were responsible for Lollo's abduction. Embla eagerly embarks on the investigation, though her goal is perhaps not so much to find the killer as to uncover some further trace of Lollo.

It soon becomes a case of "be careful what you wish for. . ." As always in Tursten's books, the well-drawn characters and first-rate suspense provide fine examples of the dark delights of Scandinavian noir.

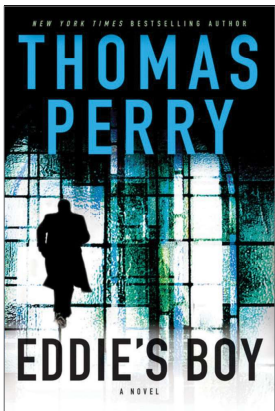


### The Art of Violence

Cold open: A man walks up to a private investigator, accosts him with a gun and demands that the investigator prove the man's guilt in a series of murders—not his innocence, note, but his guilt. Unusual request, but it makes some sense. Years back, after being slipped a strong hallucinogen, Sam Tabor killed a woman, stabbing her, by his count, "seven billion times." Faced with the choice of a temporary insanity plea and an unspecified sentence to psychiatric lockdown, or a defined length of time in the slammer, Sam pleaded guilty and went to jail. Now he's out, and he's convinced that he's killed again. **The Art of Violence** (Pegasus, \$25.95, 9781643135311) is the latest in S.J. Rozan's excellent series featuring PI Bill Smith and his partner, Lydia Chin. I almost don't want to say more; there are too many nuances and red herrings, and I don't want to inadvertently give anything away. But here are a couple of freebies: The client is a well-known artist who is often described as "tormented," the flavor of the

month in the fickle Manhattan art milieu. A blackout alcoholic, he doesn't remember killing anyone, but the crime scene "signature" is eerily evocative of his first crime.

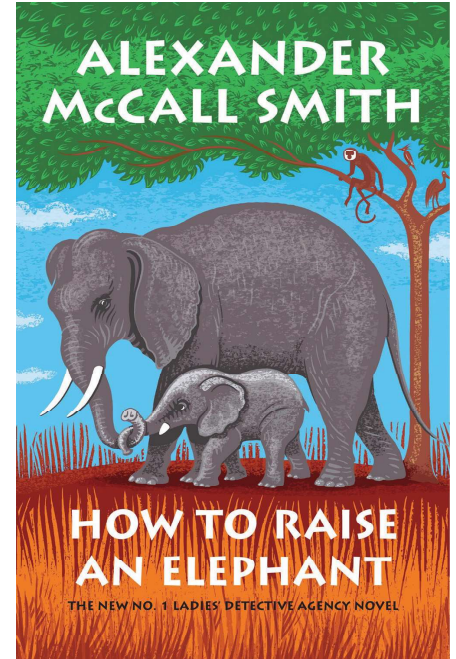
Sign up for our mystery newsletter at [BookPage.com/enews](http://BookPage.com/enews).



### Eddie's Boy

Thomas Perry's debut, *The Butcher's Boy*, earned him the coveted Edgar Award for Best First Mystery Novel back in 1983. At the time, the book virtually defined a new subgenre of thriller: the "Hired Killer Summoned Out of Retirement by Someone Trying to Kill Him." **Eddie's Boy** (Mysterious Press, \$26, 9780802157775), Perry's latest novel, opens with not one but four would-be assassins trying—and failing miserably—to take out the Butcher's Boy. Retired, and known these days as Michael Shaeffer, he is still savvy enough to know that if someone sent four trained killers, there will be more in the wings waiting for their turn. So he scoots from England to Australia, but it will not be far enough. Michael has one ace in the hole, though, in the form of a tenuous relationship with a Justice Department official who tips him off to the impending parole of a career criminal who once hired the Butcher's Boy, then reneged on the payment. Soon afterward, our hero neatly framed him for a murder, watching as the innocent

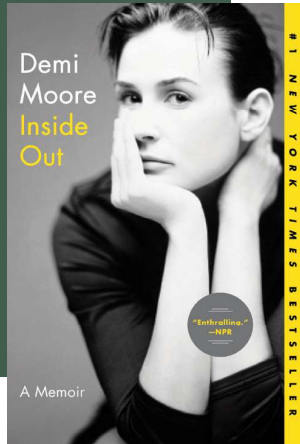
man (well, innocent of *this* killing at least) was carted off to jail. There's a lot more backstory and a lot more innovative executions along the way as Michael tries to stop the attempts on his life. A new Butcher's Boy book arrives only once every decade, if that, and this one is well worth the wait.



### ★ How to Raise an Elephant

Over the course of its 21-volume run, Alexander McCall Smith's No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series has become one of the best-loved series in its genre. In some ways it is defined by what is absent: murders or essentially violence of any sort. But the tiny African country of Botswana holds its own in the suspense department, its small mysteries strangely compelling and never descending into treacly sweetness. In this latest outing, **How to Raise an Elephant** (Pantheon, \$26.95, 9781524749361), our intrepid sleuth, Precious Ramotswe, must rescue—no surprise here—a newborn elephant left orphaned by poachers. Said little elephant has a mind of its own, with results both comedic (imagine a 300-pound baby pachyderm rolling around delightedly in the back of a minivan) and tragic, with a look into the cruelty of the ivory poaching trade. There's also a noisy neighbor who angrily calls her philandering husband an "anteater"; a sketchy relative who will impart a life lesson we can all benefit from; and the ongoing adversarial relationship between Grace and Charlie, the two opinionated employees at Mma Ramotswe's agency. I have read all of this wonderful series, reviewed most and wholeheartedly look forward to each and every one.

Bruce Tierney lives outside Chiang Mai, Thailand, where he bicycles through the rice paddies daily and reviews the best in mystery and suspense every month.



## Hollywood tell-alls

In **Inside Out** (Harper Perennial, \$17.99, 9780062049544), actor Demi Moore comes to terms with her troubled past. As the daughter of alcoholic parents, Moore had an unstable and traumatic childhood, and her early career as a model left her feeling insecure about her appearance. Although she went on to achieve success in Hollywood, starting in such films as *St. Elmo's Fire* and *Ghost*, she struggled for years with drug addiction. Throughout this candid, accomplished memoir,

Moore is upfront about her marriages to Bruce Willis and Ashton Kutcher, and she provides fascinating insight into the movie business.

Esteemed actor Sally Field shares

Entertaining yet substantial, briskly paced yet informative, these books are perfect for the busy month of December.

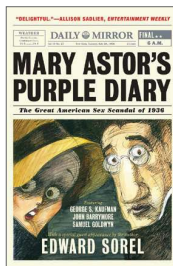
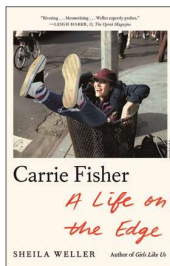
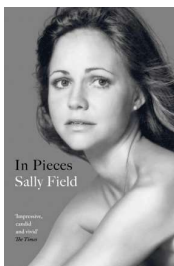
her personal story in her memoir, **In Pieces** (Grand Central, \$17.99, 9781538763032). Born in Pasadena, California, in 1946, Field opens up about her solitary childhood, her alcoholic mother and the stepfather who abused her. She began acting as a teen, going on to star in blockbusters including *Norma Rae* and *Forrest Gump*. With sensitivity and a wonderful command of narrative, she reflects on important past relationships, including her romance with Burt Reynolds, and on the impulses that drive her acting. The result is a well-rounded, well-written portrait of an artist that will appeal to anyone who loves a good celebrity memoir.

Written by bestselling biographer Sheila Weller, **Carrie Fisher: A Life on the Edge** (Picador, \$18, 9781250758255) is an illuminating study of an American icon. Carrie Fisher, perhaps best known for portraying Princess Leia in the Star Wars films, was the daughter of singer Eddie Fisher and actor Debbie Reynolds. In this well-researched biography, Weller chronicles Fisher's

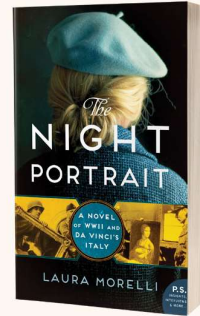
Hollywood upbringing, her rise as an actor, her marriages and her experiences with bipolar disorder and drugs. Fisher's intelligence and strength

shine through in this lively narrative, which is rich with movie history and personal anecdotes, as well as themes of family and feminism.

Illustrator and author Edward Sorel revisits the golden age of Hollywood in **Mary Astor's Purple Diary: The Great American Sex Scandal of 1936** (Liveright, \$17.95, 9781631493386). Sorel explores the life of actor Mary Astor, star of *The Maltese Falcon* and other classics, who kept a diary of her sexual affairs. In the 1930s, her ex-husband discovered the diary and used it against her during his legal battle for custody of their daughter. Sorel digs in to weighty topics including public image, the power of journalism and the female experience in show business, and his nifty illustrations add to the book's appeal.



# BOOK CLUB READS FOR WINTER



## THE NIGHT PORTRAIT

by Laura Morelli

"This is a truly original novel that has earned its place among my favorite works of historical fiction."

—JENNIFER ROBSON,

bestselling author of *The Gown*

## HOUSE OF CORRECTION

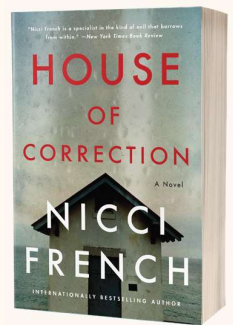
by Nicci French

"French's best book yet... booby-trapped with twists, the floors paved with trapdoors, quicksand churning in the garden."

—A.J. FINN,

bestselling author of

*The Woman in the Window*



## JANE IN LOVE

by Rachel Givney

"Artfully written and engaging, *Jane in Love* is a lively effusion of wit and humor."

—GRAEME SIMSION,

bestselling author of *The Rosie Project*

## LADY BREWER OF LONDON

by Karen Brooks

An unforgettable historical tale set in 15th century England of a brilliant woman's defiance, courage, and ingenuity—from the author of *The Chocolate Maker's Wife*.



@Morrow\_PB

@bookclubgirl

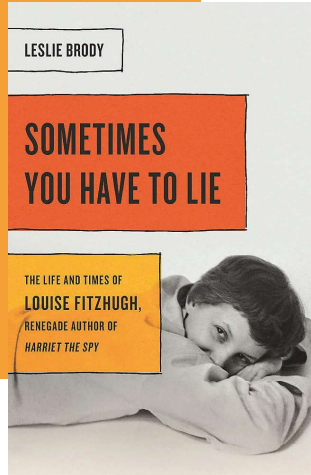
William Morrow

BookClubGirl

A BookPage reviewer since 2003, Julie Hale recommends the best paperback books to spark discussion in your reading group.

well read

by robert weibezahl



## Sometimes You Have to Lie

Generations of children, and more than few adults, have embraced the antics of *Harriet the Spy* and its singular heroine since it was published in 1964. As Leslie Brody reports in **Sometimes You Have to Lie** (Seal, \$30, 9781580057691), her absorbing biography of the elusive author Louise Fitzhugh, the classic middle grade novel sold around 2.5 million copies in its first five years, a number that is now approaching 5 million worldwide. Fitzhugh, who died at age 46 in 1974, was publicity-shy

even by the more genteel standards of her day, and her literary executors have remained guarded about releasing her private papers. Faced with this estimable hurdle, Brody has succeeded admirably in reconstructing Fitzhugh's complicated, often troubled life.

Fitzhugh was born into a well-heeled family in Memphis, Tennessee, but from the beginning she pushed against the constraints of propriety. Her ill-matched parents separated and divorced (in a scandalous trial that the local public devoured) while Fitzhugh was still an infant, and for years her imperious father told his daughter that her mother was dead. Though she eventually reunited with her mother, Fitzhugh

had lifelong issues with both of her parents, and the querulous, outlier spirit that defines her most famous character would also come to drive the author herself. From puberty, young Fitzhugh knew that she was a lesbian, and by the time she dropped out of Bard College and moved to New York City to make her mark, she was already completely comfortable in her own skin.

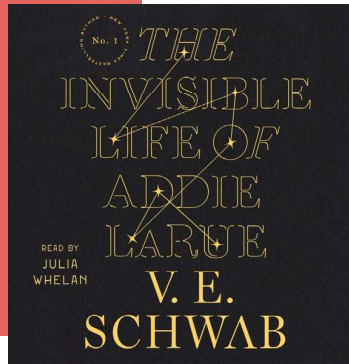
Fitzhugh viewed herself first and foremost as a visual artist, and for much of her life she focused on her painting. She was fully immersed in the downtown New York art scene of the 1950s and early '60s, and her bohemian lifestyle was made all the more colorful by her central place in the lesbian subculture. Fitzhugh's circle of friends and lovers was a group of smart, talented women who largely kept their sexual orientation on the Q.T. She was less concerned with midcentury decorum than many of her peers, dressing mostly in men's clothing, and it seems few blinked twice at her out-of-the-closet ways. When *Harriet the Spy* was published and became a widespread success, however, Fitzhugh's publisher capitalized on her natural shyness to try and keep the truth of her sexuality from readers.

*Harriet the Spy*, with its ill-behaved, uncompromising and inquisitive heroine, is a subversive work and, in retrospect, might be read as a coded version of a gay adolescent's experience of being different, wrestling with a reality that doesn't match up to the norm. As the world becomes a more affirming place for members of the LGBTQ community, perhaps it will also finally catch up with the nonconforming, unsentimental, trailblazing Louise Fitzhugh.

Robert Weibezahl is a publishing industry veteran, playwright and novelist. Each month, he takes an in-depth look at a recent book of literary significance.

audio

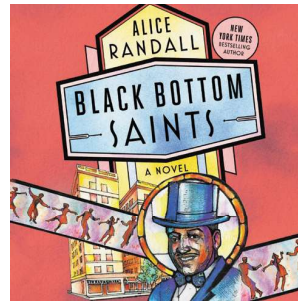
by anna zeitlin



## ★ The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue

V. E. Schwab's **The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue** (Macmillan Audio, 17 hours) is a rare, original fable that feels timeless. As a young woman in the 17th century, Addie makes a deal with the darkness, embodied by Luc, a trickster god. He grants her immortality with the caveat that everyone she ever meets will fail to

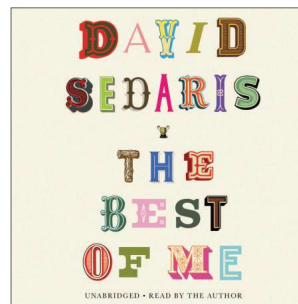
remember her. Addie lives in the shadows for hundreds of years, roaming Europe and the United States, finding ways to get by and doomed to solitude, until one day, she meets a man who can remember her. This epic story, spanning three centuries and two continents, is expertly narrated by Julia Whelan. Her performance grows and changes with Addie, capturing her early French accent and her later American one, which still carries a slight French tinge. This is a transporting listen, and these characters will stick with you for a long time.



## Black Bottom Saints

Co-narrated by Prentice Onayemi and Imani Parks, Alice Randall's novel **Black Bottom Saints** (HarperAudio, 12.5 hours) captures the memories of Joseph "Ziggy" Johnson, a gossip columnist who founded a famed dance school in Detroit. As Ziggy recalls the men and women who touched his life from the 1930s to the '60s, he pays tribute to these heroes and toasts each one with a custom cocktail (recipes included). From local legends to household names like Count Basie and Martin Luther King Jr., each story shines a spotlight on Black excellence. Onayemi does a beautiful job narrating the book from Ziggy's perspective, bringing gravity and a warm nostalgia to the telling. Parks plays Ziggy's goddaughter, who is piecing together his story, and her modern sensibility provides a welcome contrast. Both narrators hail from Broadway, and they bring notable vitality to the narration.

Sign up for our audio newsletter at [BookPage.com/enews](http://BookPage.com/enews).



## The Best of Me

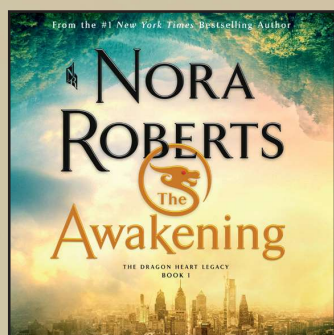
Arguably the king of audiobooks, David Sedaris returns with his greatest hits, **The Best of Me** (Hachette Audio, 13 hours), all selected by the author from his more than 25-year career. From imagined letters to the editor to quirky stories about his large family, this collection gathers all the favorites in one place. Sedaris narrates the audiobook as only he can, his distinct voice emphasizing the odd observations that make his perspective so unique. This is a perfect point of introduction to an expansive and celebrated opus.

Anna Zeitlin is an art curator and hat-maker who fills her hours with a steady stream of audiobooks.

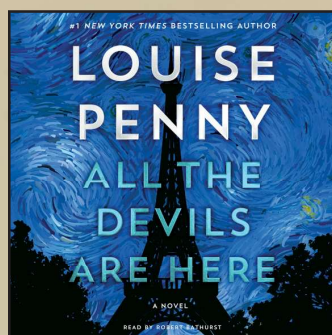
# An Audiobook for Everyone on Your List

from  
**MACMILLAN**  
**AUDIO**

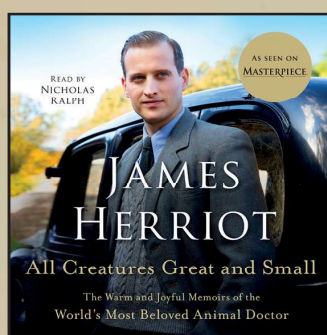
## CAPTIVATING STORIES



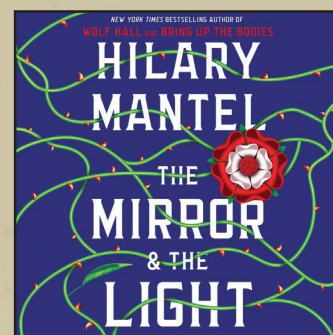
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READ BY ROBERT BATHURST

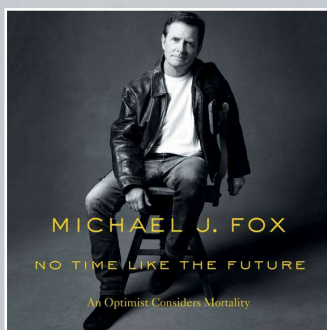


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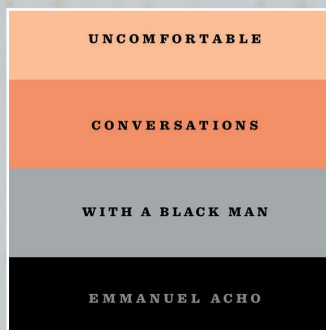


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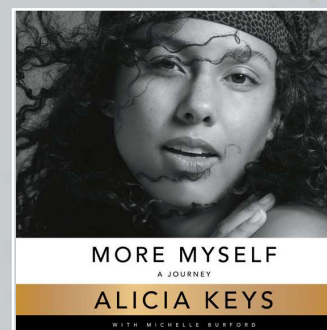
## IN THEIR OWN WORDS



READ BY MICHAEL J. FOX

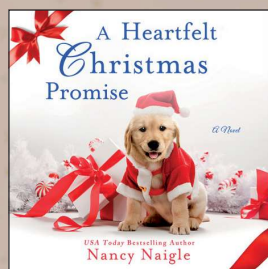


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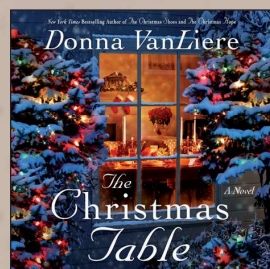


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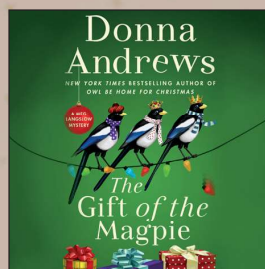
## FESTIVE HOLIDAY LISTENS



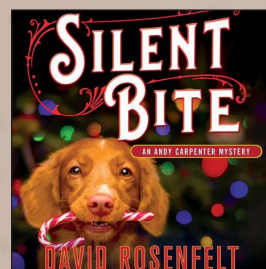
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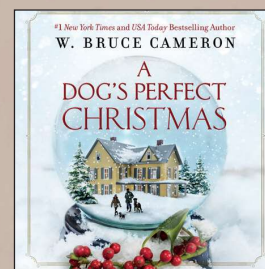
READ BY THE AUTHOR



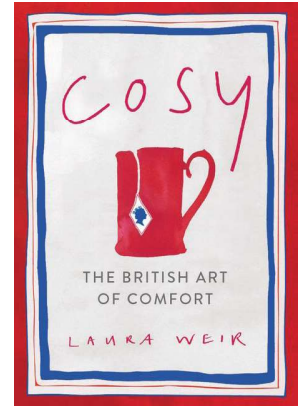
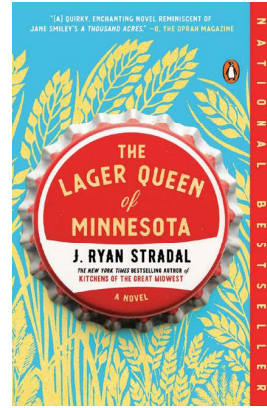
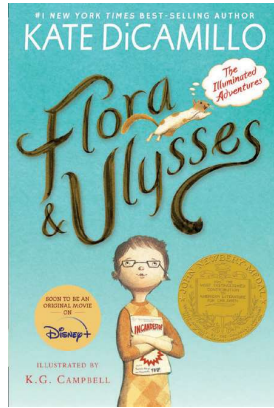
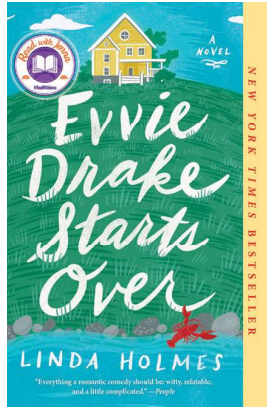
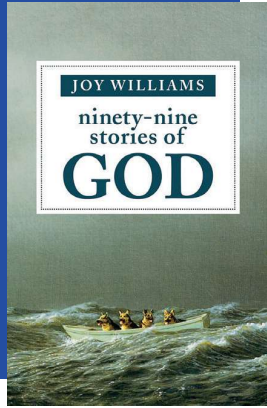
READ BY BERNADETTE DUNNE



READ BY GROVER GARDNER



READ BY ANN MARIE LEE



## Books that inspire good cheer toward humanity

Sometimes empathy for our fellow humans can feel just beyond our reach. On those days, we want to shut out the world and escape from our differences. Fortunately there are books that reaffirm hope and help us feel patience for our neighbors once more, like breathing warm breath onto cold hands.

### Ninety-Nine Stories of God

This book is pretty clear about what it's offering: 99 stories from Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award finalist Joy Williams, all of them in some way about God. In typical Williams fashion, though, **Ninety-Nine Stories of God** is far more than that. The stories here are short and strange, the longest no more than a few pages, but each is crammed with life. From Kafka and a fish to the Aztecs and O.J. Simpson, these stories highlight the absurdity and whimsy of being alive. A teacher recommended this book to me, but she warned me to curb my expectations: While "God" is present in each story, the book is really about humans and the strange things we do for faith. Praying, hoping, crying—it's all crystallized in these short stories. Williams reminds us that God, however you think of God, is in people.

—Eric, Editorial Intern

### Evvie Drake Starts Over

I hate Hallmark movies. So much so that I can't even stomach watching them in a so-bad-it's-good type of way. I get anxious the farther I get from an urban center, I break out in hives when faced with a quirky pun, and I have never really understood the appeal of New England. So it means a lot for me to say that reading Linda Holmes' wry romance, **Evvie Drake Starts Over**, filled me with joy. The author's warmth and humor radiate off every page, the sense of place (a tiny town in Maine, by the sea) is absolutely perfect, and then there's the marvelous Evvie herself, she of the relatable breakdowns and perfect zingers and hard-won journey to happiness and love. This is an endearing little bundle of a book, and after finishing it, I considered, for the first time in my life, taking a trip to Maine.

—Savanna, Associate Editor

### Flora & Ulysses

I love all of Kate DiCamillo's books, but I love her Newbery Medal-winning **Flora & Ulysses** most of all. The miraculous, madcap adventure of a superpowered squirrel and the girl he loves, **Flora & Ulysses** is as honest about the possibility of goodness as it is about darkness and despair. In a world where tragedy can be "just sitting there, keeping you company, waiting," Flora believes herself a cynic who can't afford to hope. In fact, all of the characters have been, in one way or another, disappointed by other people. DiCamillo's willingness to acknowledge how audacious it can be to hold on to hope amid uncertainty makes the book's climax, in which so many hopes are rewarded, all the more moving. As one character says, "There is much more beauty in the world if I believe such a thing is possible."

—Stephanie, Associate Editor

### The Lager Queen of Minnesota

No one makes me feel good about the world quite like my mom and grandma, the relentlessly positive Minnesota matriarchs of my family. But their upbeat nature isn't a willful idealism; rather, it's a daily choice to take the hard stuff in stride, to make the most of it, because why not? J. Ryan Stradal's Midwestern family drama takes me home. It's got some ups and downs as two estranged sisters figure their way through a long-time divide, but it's packed with redemption, as one of the sisters' granddaughters makes a go of a new beer venture that promises to change everyone's fortunes for the better. Behold the power of hard work and determination to heal nearly any wound. You're never too old, and it's never too late, if you're willing to put a little elbow grease into it. Plus, there's pie and there's beer, and those are my two pandemic love languages.

—Cat, Deputy Editor

### Cosy

The best way for me to show good cheer toward humankind is to spend time away from them. Call it introversion, call it misanthropy—the bottom line is that I can lose steam quickly when I interact with people, and it's difficult to be charitable toward your fellow human when you're cranky. This is where a book like **Cosy** becomes invaluable. From soups to tea to socks to soft lighting, Laura Weir is an expert at cultivating a space that's warm, peaceful and snug, and she shares her insights in prose that radiates comfort. Need a cozy movie, hike, book or tippie? There are recommendations in every category, as well as atmospheric musings on the philosophy of coziness. Dipping into this book makes me gentler and more compassionate, and during a year when keeping your distance is a concrete act of kindness, **Cosy** is worth its weight in gold.

—Christy, Associate Editor

Each month, BookPage staff share special reading lists—our personal favorites, old and new.

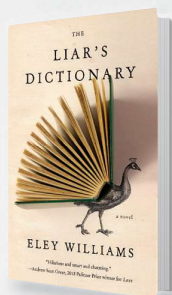
# BOOKISH TO-DO LIST: 2021 BOOK CLUB PICKS



FOR READERS OF *FINDING DOROTHY*, *ORPHAN TRAIN*, AND *BEFORE WE WERE YOURS*

Melanie Benjamin  
**THE CHILDREN'S BLIZZARD:**  
A NOVEL

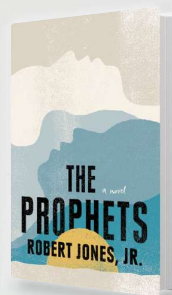
Delacorte Press | Coming January 2021 in Hardcover, eBook, and Audio Editions



FOR READERS OF KEVIN WILSON AND JAMI ATTENBERG, AND "WORD NERDS" EVERYWHERE

Eley Williams  
**THE LIAR'S DICTIONARY:**  
A NOVEL

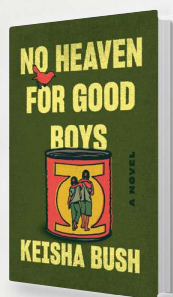
Doubleday | Coming January 2021 in Hardcover, eBook, Audio, and Large Print Editions



FOR READERS OF COLSON WHITEHEAD, TAYARI JONES, YAA GYASI, AND TONI MORRISON

Robert Jones, Jr.  
**THE PROPHETS**  
A NOVEL

Putnam | Coming January 2021 in Hardcover, eBook, Audio, and Large Print Editions



FOR READERS OF *HOME FIRE*, *STAY WITH ME*, AND *MY ABSOLUTE DARLING*

Keisha Bush  
**NO HEAVEN FOR GOOD BOYS:**  
A NOVEL

Random House | Coming January 2021 in Hardcover, eBook, and Audio Editions



FOR READERS OF CECELIA AHERN AND JOANNA TROLLOPE

Mameve Medwed  
**MINUS ME:**  
A NOVEL

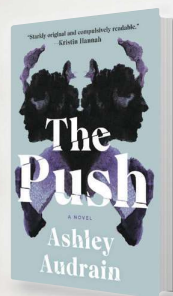
Alcove Press | Coming January 2021 in Trade Paperback and eBook Editions



FOR READERS OF *WE WERE THE LUCKY ONES*, *LILAC GIRLS*, *THE BOOK THIEF*, AND *HOTEL ON THE CORNER OF BITTER AND SWEET*

Lauren Fox  
**SEND FOR ME:**  
A NOVEL

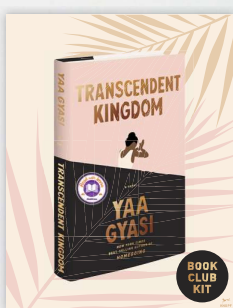
Knopf | Coming February 2021 in Hardcover and eBook Editions



FOR READERS OF *THE PERFECT NANNY* AND *THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN*

Ashley Audrain  
**THE PUSH:**  
A NOVEL

Pamela Dorman Books | Coming January 2021 in Hardcover, eBook, Audio, Large Print, and Spanish-Language Editions



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# 100 Best Books of 2020

This year didn't turn out how we expected, but its books were even better than we'd hoped. The BookPage editors are pleased to present our most highly recommended books of 2020.



## FICTION

### 1. *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett

Calling to mind the work of Toni Morrison and Elizabeth Strout, Bennett's masterful family saga is filled with characters who shine brightly in memorable moments both big and small.

### 2. *Transcendent Kingdom* by Yaa Gyasi

Gyasi's second novel ranges into fresh, relevant territories, delving into the heart of one woman's struggle to make sense of her life and family.

### 3. *Piranesi* by Susanna Clarke

"This slim tale of solitude and secrets is nearly impossible to describe, and I almost can't believe Clarke pulled it off—but she absolutely did." —Cat, Deputy Editor

### 4. *Such a Fun Age* by Kiley Reid

Smart, witty and even a bit sly, this penetrating social commentary is also one of this year's most enjoyable novels.

### 5. *The Glass Hotel* by Emily St. John Mandel

Mandel follows her bestselling *Station Eleven* with an even more intricately layered novel of hauntings both literal and metaphorical.

### 6. *Afterlife* by Julia Alvarez

In one moving scene after another, Alvarez dramatizes the sustaining power of stories, whether for immigrants in search of a better life or for a widow surviving a spouse's death.

### 7. *Hamnet* by Maggie O'Farrell

Graceful and moving, this triumph of literary and historical fiction is a brilliant re-creation of the lives of William Shakespeare's family.

### 8. *Memorial* by Bryan Washington

"Love is becoming increasingly difficult to nav-

igate, but Washington faces it head-on. The answers to our love problems aren't in *Memorial*, though; they're in how Washington makes us feel." —Eric, Editorial Intern

### 9. *Deacon King Kong* by James McBride

*Deacon King Kong* finds a literary master at work, and reading the book's 384 pages feels like both an invigorating sprint and an engrossing marathon.

### 10. *The Mirror & the Light* by Hilary Mantel

With the satisfying close to her Wolf Hall trilogy, Mantel has, quite simply, redefined historical fiction.

### 11. *Leave the World Behind* by Rumaan Alam

Alam's smart and terrifying thriller is certainly timely in the era of COVID-19, but it's also relevant for anyone who has questioned our unwavering faith in the social contract.

### 12. *The Death of Vivek Oji* by Akwaeke Emezi

It takes a village to raise a child, but as Emezi implies in their second adult novel, it takes a culture and its mythologies to erase a child. This is a profound exploration of the boundaries of personal, sexual and cultural transition.

### 13. *How Much of These Hills Is Gold* by C Pam Zhang

"This fresh, myth-laden immigrant tale has the power to shift the needle for what we expect from American historical fiction." —Cat, Deputy Editor

### 14. *Monogamy* by Sue Miller

Miller remains one of the best writers at depicting the day-to-day normality of sexual desire. If this is not her best novel, it is surely in the top tier of her work.

### 15. *The Lying Life of Adults* by Elena Ferrante

Ferrante's standalone novel simmers with rage toward parental deception and society's impossible ideals of beauty and behavior.

### 16. *Valentine* by Elizabeth Wetmore

As Texas women navigate what is decidedly a man's world with feminine grace, *Valentine* becomes a testament to the resilience of the female spirit.

### 17. *Sisters* by Daisy Johnson

"Johnson's psychologically astute tale of two sisters can be read in an evening but will be pondered for much longer than that." —Trisha, Publisher

### 18. *The Lost Book of Adana Moreau* by Michael Zapata

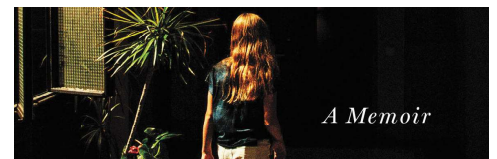
"Stories within stories can be dizzying, but Zapata's parallel universes are an anchor. His debut is as much about real life as it is about lives that could have been." —Eric, Editorial Intern

### 19. *Code Name Hélène* by Ariel Lawhon

This spellbinding work of historical fiction, inspired by the true story of Nancy Grace Augusta Wake, will leave you in awe at every page.

### 20. *Happy and You Know It* by Laura Hankin

This is a romp with substance, offering ample opportunity for self-reflection.



## NONFICTION

### 1. *Notes on a Silencing* by Lacy Crawford

Crawford's story of sexual assault and institutional cover-up is harrowing, but her elegant writing and propulsive narrative structure keep readers from ever sinking into despair. It's a rare and brilliant achievement.

### 2. *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson

Wilkerson is unmatched in her ability to take colossal concepts and distill them into smooth, accessible prose full of paradigm-shifting ideas.



**3. Fathoms** by *Rebecca Giggs*

The breadth and depth of Giggs' research on whales is remarkable, but it's her poetic and insightful analysis that elevates *Fathoms* into something unforgettable.

**4. Memorial Drive** by *Natasha Trethewey*

"Trethewey's ability to translate the bone-crushing tragedy of her mother's murder into art borders on alchemy." —Christy, Associate Editor

**5. The Dead Are Arising** by *Les Payne and Tamara Payne*

This biography of Malcolm X, three decades in the making, is essential reading.

**6. Hidden Valley Road** by *Robert Kolker*

Kolker paints an arresting, stunningly reported portrait of how far we've come in treating mental illness—and how far we still have to go.

**7. Is Rape a Crime?** by *Michelle Bowdler*

Bowdler's candid recounting of her own mishandled legal case swells into a stinging indictment of the criminal justice system's failure to treat sexual violence as a crime.

**8. Conditional Citizens** by *Laila Lalami*

Lalami's first work of nonfiction considers who has access to the rights and freedoms America is known for and whose citizenship is restricted. In the hands of such a gifted storyteller, these questions become deeply personal.

**9. Children of the Land** by *Marcelo Hernandez Castillo*

"Castillo seems to crack open his own chest to reveal the human cost and personal injury of immigrating to the U.S." —Christy, Associate Editor

**10. World of Wonders** by *Aimee Nezhukumatathil*

In essays that explore the love for nature that has sustained her throughout her life, poet Nezhukumatathil finds a sense of connection to the world and a way to soften its sharp edges.

**11. Nobody Will Tell You This but Me** by *Bess Kalb*

"Family memoirs are usually about dysfunction, so it's refreshing to read one that's inspired by a soul-deep bond. I laughed, I cried, I passed my copy on to someone I loved." —Trisha, Publisher

**12. Vesper Flights** by *Helen Macdonald*

Macdonald's bite-size essays about the intersection of the human and animal worlds are by turns heavenly, mystical and unsettling.

**13. To Start a War** by *Robert Draper*

This revelatory account of the Bush administration's momentous decision to invade Iraq in 2003 breaks new ground and makes big waves.

**14. Inferno** by *Catherine Cho*

As Cho recounts her experience of postpartum psychosis, she moves maternal mental illness out of the shadows and offers a vision of motherhood that is honest, complicated and refreshing.

**15. Wow, No Thank You.** by *Samantha Irby*

"Irby's frankness about things like chronic illness and depression make her so much more than just the Midwest's patron saint of poop jokes." —Christy, Associate Editor

**16. Just Us** by *Claudia Rankine*

By mixing poetry, cultural criticism, memoir and images, Rankine urges us to engage others in difficult conversations about the systems and prejudices that divide us.

**17. Once I Was You** by *Maria Hinojosa*

Thirty years of award-winning journalism culminate in Hinojosa's beautiful and passionate memoir, which combines her personal story with the history of U.S. immigration policy.

**18. Wilmington's Lie** by *David Zucchino*

This brilliant and astonishing history details what happened in 1898 Wilmington, North Carolina, when white supremacists tried to eliminate Black citizens by any means.

**19. Minor Feelings** by *Cathy Park Hong*

In biting essays that cover topics as broad as intergenerational trauma and stand-up comedy, Hong showcases the textured complexities of Asian American identity.

**20. The Splendid and the Vile** by *Erik Larson*

One of narrative nonfiction's most adept practitioners, Larson can make even a subject as well-worn as Winston Churchill come alive.

**MYSTERY & SUSPENSE****1. Blacktop Wasteland** by *S.A. Cosby*

Cosby's lightning-bright prose powers this magnificent tale of a heist gone wrong and a weary man's attempts to free himself from his past.

**2. Mexican Gothic** by *Silvia Moreno-Garcia*

The gothic thriller gets a refreshingly glamorous update in the skilled hands of Moreno-Garcia.

**3. The Distant Dead** by *Heather Young*

A young boy finds a charred corpse in the dusty hills outside his Nevada town. Young's steady, meditative mystery uses this premise as an entry point to explore regret, isolation and loss.

**4. The Book of Lamps and Banners** by *Elizabeth Hand*

"This enjoyably shaggy mystery crackles with tension and sparks with paranoia, fully immersing you in the head space of its punk photographer sleuth." —Savanna, Associate Editor

**5. The Bright Lands** by *John Fram*

Fram's wonderful spin on the spooky small-town thriller upends musty old tropes and introduces him as a writer to watch.

**6. Take Me Apart** by *Sara Sligar*

It's difficult to balance social commentary with suspense, but this feverish tale handles both mystery and trauma with aplomb.

**7. Dear Child** by *Romy Hausmann*

*Gone Girl* meets *Room* in this absolutely riveting thriller. Here's hoping Hausmann will be robbing us of our sleep for many years to come.

**8. When No One Is Watching** by *Alyssa Cole*

Beloved romance author Cole makes big waves with her debut thriller, which crafts a nightmare from the everyday terror of gentrification.

**9. The Devil and the Dark Water** by *Stuart Turton*

In this fiendishly entertaining historical mystery, a Sherlock Holmes-esque detective and a trio of

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female sleuths try to determine whether their ocean voyage is beset by demonic forces.

**10. Perfect Little Children** by *Sophie Hannah*

“This thriller takes a mind-twisting premise—a woman who discovers her former best friend’s children seemingly haven’t aged—and just gets crazier from there.” —Trisha, Publisher



ROMANCE

**1. Take a Hint, Dani Brown** by *Talia Hibbert*

Hibbert’s latest triumph questions the wisdom of living your life according to the conventions of romance novels—and is also, itself, an incredible romance novel.

**2. Love Lettering** by *Kate Clayborn*

“You’ll never look at your own handwriting the same way again after reading this luminous contemporary romance.” —Savanna, Associate Editor

**3. Boyfriend Material** by *Alexis Hall*

Hall’s charming rom-com explores respectability politics in the gay community while giving us *Four Weddings and a Funeral* vibes.

**4. Spoiler Alert** by *Olivia Dade*

“This was the body-positive romance I didn’t know I always wanted. Dade absolutely nails the world of media fandom.” —Stephanie, Associate Editor

**5. Headliners** by *Lucy Parker*

In what may be her best romance yet, Parker transitions her absolutely wonderful London Celebrities series from the theater to the high-stakes world of prime-time TV.

**6. Season of the Wolf** by *Maria Vale*

The Legend of All Wolves is one of the most ambitious paranormal series out there, and it just keeps topping itself with each fascinating installment.

**7. Ties That Tether** by *Jane Igharo*

Igharo’s impressive debut tackles interracial relationships, ambition and family with even-handed clarity and just a hint of melancholy. (And some very hot love scenes.)

**8. If I Never Met You** by *Mhairi McFarlane*

McFarlane uses the workplace romance as a foundation for an emotional exploration of how past traumas affect romantic relationships.

**9. Whiteout** by *Adriana Anders*

This Antarctica-set romantic suspense balances character development with high-stakes action in one of the harshest environments on Earth.

**10. The Rakes** by *Scarlett Peckham*

The life of Enlightenment-era feminist Mary Wollstonecraft serves as inspiration for this angsty and righteously angry historical romance from rising star Peckham.



SCI-FI & FANTASY

**1. Or What You Will** by *Jo Walton*

A joyful and blazingly intelligent meditation on life and mortality, Walton’s latest masterpiece is everything speculative fiction should be.

**2. Unconquerable Sun** by *Kate Elliott*

Elliott’s grandly progressive yet old-fashioned space opera is a take on Alexander the Great inspired by the world of antiquity.

**3. The Doors of Eden** by *Adrian Tchaikovsky*

Tchaikovsky’s intelligence and talent for crafting lovable characters are on full display in this mind-bending trip through time and space.

**4. The Obsidian Tower** by *Melissa Caruso*

The current wave of glorious, gloomy gothic genre fiction shows no signs of stopping, and Caruso’s is among the best of the bunch.

**5. The Once and Future Witches** by *Alix E. Harrow*

“Harrow’s scorching second novel channels female rage into magical power, making for an oh-so-satisfying 2020 read.” —Trisha, Publisher

**6. The House in the Cerulean Sea** by *T.J. Klune*

“Klune’s wise and whimsical tale is simply the most delightful fantasy novel I read this year. It made me chuckle, sigh and, in the end, hug the

book like a dear friend.” —Stephanie, Associate Editor

**7. The Vanished Birds** by *Simon Jimenez*

“This book came out in January, and I have thought about its opening chapter every month since.” —Savanna, Associate Editor

**8. The Unspoken Name** by *A.K. Larkwood*

The early praise was ecstatic, with comparisons to Ursula K. Le Guin’s iconic *The Tombs of Atuan*, and Larkwood’s debut more than lives up to the hype.

**9. A Deadly Education** by *Naomi Novik*

“Novik’s tale may be darker than her best known works, but it has a sly, knowing wit and a deep thoughtfulness I found hard to resist.” —Stephanie, Associate Editor

**10. The Wolf of Oren-Yaro** by *K.S. Villoso*

Villoso’s debut has superb world building and complex character development, and never gets overburdened by either.



YOUNG ADULT

**1. Dragon Hoops** by *Gene Luen Yang*

*Dragon Hoops* is the “Friday Night Lights” of graphic literature: It’s a story about a basketball team, but it’s also a brilliant story about storytelling itself.

**2. Legendborn** by *Tracy Deonn*

Deonn’s debut is an extremely satisfying contemporary fantasy novel that upends the tropes of the genre.

**3. Foreshadow**, edited by *Emily X.R. Pan and Nova Ren Suma*

“This anthology of new voices exemplifies the best of what short stories and young adult literature can be.” —Stephanie, Associate Editor

**4. We Are Not From Here** by *Jenny Torres Sanchez*

This lyrical, visceral tale of three teens forced to leave their homeland in search of a better life is jaw-droppingly, heart-stoppingly powerful.

**5. *Elatsoe* by Darcie Little Badger, illustrated by Rovina Cai**

Little Badger's first book wraps a page-turning mystery up in some of the most inventive and clever world building of the year.

**6. *The Gravity of Us* by Phil Stamper**

"*The Gravity of Us* has all the ingredients I love in a truly great love story. It made my heart sing." —Stephanie, Associate Editor

**7. *Not So Pure and Simple* by Lamar Giles**

Giles' novel is a masterful exploration of gender roles and toxic masculinity, anchored in an authentic teen boy's voice.

**8. *Kent State* by Deborah Wiles**

This slim verse novel, narrated from multiple perspectives, serves as a historical record of a national tragedy and a call to action for every American.

**9. *Girl, Unframed* by Deb Caletti**

*Girl, Unframed* is a perceptive story of a young woman's journey to understanding the persistent contradictions that govern the lives of women.

**10. *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea* by Maggie Tokuda-Hall**

Tokuda-Hall's first YA novel reads like an undiscovered classic with impressive modern flair.



## MIDDLE GRADE

**1. *Everything Sad Is Untrue* by Daniel Nayeri**

"It's easy to say that a children's book could change the world, because so many children's books do by changing the life of one reader. But I'm still going to say it: This book could change the world." —Stephanie, Associate Editor

**2. *All Thirteen* by Christina Soontornvat**

Soontornvat's chronicle of the rescue of the Wild Boars boys soccer team from a Thai cave is tense, expansive and revelatory.

**3. *Fighting Words* by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley**

Bradley called *Fighting Words* "the work I was put on this earth to do." She was right.

**4. *King and the Dragonflies* by Kacen Callender**

This moving, lyrical story is infused with a sense of hope that flutters and glitters like so many delicate dragonfly wings.

**5. *Our Friend Hedgehog* by Lauren Castillo**

"Reading Castillo's illustrated chapter book is like getting the coziest cup of tea on the coldest day of the year." —Stephanie, Associate Editor

**6. *The Only Black Girls in Town* by Brandy Colbert**

Colbert's light touch with weighty subjects pays off handsomely in her first middle grade novel.

**7. *Land of the Cranes* by Aida Salazar**

Salazar's novel-in-verse is a powerful call to recognize the experiences of migrants as well as an intimate portrait of a caring, supportive family fighting for their freedom.

**8. *Echo Mountain* by Lauren Wolk**

In Wolk's signature evocative language, this complex historical novel explores themes of family, social responsibility and modern versus traditional medicine.

**9. *We Dream of Space* by Erin Entrada Kelly**

*We Dream of Space* is a celebration of the need for optimism in the face of disasters both individual and communal.

**10. *Premeditated Myrtle* by Elizabeth C. Bunce**

This series opener charmingly evokes the spirit of Louise Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy*, if Harriet were a bit more inclined toward afternoon tea.



## PICTURE BOOKS

**1. *The Old Truck* by Jarrett Pumphrey and Jerome Pumphrey**

This debut by two talented brothers is an extraordinary and universally appealing new classic.

**2. *Rain Before Rainbows* by Smriti Prasadam-Halls, illustrated by David Litchfield**

Litchfield's color-saturated illustrations are stun-

ning, and Prasadam-Halls' spare benediction of gentle comfort will settle quietly into your heart.

**3. *13 Stories About Harris* by Amy Schwartz**

Schwartz proves herself a master of understated humor in this baker's dozen of irresistibly charming tales.

**4. *Me & Mama* by Cozbi A. Cabrera**

"Cabrera perfectly captures the adoration a young girl feels toward her mother, and her acrylic illustrations take my breath away." —Stephanie, Associate Editor

**5. *In a Jar* by Deborah Marcer**

The story of a little bunny who collects tangible reminders of special moments, *In a Jar* captivates, entertains and leaves you with a sense of magic still shimmering around the edges.

**6. *Sugar in Milk* by Thrity Umrigar, illustrated by Khoa Le**

"This story about the sweetness that comes when we invite new people into our hearts is beautifully crafted." —Stephanie, Associate Editor

**7. *The Little Mermaid* by Jerry Pinkney**

Pinkney breathes new life into Hans Christian Andersen's familiar tale. This is an impressive addition to the already excellent body of work of one of the most acclaimed children's book creators of all time.

**8. *I Talk Like a River* by Jordan Scott, illustrated by Sydney Smith**

Drawn from Scott's personal experience with stuttering, *I Talk Like a River* is compassionate without resorting to sentimentality and dazzlingly brought to life by illustrator Smith.

**9. *The Paper Kingdom* by Helena Ku Rhee, illustrated by Pascal Campion**

"The power of imagination to enliven any task is on full display in this gently told tale of a child who accompanies his parents to their job as night janitors." —Trisha, Publisher

**10. *Prairie Days* by Patricia MacLachlan, illustrated by Micha Archer**

"Archer's extraordinary illustrations deliver a new thrill with every turn of the page. This is the most beautiful book of the year." —Allison, Children's Books



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## ★ *Perestroika in Paris*

By Jane Smiley

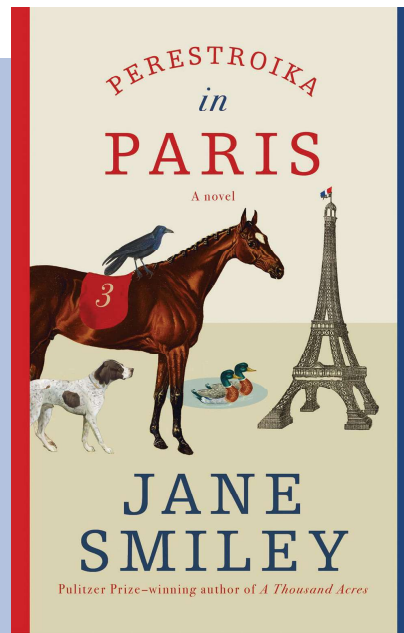
### Folk Tale

We humans like to imagine that we know what our animal friends are thinking, but in *Perestroika in Paris* (Knopf, \$26.95, 9780525520351), Jane Smiley actually burrows into the craniums of a menagerie that includes a horse, a dog, a raven, some rats and the humans they interact with, resulting in a remarkable novel that splits the difference between *Charlotte's Web* and *Animal Farm*.

At the outset, a careless trainer leaves a stall unlocked, and the curious filly Paras (short for Perestroika) wanders away from the race-track and into the City of Lights. Paras knows the things a thoroughbred would know—her lineage, for instance—but not much else. In the city, Paras meets a worldly dog named Frida,

who has been forced to fend for herself since her owner went missing. Like any street survivor, Frida knows how to avoid the gendarmes and which tricks will con treats from the citizenry.

The adventure shifts into high gear when the pair is introduced to a raven, Sir Raoul



Corvus Corax, whom Smiley imbues with intelligence, twitchiness and a certain French *je ne sais quoi*. With winter approaching, Frida and Paras face some crucial decisions regarding housing and food. While neither is equipped with the capacity for long-term logistical planning, their animal instincts kick in, propelling them to a surprising conclusion.

To call this book “charming” might be damning it with faint praise, but Smiley has created an otherworldly universe in which her makeshift animal family supports one another in an environment that, while not necessarily hostile, is certainly hazardous. *Perestroika in Paris* takes its place alongside the likes of *Through the Looking-Glass*, in that it will reward both precocious young readers and their parents with a sense of wonder and whimsy.

—Thane Tierney

## The Arctic Fury

By Greer Macallister



### Historical Fiction

The real Lady Jane Franklin sponsored a number of expeditions to find her explorer husband, Rear Admiral Sir John Franklin, after he and his men went missing in the Arctic. Though there's

no record of an all-female expedition, that hasn't stopped Greer Macallister from writing a cracking good story about one in her fourth novel, *The Arctic Fury* (Sourcebooks Landmark, \$16.99, 9781728215693).

Virginia Reeve is the leader of the all-female company, and when the book opens, she's on trial for the murder of one of its members. The year is 1853, and the courthouse is in Boston, though the alleged homicide happened not far from the North Pole. Big-hearted Virginia is strong and rough around the edges, and much of her fortitude is born of trauma, having lived through both the horrific winter of 1846–47 and the accidental death of her mentor, a pathfinder named Ames whom she loved with a platonic fervor.

Virginia's crew is motley enough. Among

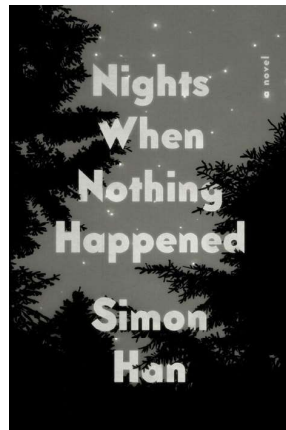
them are a woman who handles the sled dogs, a cartographer, an illustrator, a writer, a ladies' maid and her pampered mistress, Caprice. Though Caprice and Virginia cross swords early on, the hardships of their trek allow them to value each other's qualities.

Macallister's book, written in prose as crisp as an Arctic summer, reminds us that women had all kinds of adventures during this period, from heading out into the frontier to holding conventions for women's rights and writing antislavery books like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. *The Arctic Fury* is a tribute to one young woman's leadership and genius for survival.

—Arlene McKanic

## ★ *Nights When Nothing Happened*

By Simon Han



### Family Drama

Simon Han's debut novel scrutinizes the American dream through the Chengs, who have recently emigrated from China. The family settles in a suburb of Dallas, Texas, where Patty works in

semiconductors and Liang is a photographer. Their son, Jack, spends the first six years of his life in China, where his grandparents raise him until his parents are ready for him to join them in the United States. His sister, Annabel, is born in the U.S., and her relationship to China is abstract, as she has never been there but speaks Mandarin at home.

Things aren't going particularly well with 5-year-old Annabel. At school, she's practicing manipulation on a friend, and other parents are leery of her. When she begins sleepwalking, Jack deems himself her protector.

In *Nights When Nothing Happened* (Riverhead, \$26, 9780593086056), Han explores all that can get lost in the spaces between people. A fateful Thanksgiving Day serves as the crux of the story, but the tale spans much further than that, back to the mysterious death of Liang's mother when he was an infant, which has haunted him his whole life. While the book is driven more by characterization than by plot, Han delivers the few pivotal moments with such skill that they are jaw-droppers.

Han displays incredible range as a novelist, oscillating between honest, almost tangibly real scenes, opaque dreams and refractive memories. He portrays Annabel's and Jack's points of view with remarkable integrity, while Liang and Patty are both heartbreaking and heartwarming, doing their absolute best for their children while grappling with their pasts.

Han's prose is vivid yet restrained, and his characters are multidimensional and alive. Emotionally resonant and packed with nuance, this is an exemplary debut novel.

—Leslie Hinson

## ★ All the Young Men

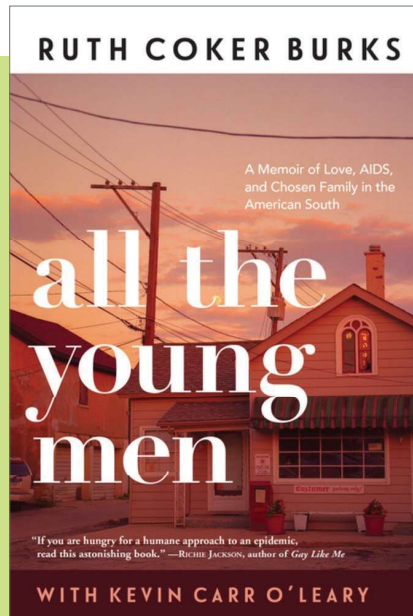
By Ruth Coker Burks

### Memoir

The history of HIV/AIDS in the U.S. is often told from the perspectives of white, openly gay men who lived in major cities. But that's not even close to the whole story. Ruth Coker Burks' *All the Young Men* (Grove, \$26, 9780802157249) tells of the HIV-positive men who lived and died in the deeply conservative state of Arkansas, where the stigma of homosexuality was nearly as deadly as the virus.

In 1986, Burks was 26 and visiting a friend in the hospital when she became aware of a young man dying of AIDS in another room. The medical staff, disguised by the disease, neglected him in his final hours. As a devout Christian, Burks couldn't bear to let the man die hungry, scared and alone.

She soon developed a reputation in Hot Springs, Arkansas, as someone who would help care for gay men dying of the virus. Many of the men who came to her were from religious families who believed that, through illness and death, these men got what was coming to them. Refusing to treat people with HIV as outcasts made Burks a pariah in her



community and particularly in her church, where appearances mattered more than anything. As a single mom, Burks was well versed in the conservative social politics of the South and adept at “killing them with kindness.” She showed great ingenuity as she shamed politicians, businessmen and medical workers into taking action on behalf of AIDS patients.

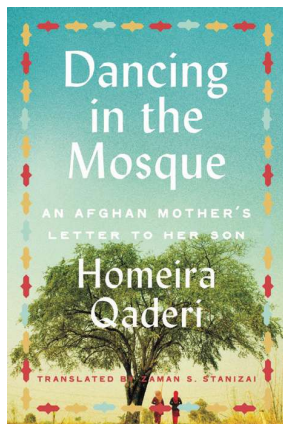
Throughout the memoir, it's hard not to fall in love with Burks for her big-heartedness and enduring sense of humor in the face of suffering. However, *All the Young Men* isn't an uplifting book. Ignorance, denial and cruelty have always been, and always will be, killers. But as Burks forges a path alongside these vulnerable men, her embrace of education and rejection of bigotry light the way forward for us all.

—Jessica Wakeman

## Dancing in the Mosque

By Homeira Qaderi

Translated by Zaman S. Stanizai



### Memoir

“Divorce, divorce, divorce.” Homeira Qaderi's phone screen lit up with these words from her husband, ending their arranged marriage—and her parental rights to their baby son. This heartbreaking act comes not at the

beginning of her searing memoir, *Dancing in the Mosque: An Afghan Mother's Letter to Her Son* (Harper, \$26.99, 9780062970312), but near its inevitable conclusion, as a woman who could not conform to the strictures of Taliban-ruled Afghanistan must face the bitter consequences. Someday, Qaderi writes to her son, Siawash, from her chosen exile in California, she hopes their story will mean other Afghan mothers will not meet the same fate.

Qaderi's childhood in Herat, occupied by Russians and later ruled by the Taliban, was fraught with violence. Bullets flew everywhere. Soldiers strode through streets and into homes. Books were forbidden for girls, and her mother “was like a spider trying to safeguard me within her web.” Her grandmother chastised her curiosity

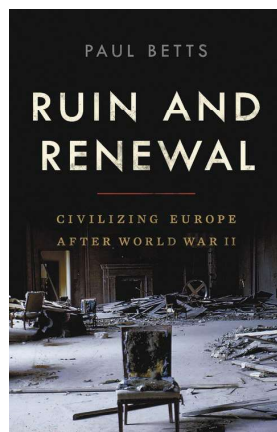
and fearlessness, but her father encouraged her. She was still a teenager when she began teaching boys and girls together, a forbidden act. Their classroom was a stifling tent that served as a mosque, and they kept their notebooks hidden in their Qurans lest Taliban soldiers found them learning instead of praying.

Interspersed among grim descriptions of Taliban rule and Qaderi's heartbroken letters to her lost son are stunning passages describing the austere beauty of her homeland, which she still mourns. Yet her grief begs an even harder question: What does it take for a parent to choose hope for a greater good over their own child?

—Priscilla Kipp

## Ruin and Renewal

By Paul Betts



### European History

When World War II ended, Europe was devastated. There were over 40 million displaced people across the continent, including 8 million civilians in Germany alone, 10% of them Jewish.

Malaria, tuberculosis and famine were serious threats in areas that lacked a stable society, moral authority and

basic infrastructure. In his wide-ranging and consistently enlightening *Ruin and Renewal: Civilizing Europe After World War II* (Basic, \$35, 9781541672468), Paul Betts shows how efforts to “civilize” these devastated regions influenced much of our world today. His account combines political, cultural and intellectual history, while also touching on science, religion, photography, architecture and archaeology.

The first humanitarian efforts were waged by foreign volunteers from both secular and religious groups. Among the many agencies was the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, made up of workers from 44 countries. They offered help to the “victims of German and Japanese barbarism,” and their legacy is mixed, but the organization “did forge a new language of civilization . . . for postwar Europe.”

Other types of aid had religious overtones. In 1946 Winston Churchill asserted that there “can be no revival of Europe without a spiritually great France and a spiritually great Germany.” His message of forgiveness went as far as a personal contribution to the defense fund for German officers accused of war crimes. Likewise, Presidents Truman and Eisenhower shaped a good deal of U.S. foreign policy according to their Christian beliefs.

The first half of the book focuses on the European continent, and the second half concentrates on Europe's changing role in the wider world with regard to empire and decolonization. In all, this splendid overview provides striking new insights about where the Western world has been and where we may be going.

—Roger Bishop

# A flurry of seasonal stories

Three original tales and a bold take on a beloved classic are just right for sharing.

Need a heaping dose of joy this holiday season? Fix yourself a steaming mug of cocoa, put on your warmest, fuzziest pajamas, and cuddle up with one of these spectacular picture books.

Leslie Kimmelman and Galia Bernstein's **The Eight Knights of Hanukkah** (Holiday House, \$17.99, 9780823439584, ages 4 to 8) is a humorous adventure that features heroic cavaliers and a rascally dragon while drawing upon Hanukkah traditions.

Lady Sadie has invited her subjects to celebrate the final night of Hanukkah, but Dreadful the dragon is wreaking havoc and thwarting her plans. To stop him, Lady Sadie summons her children, the titular knights, and asks them to commit acts of courage and goodwill to get the holiday back on track. When the dragon's fiery breath fries a boy's dreidel, Sir Alex makes a new one. After Dreadful gobbles up the baker's doughnuts, Sir Lily helps replenish the supply. The knights pursue Dreadful with persistence and bravery, but when they meet him face to face, they discover he's not quite what he seems.

Bernstein's illustrations of the mischievous Dreadful, the bold knights and gracious Lady Sadie are friendly and energetic, and design features such as a map of the kingdom will transport readers to the story's medieval setting. In an afterword, Kimmelman explores the history of Hanukkah and the importance of performing mitzvot—good deeds—throughout the year. It all adds up to a clever, thrilling journey that's lots of fun.

Bestselling author-illustrator Loren Long offers an inspired take on a classic tale in **The Night Before Christmas** (HarperCollins, \$18.99, 9780062869463, ages 4 to 8). In stunning illustrations that capture just a few of the many ways we celebrate the holiday today, Long updates Santa's famous Christmas Eve visit with a contemporary sensibility that will resonate with readers of all ages.

Long stays true to the spirit of Clement C. Moore's poem even as he shifts its setting to the present day. His illustrations depict the holiday traditions of four diverse families in beautifully composed scenes executed in acrylic paint and colored pencil. Cozy mobile home, snug farmhouse, urban apartment, coastal bungalow—the homes may be different, but they're all ready for Santa's visit. Delightfully detailed paintings of children “nestled snug in their beds” and parents on the lookout for “the jolly old elf” capture the excitement and anticipation of the season. Endpapers show kiddos making crafts, putting up decorations, baking cookies and otherwise prepping for Santa's arrival.

Long's use of varied families and homes is a smart approach that truly modernizes the poem. Inclusive and human, warm and festive, his illustrations provide a wonderful complement to Moore's text, ensuring that the famous tale will continue to be a seasonal staple.

Arthur A. Levine introduces a new holiday hero in the wonderfully original tale **The Hanukkah Magic of Nate Gadol** (Candlewick, \$19.99, 9780763697419, ages 4 to 7). Nate is a benevolent spirit with flashing eyes, a blue waistcoat, fancy boots and the unique ability to make “things last

as long as they [need] to.” A noble figure, he only uses his gift for urgent requests, like prolonging the freshness of a flower in a sick child's room or stretching a small quantity of butter for cooking.

Nate keeps a particular eye on two families—the Glasers and the O'Malleys—and helps them out if they fall on hard times. In the difficult winter of 1881, as the Glasers run short of food and the O'Malleys' new baby falls sick, the holidays look far from bright. But on Christmas Eve, Nate teams up with a recognizable jolly old friend to assist both families and bring unexpected joy to their seasonal celebrations.

In a moving author's note, Levine reflects on “the challenges of being a Jewish child during Christmas” and his desire to add to the mythology of the holidays. His sparkling story does just that. In Kevin Hawkes' swirling, whimsical illustrations, Nate is jaunty and beaming with glistening gold details on his buttons, eyes and hair—a captivating sprite who hovers in midair and soars over rooftops. His holiday adventure has an inviting, appealing spirit.

Another inventive addition to the literature of the season, **The Little Bell That Wouldn't Ring** (NorthSouth, \$17.95, 9780735843868, ages 4 to 8), written by Heike Conradi and illustrated by Maja Dusíková, is an imaginative fable sure to prompt reflection on the true meaning of the Christmas holiday.

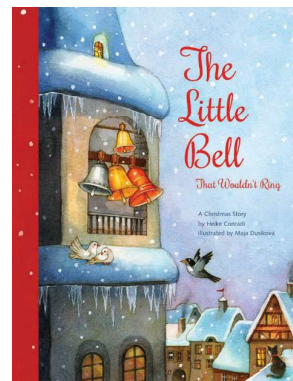
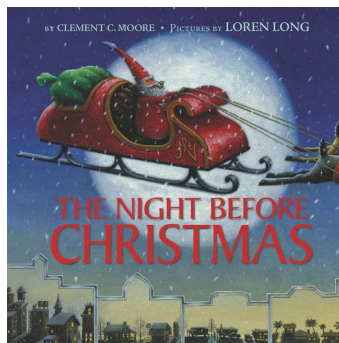
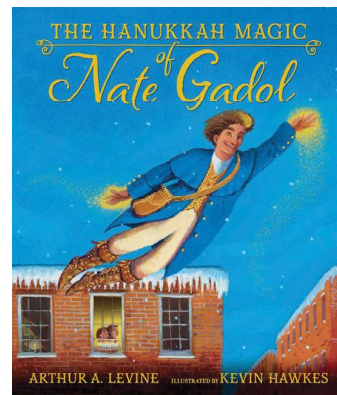
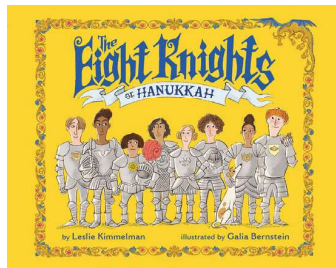
In an old church tower, three majestic bells—one silver, one bronze and one gold—practice for the approaching festivities. The tower's newest addition is a small, unassuming bell that refuses to make music, despite urging from the other bells. A friendly dove named Felidia notices the little bell's silence and, concerned, seeks out her friend

Carol the crow. “Nice words will help,” Carol advises.

And so Felidia embarks on a quest to discover words that might coax the little bell to ring. Checking in with her animal friends, Felidia solicits suggestions (Ringlebert the pigeon suggests “cake crumbs,” while Maurice the mouse proposes “cheddar, camembert, gorgonzola”). Felidia's avian companions travel far and wide to gather words, but in the end, it's a traditional holiday phrase discovered close to home that finally prompts the little bell to chime out for all to hear.

A sweet story that stresses the importance of friendship and encouragement, the tale of the bell comes to life in Dusíková's lovely artwork. From the stately church tower to the bustling town square filled with market stalls, busy shoppers and rosy-cheeked children, her illustrations evoke a winter wonderland. The smallest bell, glowing and golden, has a magical aura all its own. Little ones will love ringing in Christmas with Felidia and her friends.

—Julie Hale



# A Year of Everyday Wonders

By Cheryl B. Klein  
Illustrated by Qin Leng

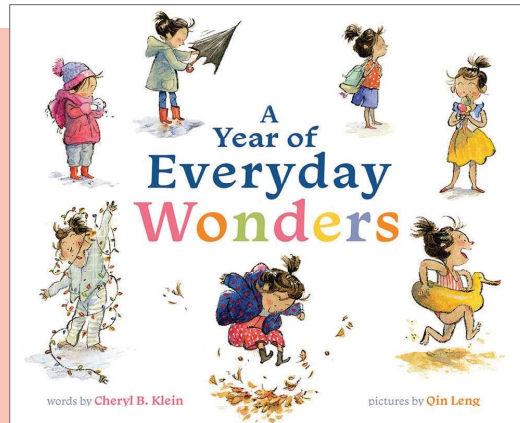
## Picture Book

This reflective, observant book follows a family of four through a calendar year of small moments with a playful, spirited young girl serving as our guide.

Author Cheryl B. Klein keeps the text simple, using short, unpunctuated phrases—"First valentine / First cold / First crush"—while illustrator Qin Leng's charming images capture the emotional ups and downs of childhood. Much of the book is composed of little vignettes that expertly pace the action. The "first crush" begins at the "first cold," when our

protagonist sneezes and a classmate kindly hands her a box of tissues. With crisp colors and fine lines, Leng delightfully extends Klein's spare text.

Klein occasionally varies the rhythm of her phrasing for wry comedic effect. There's a first new umbrella, then a first lost umbrella, followed later by a second occurrence of each. There's a second crush, repeated fights with the girl's brother ("Two hundred twenty-sixth fight with your brother") and, as winter returns,



second and even third snowfalls. As the year winds down, Klein seamlessly and subtly slides into marking "last" instances, rather than "first." For example, waffles that were "first" in January are now the "last waffles" of snowy December.

The book is especially joyful when depicting the year's seasonal gifts—the first "green in the gray" of spring, the first beach trip of summer, the first "gold in the green" of fall and, as the year comes full circle, the first silent night of winter. **A Year of Everyday Wonders** (Abrams, \$16.99, 9781419742088, ages 3 to 7) is a truly wonderful, wonder-filled picture book, perfect for revisiting in every season of the year.

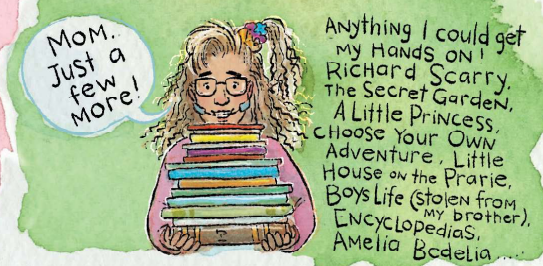
—Julie Danielson

## meet APRYL STOTT

How would you describe your book?



What books did you enjoy as a child?



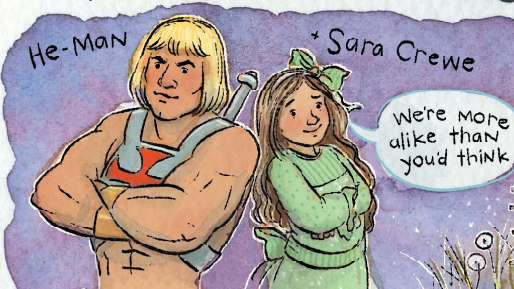
Who has been the biggest influence on your work?



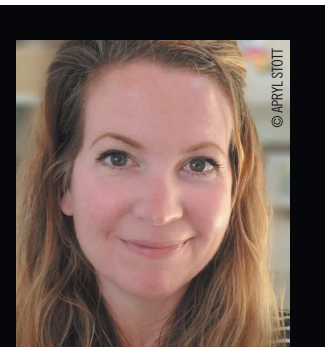
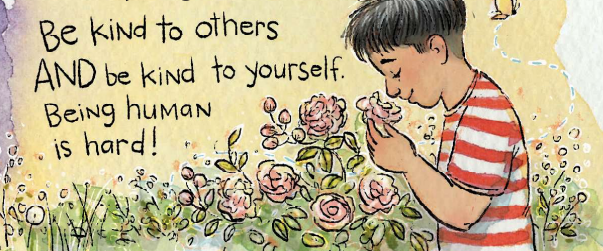
What one thing would you like to learn to do?



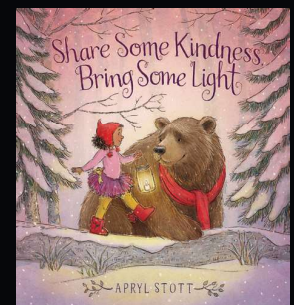
Who was your childhood hero?



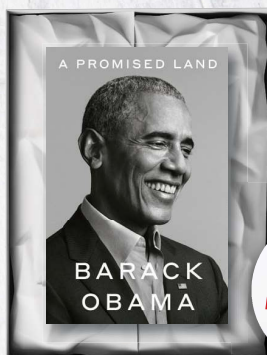
What message would you like to send to young readers?



In Apryl Stott's warm and wonderful debut picture book, **Share Some Kindness, Bring Some Light** (Simon & Schuster, \$17.99, 9781534462380, ages 4 to 8), the forest animals are afraid of Bear, so his friend Coco decides to help them see Bear's kind heart and excellent dancing skills. Raised in California, Stott studied illustration and design at Brigham Young University and now calls Reno, Nevada, home.



# Perfect Gifts FOR Every Reader



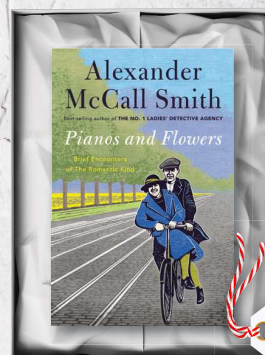
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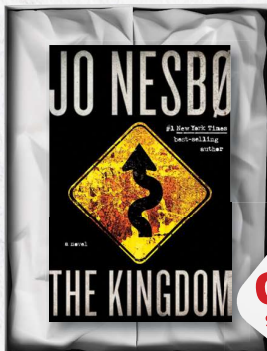
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**GIVE**  
 SUSPENSE



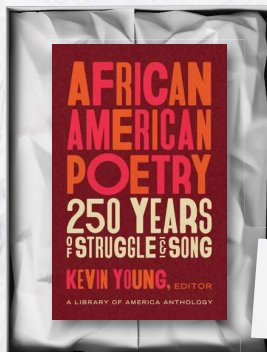
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