

## July 2021 Book Recommendations

### **1. Big Lies in a Small Town by Diane Chamberlain. 387 pages**

North Carolina 2018: Moran Christopher's life has been derailed. Taking the fall for a crime she did not commit, she finds herself serving a three year stint in the North Carolina women's correctional center. Her dream of a career in art is put on hold - until a mysterious visitor makes her an offer that will see her released immediately. Her assignment: restore an old post office mural in a sleepy southern town. Morgan knows nothing about art restoration, but desperate to leave prison she accepts. What she finds under the layers of grime is a painting that tells the story of madness, violence, and a conspiracy of small town secrets.

North Carolina 1940: Anna Doyle, an artist from New Jersey, wins a national contest to paint a mural for the post office in Edenton, North Carolina. Alone in the world and desperate for work, she accepts. But what she doesn't expect is to find herself immersed in a town where prejudices run deep, where people are hiding secrets behind closed doors, and where the price of being different might just end in murder.

What happened to Anna Doyle? Are the clues hidden in the decrepit mural? Can Morgan overcome her own demons to discover what exists beneath the layers of lies?

### **2. The Four Winds by Kristen Hannah, 450 pages**

The Four Winds Kristin Hannah's latest novel is an outstanding historical saga sparking memories of the classic John Steinbeck story, Grapes of Wrath. Based during the great depression, the hardships and demise of small farmers and the migration of people from the Dust Bowl states in America to the land of milk and honey – California

### **3. The Godmothers by Camille Aubrey, 377 pages**

An irresistible and suspenseful novel about four women who marry into a prosperous Italian family. This feminist mafia romp is set in World War Two era Greenwich Village. When their husbands are forced to leave them during the war they must take care of the family business.

### **4. Lorna Mott Comes Home by Diane Johnson , 336 pages**

An art historian divorces her French husband and reconnects with her financially scheming grown children back in California.

In the midst of a large cast, the precarious balance of comedy and tragedy, happiness and anxiety, contentment and striving, generosity and greed, love and sex, Diane Johnson, our Edith Wharton of expat life, comes home to America to deftly, irresistibly portray, with the lightest of touch, the way we live now,

### **5. The People We Meet On Vacation by Emily Henry, 361 pages**

Alex and Poppy have nothing in common. She's a wild child; he wears khakis. She had insatiable wanderlust; he prefers to stay home with a book. And somehow, ever since a fateful car share home from college many years ago, they are the very best of friends. For most of the year they live far apart- she's in New York City and he's in their small hometown - but every summer for a decade, they have taken one glorious week of vacation together. Until two years ago, when they ruined everything. They haven't spoken since.

And do Poppy decides to convince her best friend to take the ne more vacation together - lay everything on the table, make it all right. Miraculously, he agrees. Now she had a week to fix everything. If only she can get around the one big truth that has always stood quietly in the middle of a his seemingly perfect relationship. What could possibly go wrong?

## 6. **The Last Days of Ellis Island by Gaelle Josse , 208 pages**

The Last Days of Ellis Island is a tragic story of a man who spends forty-five years working as an immigration official on Ellis Island. Josse masterfully weaves this moving story of love and loss around the larger historical context "Josse powerfully evokes the spirit of the 'huddled masses' who landed on America's shores while creating a memorable portrait of a man torn between his commitment to his difficult job and the longings of his heart. Duty and desire clash in the melancholy reminiscences of a former Ellis Island immigration officer."

## 7. **Star Crossed: The Story of Astronaut Lisa Nowak by Kimberly C Moore, 296 pages**

**The astronaut crime that shocked the world** *Star Crossed* transports readers to the moment the news broke that one of America's heroes, an astronaut who had flown aboard the Space Shuttle *Discovery* & just months before, had been arrested for a very bizarre crime.

Lisa Nowak had driven 900 miles from Houston to Orlando to intercept and confront her romantic rival in an airport parking lot--allegedly using diapers on the trip so she wouldn't have to stop. Nowak had been dating astronaut William "Billy" Oefelein when she learned that Oefelein was seeing a new girlfriend--U.S. Air Force Captain Colleen Shipman. The "astronaut love triangle" scandal quickly made headlines. The world watched as Nowak was dismissed from NASA, pleaded guilty to a felony, and received an "other than honorable" military discharge.

An award-winning investigative reporter who covered Nowak's criminal case, Kimberly Moore offers behind-the-scenes insights into Nowak's childhood, her rigorous training, and her mission to space. Moore ventures inside the mind of the detective who studied the actions Nowak took that fateful February night. She includes never-before-told details of Nowak's psychiatric diagnosis, taking a serious look at how someone so accomplished could spiral into mental illness to the point of possible attempted murder.

This book spotlights the often-overlooked psychological health of astronauts, exploring how they are cared for by NASA doctors and what changes have been made in recent years to support space travelers on long-term missions. Expertly told, Moore's story is a riveting journey inside the high-pressure world of one of America's most elite agencies and the life of one beleaguered astronaut.

## 8. **Lethal Legacy by Linda Fairstein , 384 pages** (Linda Fairstein is a former NYC ADA who headed the Special Victim's Unit in Manhattan. Her books contain facts on historical NYC sites, here, the NY Public Library on 5th Ave.)

When Assistant District Attorney Alex Cooper is summoned to Tina Barr's apartment on Manhattan's Upper East Side, she finds a neighbor convinced that the young woman was assaulted. But the terrified victim, a conservator of rare books and maps, refuses to cooperate with investigators. Then another woman is found murdered in that same apartment with an extremely valuable book, believed to have been stolen. As Alex pursues the murderer, she is drawn into the strange and privileged world of the Hunt family, major benefactors of the New York Public Library and passionate rare book collectors.

Eventually Alex connects their internal family rivalries to a priceless edition of *Alice in Wonderland*, which also contains the world's oldest map. Would one of the well-bred Hunts be willing to kill for the treasures? The search for the answer takes Alex and her team on a breathtaking chase from Manhattan's grandest apartments to the secret tunnels and chambers of the New York Public Library, and finally to a nineteenth-century underground vault. There, in the pitch-black darkness, Alex comes face-to-face with the killer who values money more than life.

Featuring a cast of elite, erudite, and downright eccentric characters, and a complex trail of clues that will have you guessing until the final pages, *Lethal Legacy* is Linda Fairstein's most beguiling thriller yet.

## 9. **The Guest Book by Sarah Blake**, 490 pages

*The Guest Book* follows three generations of a powerful American family, a family that “used to run the world”. And when the novel begins in 1935, they still do. Kitty and Ogden Milton appear to have everything—perfect children, good looks, a love everyone envies. But after a tragedy befalls them, Ogden tries to bring Kitty back to life by purchasing an island in Maine. That island, and its house, come to define and burnish the Milton family, year after year after year. And it is there that Kitty issues a refusal that will haunt her till the day she dies.

In 1959 a young Jewish man, Len Levy, will get a job in Ogden’s bank and earn the admiration of Ogden and one of his daughters, but the scorn of everyone else. Len’s best friend Reg Pauling has always been the only black man in the room—at Harvard, at work, and finally at the Miltons’ island in Maine.

An island that, at the dawn of the 21st century, this last generation doesn’t have the money to keep. When Kitty’s granddaughter hears that she and her cousins might be forced to sell it, and when her husband brings back disturbing evidence about her grandfather’s past, she realizes she is on the verge of finally understanding the silences that seemed to hover just below the surface of her family all her life.

An ambitious novel that weaves the American past with its present, *The Guest Book* looks at the racism and power that has been systemically embedded in the US for generations. Brimming with gorgeous writing and bitterly accurate social criticism, it is a literary tour de force.

## 10. **Hamnet by Maggie O'Farrell**, 320 pages

Drawing on Maggie O'Farrell's long-term fascination with the little-known story behind Shakespeare's most enigmatic play, *HAMNET* is a luminous portrait of a marriage, at its heart the loss of a beloved child.

Warwickshire in the 1580s. Agnes is a woman as feared as she is sought after for her unusual gifts. She settles with her husband in Henley street, Stratford, and has three children: a daughter, Susanna, and then twins, Hamnet and Judith. The boy, Hamnet, dies in 1596, aged eleven. Four years or so later, the husband writes a play called Hamlet.

Award-winning author Maggie O'Farrell's new novel breathes full-blooded life into the story of a loss usually consigned to literary footnotes, and provides an unforgettable vindication of Agnes, a woman intriguingly absent from history.

## 11. **Finding Dorothy by Elizabeth Letts**, historical fiction, 351 pages

Maud Gage Baum, widow of the author of the book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, met Judy Garland, the young actress playing the role of Dorothy on the set of *The Wizard of Oz* in 1939. At the time, Maud was seventy-eight and Judy was sixteen. In spite of their age difference, Maud immediately connected to Judy--especially when Maud heard her sing "Over the Rainbow," a song whose yearning brought to mind the tough years in South Dakota when Maud and her husband struggled to make a living--until Frank Baum's book became a national sensation.

This wonderfully evocative two-stranded story recreates Maud's youth as the rebellious daughter of a leading suffragette, and the prairie years of Maud and Frank's early days when they lived among the people--especially young Dorothy--who would inspire Frank's masterpiece. Woven into this past story is one set in 1939, describing the high-pressured days on *The Wizard of Oz* film set where Judy is being badgered by the director, producer, and her ambitious stage mother to lose weight, bind her breasts, and laugh, cry, and act terrified on command. As Maud had promised to protect the original Dorothy back in Aberdeen, she now takes on the job of protecting young Judy.

## **12. Sensational: The Hidden History of America's "Girl Stunt Reporters"** , By Kim Todd, 400 pages, nonfiction

A vivid social history that brings to light the "girl stunt reporters" of the Gilded Age who went undercover to expose corruption and abuse in America, and redefined what it meant to be a woman and a journalist — pioneers whose influence continues to be felt today.

In the waning years of the nineteenth century, women journalists across the United States risked reputation and their own safety to expose the hazardous conditions under which many Americans lived and worked. In various disguises, they stole into sewing factories to report on child labor, fainted in the streets to test public hospital treatment, posed as lobbyists to reveal corrupt politicians. Inventive writers whose in-depth narratives made headlines for weeks at a stretch, these "girl stunt reporters" changed laws, helped launch a labor movement, championed women's rights, and redefined journalism for the modern age.

The 1880s and 1890s witnessed a revolution in journalism as publisher titans like Hearst and Pulitzer used weapons of innovation and scandal to battle it out for market share. As they sought new ways to draw readers in, they found their answer in young women flooding into cities to seek their fortunes. When Nellie Bly went undercover into Blackwell's Insane Asylum for Women and emerged with a scathing indictment of what she found there, the resulting sensation created opportunity for a whole new wave of writers. In a time of few jobs and few rights for women, here was a path to lives of excitement and meaning.

After only a decade of headlines and fame, though, these trailblazers faced a vicious public backlash. Accused of practicing "yellow journalism," their popularity waned until "stunt reporter" became a badge of shame. But their influence on the field of journalism would arc across a century, from the Progressive Era "muckraking" of the 1900s to the personal "New Journalism" of the 1960s and '70s, to the "immersion journalism" and "creative nonfiction" of today. Bold and unconventional, these writers changed how people would tell stories forever.

## **13. This Is How It Always Is**, by Laurie Frankel, 338 pages

This is how a family keeps a secret...and how that secret ends up keeping them.

This is how a family lives happily ever after...until happily ever after becomes complicated.

This is how children change...and then change the world.

This is Claude. He's five years old, the youngest of five brothers, and loves peanut butter sandwiches. He also loves wearing a dress, and dreams of being a princess. When he grows up, Claude says, he wants to be a girl.

Rosie and Penn want Claude to be whoever Claude wants to be. They're just not sure they're ready to share that with the world. Soon the entire family is keeping Claude's secret. Until one day it explodes.

This Is How It Always Is is a novel about revelations, transformations, fairy tales, and family. And it's about the ways this is how it always is: Change is always hard and miraculous and hard again, parenting is always a leap into the unknown with crossed fingers and full hearts, children grow but not always according to plan. And families with secrets don't get to keep them forever.

#### 14. **The Book of Lost Names** by Kristen Harmel

Ava Traube Abrams, a semi-retired librarian in Florida, is shelving books one morning when her eyes lock on a photograph in a magazine lying open nearby. She freezes; it's an image of a book she hasn't seen in sixty-five years—a book she recognizes as *The Book of Lost Names*.

The accompanying article discusses the looting of libraries by the Nazis across Europe during World War II—an experience Eva remembers well—and the search to reunite people with the texts taken from them so long ago. The book in the photograph, an eighteenth-century religious text thought to have been taken from France in the waning days of the war, is one of the most fascinating cases. Now housed in Berlin's Zentral- und Landesbibliothek library, it appears to contain some sort of code, but researchers don't know where it came from—or what the code means. Only Eva holds the answer—but will she have the strength to revisit old memories and help reunite those lost during the war?

As a graduate student in 1942, Eva was forced to flee Paris after the arrest of her father, a Polish Jew. Finding refuge in a small mountain town in the Free Zone, she begins forging identity documents for Jewish children fleeing to neutral Switzerland. But erasing people comes with a price, and along with a mysterious, handsome forger named Rémy, Eva decides she must find a way to preserve the real names of the children who are too young to remember who they really are. The records they keep in *The Book of Lost Names* will become even more vital when the resistance cell they work for is betrayed and Rémy disappears.

An engaging and evocative novel reminiscent of *The Lost Girls of Paris* and *The Alice Network*, *The Book of Lost Names* is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the power of bravery and love in the face of evil.

#### 15. **The Silent Patient** by Alex Michaelides

Alicia Berenson's life is seemingly perfect. A famous painter married to an in-demand fashion photographer, she lives in a grand house with big windows overlooking a park in one of London's most desirable areas. One evening her husband Gabriel returns home late from a fashion shoot, and Alicia shoots him five times in the face, and then never speaks another word.

Alicia's refusal to talk, or give any kind of explanation, turns a domestic tragedy into something far grander, a mystery that captures the public imagination and casts Alicia into notoriety. The price of her art skyrockets, and she, the silent patient, is hidden away from the tabloids and spotlight at the Grove, a secure forensic unit in North London.

Theo Faber is a criminal psychotherapist who has waited a long time for the opportunity to work with Alicia. His determination to get her to talk and unravel the mystery of why she shot her husband takes him down a twisting path into his own motivations—a search for the truth that threatens to consume him.