

## January 8, 2024 Book Suggestions

### 1. Remarkably Bright Creatures – 360 pgs by Shelby Van Pelt

***Remarkably Bright Creatures*, an exploration of friendship, reckoning, and hope, tracing a widow's unlikely connection with a giant Pacific octopus.**

After Tova Sullivan's husband died, she began working the night shift at the Sowell Bay Aquarium, mopping floors and tidying up. Keeping busy has always helped her cope, which she's been doing since her eighteen-year-old son, Erik, mysteriously vanished on a boat in Puget Sound over thirty years ago.

Tova becomes acquainted with curmudgeonly Marcellus, a giant Pacific octopus living at the aquarium. Marcellus knows more than anyone can imagine but wouldn't dream of lifting one of his eight arms for his human captors--until he forms a remarkable friendship with Tova.

Ever the detective, Marcellus deduces what happened the night Tova's son disappeared. And now Marcellus must use every trick his old invertebrate body can muster to unearth the truth for her before it's too late. Shelby Van Pelt's **debut novel** is a gentle reminder that sometimes taking a hard look at the past can help uncover a future that once felt impossible.

### 2. Our Missing Hearts (335 pgs) by Celeste Ng

A novel about a mother's unbreakable love in a world consumed by fear.

Twelve-year-old Bird Gardner lives a quiet existence with his loving but broken father, a former linguist who now shelves books in a university library. Bird knows to not ask too many questions, stand out too much, or stray too far. For a decade, their lives have been governed by laws written to preserve "American culture" in the wake of years of economic instability and violence. To keep the peace and restore prosperity, the authorities are now allowed to relocate children of dissidents, especially those of Asian origin, and libraries have been forced to remove books seen as unpatriotic—including the work of Bird's mother, Margaret, a Chinese American poet who left the family when he was nine years old.

Bird has grown up disavowing his mother and her poems; he doesn't know her work or what happened to her, and he knows he shouldn't wonder. But when he receives a mysterious letter containing only a cryptic drawing, he is pulled into a quest to find her. His journey will take him back to the many folktales she poured into his head as a child, through the ranks of an underground network of librarians, into the lives of the children who have been taken, and finally to New York City, where a new act of defiance may be the beginning of much-needed change.

### 3. The Nature of Fragile Things, by Susan Meissner, 367 pp

April 18, 1906: A massive earthquake rocks San Francisco just before daybreak. Sophia Whalen is a young immigrant so desperate to get out of a New York tenement that she answers a mail-order bride ad and agrees to marry a man she knows nothing about. San Francisco widower Martin Hocking proves to be as aloof as he is mesmerizingly beautiful. While Sophie quickly develops deep affection for Kay, Martin's silent five year old daughter, his odd behavior leaves her with the uneasy feeling that something about her newfound situation isn't right. Then one early spring evening, a stranger at the door sets in motion a transforming chain of events. Sophie discovers hidden ties to two other women. The first, pretty and pregnant is standing on her doorstep. The second is hundreds of miles away on the American Southwest, grieving the loss of everything she once loved. The fates of these three women intertwine on the evening of the devastating earthquake, thrusting them into a perilous journey that will test their resiliency and resolve and, ultimately, their belief that love can overcome fear. From the acclaimed author of *The Last Year of the War* and *As Bright as Heaven* comes a gripping novel about the bonds of friendship and mother love, and the power of female solidarity.

**4. A Fall of Marigolds**, by Susan Meissner, 370 pp.

September 1911. On Ellis Island in New York Harbor, nurse Clara Wood cannot face returning to Manhattan, where the man she loved fell to his death in the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire. Then, while caring for a fevered immigrant whose own loss mirrors hers, she becomes intrigued by a name embroidered onto the scarf he carries...and finds herself caught in a dilemma that compels her to confront the truth about the assumptions she's made. Will what she learns devastate her or free her?

September 2011. On Manhattan's Upper West Side, widow Taryn Michaels has convinced herself that she is living fully, working in a charming specialty fabric store and raising her daughter alone. Then a long-lost photograph appears in a national magazine, and she is forced to relive the terrible day her husband died in the collapse of the World Trade Center towers...the same day a stranger reached out and saved her. Will a chance reconnection and a century-old scarf open Taryn's eyes to the larger forces at work in her life?

**5. Like a Sister**, by Kellye Garrett

A tightly coiled plot examines racism, sexism and complicated family relationships as a graduate student investigates the murder of her half-sister from whom she was estranged for years. The brisk story centers on the appealing heroine, whose often sarcastic personality erupts when others underestimate her because she is a young black woman.

**6. Mother-Daughter Murder Night**, by Nina Simon

A high-powered L.A. real estate developer diagnosed with aggressive cancer is forced to move in with her daughter from whom she has been estranged since the younger woman became pregnant at age 17. Now is the time to make amends as the older woman regrets not having the close, supportive bonds her daughter and granddaughter have. Adrift since her illness, the developer is determined to prove the innocence of her granddaughter who is accused of murder.

**7. Blood Sisters**, by Vanessa Lilli

Vanessa Lillie effectively delivers a moving story melding Native American rights and culture, a broken community and fully realized characters into a concise thriller. The disappearances of Native American women, a tragedy often ignored by local authorities, jumpstarts this launch of a new series. Set in 2008 with frequent dips into the distant past, "Blood Sisters" works well as a historical novel and a story about families, Native Americans and prejudice.

**8. Mad Honey**, by Jodi Picoult and Jennifer Finney Boylan 464 pages

Olivia McAfee knows what it feels like to start over. Her picture-perfect life—living in Boston, married to a brilliant cardiothoracic surgeon, raising a beautiful son, Asher—was upended when her husband revealed a darker side. She never imagined she would end up back in her sleepy New Hampshire hometown, living in the house she grew up in, and taking over her father's beekeeping business.

Lily Campanello is familiar with do-overs, too. When she and her mom relocate to Adams, New Hampshire, for her final year of high school, they both hope it will be a fresh start.

And for just a short while, these new beginnings are exactly what Olivia and Lily need. Their paths cross when Asher falls for the new girl in school, and Lily can't help but fall for him, too. With Ash, she feels happy for the first time. Yet at times, she wonders if she can she trust him completely . . .

Then one day, Olivia receives a phone call: Lily is dead, and Asher is being questioned by the police. Olivia is adamant that her son is innocent. But she would be lying if she didn't acknowledge the flashes of his father's temper in him, and as the case against him unfolds, she realizes he's hidden more than he's shared with her.

*Mad Honey* is a riveting novel of suspense, an unforgettable love story, and a moving and powerful exploration of the secrets we keep and the risks we take in order to become ourselves.

**9. What Happened to the Bennetts**, by Lisa Scottoline 391 pages

Jason Bennett is a suburban dad who owns a court-reporting business, but one night, his life takes a horrific turn. He is driving his family home after his daughter's lacrosse game when a pickup truck begins tailgating them, on a dark stretch of road. Suddenly two men jump from the pickup and pull guns on Jason, demanding the car. A horrific flash of violence changes his life forever.

Later that awful night, Jason and his family receive a visit from the FBI. The agents tell them that the carjackers were members of a dangerous drug-trafficking organization - and now Jason and his family are in their crosshairs. The agents advise the Bennetts to enter the witness protection program right away, and they have no choice but to agree. But WITSEC was designed to protect criminal informants, not law-abiding families. Taken from all they know, trapped in an unfamiliar life, the Bennetts begin to fall apart at the seams. Then Jason learns a shocking truth and realizes that he has to take matters into his own hands.

**10. A Ladder To The Sky**, by John Boyne 402 pages

Maurice Swift is handsome, charming, and hungry for fame. The one thing he doesn't have is talent—but he's not about to let a detail like that stand in his way. After all, a would-be writer can find stories anywhere. They don't need to be his own.

Working as a waiter in a West Berlin hotel in 1988, Maurice engineers the perfect opportunity: a chance encounter with celebrated novelist Erich Ackermann. He quickly ingratiates himself with the powerful – but desperately lonely – older man, teasing out of Erich a terrible, long-held secret about his activities during the war. Perfect material for Maurice's first novel.

Once Maurice has had a taste of literary fame, he knows he can stop at nothing in pursuit of that high. Moving from the Amalfi Coast, where he matches wits with Gore Vidal, to Manhattan and London, Maurice hones his talent for deceit and manipulation, preying on the talented and vulnerable in his cold-blooded climb to the top. But the higher he climbs, the further he has to fall. . . .

Sweeping across the late twentieth century, *A Ladder to the Sky* is a fascinating portrait of a relentlessly immoral man, a tour de force of storytelling, and the next great novel from an acclaimed literary virtuoso.