

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS FOR JULY – DECEMBER 2026

MARILYN BINTZ:

Annie Hartnett. *The Road to Tender Hearts*. 384 pages.

PJ a 63-Year-old alcoholic, lottery winner (mostly spent by now) divorced from Ivy, who is engaged to P J's best friend, Fred. Their oldest daughter drowned on the night of her prom. The youngest, Sophie, has mixed feelings about her father. Fred and Ivy are going to Alaska for three months. PJ reads his old high school sweetheart, now a widow in a retirement home, *Tender Hearts* in Arizona, he decides he will go and see if the old connection is still there. Before he can leave, he discovers his estranged brother's daughter and son in law are dead from murder, suicide and he has been named next of kin for the 2 children, ages 8 and 9. Enlisting Sophie to help with the children, PJ borrows Fred's car and the four take a trip to see the country and go to Arizona. There is also a cat with a premonition of death. This is a story of that trip.

Joanne Cannon. *The trouble with sheep and goats*. 368 pages.

England 1976. Mrs. Casey is missing. The neighbors blame her disappearance on the heat wave, but 10-year-old Grace and Tilly aren't convinced and decide to take matters into their own hands. Spunky spirited Grace and quiet thoughtful Tilly go door to door seeking clues. The cul- de- sac starts to give up its secrets and the amateur detectives uncover more than they ever imagined. A complicated history of deception begins to emerge. Everyone has something to hide.

Emma Rosenbaum. *Bad summer people*. 272 pages.

Jan and Lauren rule the town of Secombe, Fire Island, every summer. On the beach or the tennis courts, they are adept in manipulating people. Their husbands, Sam and Jason, have summered together on the island since childhood, despite lifelong grudges and secrets. Their one single friend, Rachel, is looking for a husband, whether it's a tennis pro or someone else's husband, The season starts out quietly as any other until a body is discovered face down off the side of the boardwalk. This is the story of what's lurking under the surface of picture-perfect lives in a place where everyone has something to hide

NANNY HOUSE

Love and Ruin by Paula McLain 2018 434 pp.

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • A powerful novel of the stormy marriage between Ernest Hemingway and Martha Gellhorn, a fiercely independent woman who became one of the greatest war correspondents of the twentieth century. McLain takes readers from the front lines of the Spanish Civil War to the lush refuge of Hemingway's Cuba as Gellhorn blossoms into a venerable war correspondent, while the already famous Hemingway pens his master work, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. We watch over Gellhorn's shoulder as she grapples with the horrors of war, falls in love with a celebrated yet flawed man, and agonizes with self-doubt about her strength as a writer; yet somehow she manages to stay true to herself through it all. *Love and Ruin* is a love story, the making of a trail-blazing woman, and most of all a spellbinding work of historical fiction.

The Rosie Project by Don Tillman 2013 331 pp.

The art of love is never a science: Meet Don Tillman, a brilliant yet socially inept professor of genetics, who's decided it's time he found a wife. In the orderly, evidence-based manner with which Don approaches all things, he designs the Wife Project to find his perfect partner: a sixteen-page, scientifically valid survey to filter out the drinkers, the smokers, the late arrivers.

Rosie Jarman possesses all these qualities. Don easily disqualifies her as a candidate for The Wife Project (even if she is "quite intelligent for a barmaid"). But Don is intrigued by Rosie's own quest to identify her biological father. When an unlikely relationship develops as they collaborate on The Father Project, Don is forced to confront the spontaneous whirlwind that is Rosie—and the realization that, despite your best scientific efforts, you don't find love, it finds you.

Arrestingly endearing and entirely unconventional, Graeme Simsion's distinctive debut "navigates the choppy waters of adult relationships, both romantic and platonic, with a fresh take (USA TODAY). "Filled with humor and plenty of heart, *The Rosie Project* is a delightful reminder that all of us, no matter how we're wired, just want to fit in" (Chicago Tribune).

Once There Were Wolves by Charlotte McConaghy 2021 272 pp.

Inti Flynn arrives in Scotland with her twin sister, Aggie, to lead a team of biologists tasked with reintroducing fourteen gray wolves into the remote Highlands. She hopes to heal not only the dying landscape, but Aggie, too, unmade by the terrible secrets that drove the sisters out of Alaska.

Inti is not the woman she once was, either, changed by the harm she's

witnessed—inflicted by humans on both the wild and each other. Yet as the wolves surprise everyone by thriving, Inti begins to let her guard down, even opening herself up to the possibility of love. But when a farmer is found dead, Inti knows where the town will lay blame. Unable to accept her wolves could be responsible, Inti makes a reckless decision to protect them. But if the wolves didn't make the kill, then who did? And what will Inti do when the man she is falling for seems to be the prime suspect?

- **The Frozen River** Ariel Lawhon 2023 420 pp.

Martha Ballard was a real person who was a midwife in Hallowell Maine. (A Midwife's Tale, is a PBS documentary that chronicles the interwoven stories of saveMartha Ballard and the twentieth-century historian who brought her words to light.)

Maine, 1789: When the Kennebec River freezes, entombing a man in the ice, Martha Ballard is summoned to examine the body and determine cause of death. As a midwife and healer, she is privy to much of what goes on behind closed doors in Hallowell. Her diary is a record of every birth and death, crime and debacle that unfolds in the close-knit community. Months earlier, Martha documented the details of an alleged rape committed by two of the town's most respected gentlemen—one of whom has now been found dead in the ice. But when a local physician undermines her conclusion, declaring the death to be an accident, Martha is forced to investigate the shocking murder on her own.

Over the course of one winter, as the trial nears, and whispers and prejudices mount, Martha doggedly pursues the truth. Her diary soon lands at the center of the scandal, implicating those she loves, and compelling Martha to decide where her own loyalties lie.

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JILL WIEN BADGER:

1) *The End of Drum-Time* by Hanna Pylvainen Historical Fiction 346 pages
Scandinavian tundra 1851 Lutheran minister tries to convert native Sami reindeer herders in vain while his son falls for the minister’s daughter. How we find & lose faith, and what we’re willing to do for our beliefs and love itself.
Best book of 2023 by NPR & Time Magazine.

2) *The Diamond Eye* by Kate Quinn
Historical fiction based on a true story. 431 pages

Librarian turned sniper and mother of one son becomes heroine in 1937 Kiev as “Lady Death” when Nazi’s invade Ukraine & Russia. After becoming a national heroine due to 300+ kills, she’s sent to America where an unexpected friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt & connection with a silent fellow sniper offer the possibility of happiness.
New York Times Bestseller

3) Circling the Sun by Paula McLain
363 pages Historical fiction
1920’s Kenya fictional account of famed British East African unconventional aviator Beryl Markham caught in a love triangle with safari hunter Denys Finch Hatton and writer Baroness Karen Blixen.

PATRICIA WATSON BAUER:

MERE CHRISTIANITY BY C.S. LEWIS 227 pages

"C.S. Lewis is the ideal persuader for the half-convinced, for the good man who would like to be a Christian but finds his intellect getting in the way." — Anthony Burgess, *New York Times Book Review*

Our moral consciousness and moral judgements are proof to the human race that a moral being exists—God.

Mere Christianity explores the core beliefs of Christianity by providing an unequaled opportunity for believers and nonbelievers alike to hear a powerful, rational case for the Christian faith. A brilliant collection, *Mere Christianity* remains strikingly fresh for the modern reader and at the same time confirms C. S. Lewis’s reputation as one of the leading writer and thinkers of our age.

The book brings together Lewis’ legendary broadcast talks during World War II. Lewis discusses that everyone is curious about: right and wrong, human nature, morality, marriage, sins, forgiveness, faith, hope, generosity, and kindness.

WE THE WOMEN: THE HEROES WHO SHAPED AMERICA BY NORAH O’DONNELL

Over a decades-long, distinguished career, award-winning journalist Norah O’Donnell has made it her mission to shed light on untold women’s stories. Now, in honor of America’s 250th birthday, O’Donnell focuses that passion on the American heroines who helped change the course of history.

We the Women presents a fresh look at American history through the eyes of women, introducing us to inspiring patriots who demanded that the country live up to the promises made 250 years ago in the Declaration of Independence: “that all men are created

equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Since the signing of that document, the pressing question from women has been: *Why don't those unalienable rights apply to us?*

Through extensive research and interviews, as well as historical documents and old photos, O'Donnell curates a compelling portrait of these fierce fighters for freedom. From Mary Katherine Goddard, who printed the first signed Declaration of Independence, to the Forten family women, who were active in the abolition and suffrage movements and were considered the "Black Founders" of Philadelphia, to the first women who served in the armed forces even before they had the right to vote, O'Donnell brings these extraordinary women together for the first time, and in doing so writes the American story anew. 416 pages

SUNNY LOVELL:

GREEN LIGHTS BY MATTHEW MCCONAUGHY. McConaughey exiled himself in the desert without electricity for fifty-two days while writing the book.^[5] *Greenlights* originated from diaries and journals McConaughey began writing when he was fourteen years old. McConaughey described the book as a collection of "stories, prayers, poems, people and places and a whole bunch of bumper stickers." The book includes stories and insights from McConaughey's life in chronological order. It has been described as a memoir but McConaughey has called it an "approach book".

304 page

STILL LIVE BY LOUISE PENNEY (GAMACHE SERIES) 352 pages book 1 of 21

In *Still Life*, bestselling author Louise Penny introduces Inspector Armand Gamache of the Surêté du Québec.

Chief Inspector Armand Gamache of the Surêté du Québec and his team of investigators are called in to the scene of a suspicious death in a rural village south of Montreal. Jane Neal, a local fixture in the tiny hamlet of Three Pines, just north of the U.S. border, has been found dead in the woods. The locals are certain it's a tragic hunting accident and nothing more, but Gamache smells something foul in these remote woods, and is soon certain that Jane Neal died at the hands of someone much more sinister than a careless bowhunter.

A GREAT RECKONING BY LOUISE PENNEY (GAMACHE SERIES) 400 pages, book 12 of 21

A Great Reckoning is the twelfth novel in Louise Penny's Chief Inspector Armand Gamache series, featuring a murder mystery at the Sûreté training academy where Gamache is cleaning up corruption, complicated by a mysterious old map and a troubled cadet, Amelia Choquet, leading to a personal reckoning for both Gamache and the academy. The book blends a standalone mystery with ongoing series themes, exploring parenthood, loss, and betrayal, and is known for its intricate plot and character development.

CONNIE VICKERS:

THE CORRESPONDENT BY VIRGINIA EVANS 304 PAGES

The Correspondent by Virginia Evans is a critically acclaimed debut epistolary novel, published in 2025, that tells the story of 73-year-old retired lawyer Sybil Van Antwerp through her letters and emails. The book, a slow-burn character study, explores themes of aging, grief, and self-reflection as Sybil confronts her past through correspondence with friends, family, and even famous authors. It became a New York Times bestseller and is being adapted into a film starring Jane Fonda. The Correspondent by Virginia Evans is a critically acclaimed debut epistolary novel, published in 2025, that tells the story of 73-year-old retired lawyer Sybil Van Antwerp through her letters and emails. The book, a slow-burn character study, explores themes of aging, grief, and self-reflection as Sybil confronts her past through correspondence with friends, family, and even famous authors. It became a New York Times bestseller and is being adapted into a film starring Jane Fonda.

BRIDGE OF SIGHS BY RICHARD 528 PAGES

The novel is set in a small, fictional town in upstate [New York](#) called Thomaston. Like Empire Falls, the town is quickly deteriorating. The story is about Louis Charles ("Lucy") Lynch, his family, his wife, and his best friend, Bobby Marconi. Sixty-year-old Lou Lynch has cheerfully spent his entire life in Thomaston, New York, married to the same woman, Sarah. He is the proprietor of three convenience stores.

THE VIOLIN CONSPIRACY , A NOVEL BY BRENDAN SLOCUMB, 352 PAGES

A NOVEL ABOUT RAY MCMILLAN, A YOUNG BLACK CLASSICAL MUSIAN WHO DISCOVERS HIS FAMILIY'S OLD VIOLIN IS A PRICELESS STRADIVARIUS ONLY TO HAVE IT STONEN ON THE EVEN OF A MAJOR COMPETITIONFORCEING HIM TO RECLAIM IT WHILE CONFRONTING RACISM IN THE CLASSICAL MUSIC WORLD

REMARKABLY BRIGHT CREATURES A NOVAL BY SHELBY VAN

Remarkably Bright Creatures by Shelby Van Pelt is a heartwarming novel about a grieving widow, Tova Sullivan, who forms an unlikely friendship with Marcellus, a giant Pacific octopus, at the aquarium where she works as a cleaner. The story, told from multiple perspectives including Marcellus's, follows their bond as they help each other cope with loneliness and, in Marcellus's case, help Tova uncover the truth about her son's disappearance. It's a story about family, loss, and finding connection in unexpected places, praised for its unique premise and emotional depth. 368 PAGES

THE FROZEN RIVER BY ARIEL LAWHON (ALSO RECOMMENDED BY NANNCY HOUSE

RENEE DROZDOWSKI:

'EXILES' A MYSTERY SET IN AUSTRALIA. A MOTHER GOES MISSING DURING A FESTIVAL LEAVING HER BABY BEHIND. A YEAR LATER, HER FRIEND AND AN INVESTIGATOR LOOK INTO THE CASE. BY JANE HARPER 368 PAGES

FRAMED BY JOHN GRISHAM ATONISHING TRUE STORIES OF WRONGFUL CONVENTIONS' 368 PAGES

I WILL FIND YOU BY HARLAN COBEN. AN INNOCENT FATHER SERVING LIFE FOR THE MUREDER OF HIS OWN SON RECEIVES EVIDENCE THAT HIS CHILD MAY STILL BE ALIVE AND MUST BREAK OUT OF PRISON TO FIND OUT THE TRUTH. 329 PAGES

ROXANNE KELLEY:

Miss Benson's Beetle by Rachel Joysace , Miss Benson's Beetle is a quirky and poignant story about two women - one middle aged and frumpy, the other beautiful and uneducated - who go on an unlikely quest to locate a mythical beetle that may or may not exist. 368 pages

The One in A Million Boy by Monica Wood, The One-in-a-Million Boy is the incandescent story of a 104-year-old woman and the sweet, strange young boy assigned to help her around the house. 416 pages

"The Story She Left Behind" by Patti Callahan Henry is a historical mystery about a daughter, Clara, who travels to London to uncover the secrets of her mother's disappearance 25 years earlier, a journey that involves a mysterious book written in an invented language. While there, she and her daughter Wynn timer get caught in the Great Smog of 1952 and are taken to a country retreat in the Lake District by a man named Charlie Jameson, where Clara must find the courage to unravel the truth behind her mother's vanishing. 352 pages