

Friends Read Book list

January 9, 2025

All the Colors of the Dark by Chris Whitaker

A one-eyed boy becomes a monster's prey in this chilling tale of missing children. Thirteen-year-old Missouri boy Joseph "Patch" Macauley was born with one eye, so he wears an eye patch and imagines himself a pirate. In 1975, he sees a masked man assaulting a girl in the woods. He attacks the man and saves her, but the predator kidnaps him instead. Patch eventually wakes in total darkness in a cellar where a different girl secretly visits him, heard but always unseen. He learns that her name is Grace and that there have been other girls down there before. Grace paints vivid word pictures of the places she's seen and of stories by authors like Steinbeck. "Pray and stay alive," she whispers to Patch. Eventually he escapes, but she is nowhere to be found. Searching for Grace is the underlying thread in a complicated quest that takes unexpected turns over the years and might well bring heartbreak. Meanwhile, the bodies of three girls turn up locally, and their parents grieve. Is the town doctor responsible for their deaths? A local school photographer? Both? Patch paints an image of Grace based only on what he'd heard from her in the cellar; then come more paintings and displays in an art gallery—an implausible achievement for an untrained artist. Meanwhile, Grace may be anywhere, and he must find her whether alive or dead. By now an adult, he "pinball[s]" from state to state, meeting with "a dozen families looking for a dozen lost girls." To sustain himself he robs banks with an unloaded flintlock, and he shares his loot with organizations that are looking for missing children. He has "reasoned the truest proof of life [is] pain," and he vows that he will die before he quits his search. This is much more than a whodunit, though it fills that bill well. It is also a richly layered tale of love, loss, and hope.

A grim theme with a compelling and complex plot. (Kirkus, 2023)

Braided Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer

With deep compassion and graceful prose, botanist and professor of plant ecology Kimmerer (*Gathering Moss*) encourages readers to consider the ways that our lives and language weave through the natural world. A mesmerizing storyteller, she shares legends from her Potawatomi ancestors to illustrate the culture of gratitude in which we all should live. In such a culture, "Everyone knows that gifts will follow the circle of reciprocity and flow back to you again... The grass in the ring is trodden down in a path from gratitude to reciprocity. We dance in a circle, not in a line." Kimmerer recalls the ways that pecans became a symbol of abundance for her ancestors: "Feeding guests [pecans] around the big

table recalls the trees' welcome to our ancestors when they were lonesome and tired and so far from home." She reminds readers that "we are showered every day with gifts, but they are not meant for us to keep... Our work and our joy is to pass along the gift and to trust that what we put into the universe will always come back." (Publisher's Weekly, 2015)

Daughters of the Resistance by Lana Kortchik

A heart-wrenching novel of love, resilience and courage in World War II, from the author of *Sisters of War* - perfect for readers who loved *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* and *The German Midwife*.

Ukraine, 1943

On a train from Ukraine to Germany, Lisa Smirnova is terrified for her life. The train is under Nazi command, heading for one of Hitler's rumoured labour camps. As she is taken away from everything she holds dear, Lisa wonders if she will ever see her family again.

In Nazi-occupied Kiev, Irina Antonova knows she could be arrested at any moment. Trapped in a job registering the endless deaths of the people of Kiev, she risks her life every day by secretly helping her neighbours, while her husband has joined the Soviet partisans, who are carrying out life-threatening work to frustrate the German efforts.

When Lisa's train is intercepted by the partisans, Irina's husband among them, these women's lives will take an unimaginable turn. As Irina fights to protect her family and Lisa is forced to confront the horrors of war, together they must make an impossible decision: what would they be willing to lose to save the people they love? (From the publisher)

Forget Me Never by Susan Wittig Albert

Olivia Andrews is locally famous for her blog and podcast, "Forget Me A Crime Victim's Storyboard," which is dedicated to telling the stories of victims of crime. Now, she has a stunning story to tell about a decades-old murder mystery involving a prominent citizen of Pecan Springs—someone who isn't the man everybody thinks he is. But she is killed by a hit-and-run driver while she's out jogging early one morning. Was it an accident—or something else? Her sister wants to know.

And Olivia's friend China Bayles also wants to know, urgently. Who *is* the prominent citizen Olivia was about to expose? How did he manage to get away with murder twenty years ago? Did he kill Olivia to keep her from revealing his secret? What is local lawyer Charlie Lipman trying to hide? And when there's another murder . . . well, it has to be a part of the same story, doesn't it? And so does the scrapbook a cousin has compiled to honor the memory of one of the victims and make sure she won't be forgotten. It might hold the answer—except that the one person whose face China wants to see has been scissored out of every photo.

Forget Me Never asks the compelling questions *Who remembers? What do we choose to remember? Why do we forget?* Like other novels in the China Bayles series, Susan Wittig Albert's book is an engaging mix of mystery, murder, and herb lore, past sins and present secrets, and characters who are as real as your friends and neighbors. (From the publisher)

[A Gentleman in Moscow](#) by Amor Towles

House arrest has never been so charming as in Towles's second novel (following *Rules of Civility*), an engaging 30-year saga set almost entirely inside the Metropol, Moscow's most luxurious hotel. To Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov, the Metropol becomes both home and jail in 1922, when the Bolsheviks spare his life (on the strength of a revolutionary poem written in 1913, when the count was at university). Forbidden to venture out, Rostov explores the intricacies of the grand structure and befriends its other denizens: precocious nine-year-old Nina Kulikova, a bureaucrat's daughter who demands instruction on how to be a princess;

Emile, virtuosic chef of the Boyarsky, "the finest restaurant in Moscow"; Andrey, the Boyarsky's French expatriate maître d'; and the beautiful actress Anna Urbanova, who becomes the count's regular visitor and paramour. Standing in for the increasingly despotic Soviet government is the Bishop, a villainous waiter who experiences gradual professional ascent—he becomes headwaiter of the Boyarsky, finally putting his seating-chart and wine-pairing talents to use. But when the adult Nina returns to ask Rostov for a favor, his unique, precariously well-appointed life must change once more. Episodic, empathetic, and entertaining, Count Rostov's long transformation occurs against a lightly sketched background of upheaval, repression, and war. Gently but dauntlessly, like his protagonist, Towles is determined to chart the course of the individual. (Publisher's Weekly, 2016)

[Iona Andrews' series: Kate Daniels, The Edge, The Innkeeper Chronicles](#) [Clean Sweep](#)

The first in Andrews's (Magic Breaks) new "Innkeeper Chronicles" was originally released as a serial on the authors'-Andrews is a pseudonym for husband-and-wife writing team Gordon and Ilona Andrews-blog. In a small town in Texas, Dina Demille runs a Victorian bed and breakfast that is actually a quirky, otherworldly inn that provides refuge for weary galactic travelers.

When neighborhood dogs are murdered by an unknown predator, Dina forgoes neutrality to investigate. She ends up confronting ex-military werewolf Sean Evans and cosmic vampire soldier Arland, both of whom are also investigating the predators. This urban-fantasy-with-a-dash-of-sf tale is short, and more novella than novel, but it has action, snark, and interesting worldbuilding, as well as a fleeting cameo by Jack and George from Andrews's "The Edge" series. Narrator Renee Raudman's reading is well paced and contains good voice variation. Verdict Of interest to fans of urban fantasy and

the author. (Library Journal, 2014)

The September House by Carissa Orlando

★ DEBUT With grim humor, emotional resonance, and brilliant subversion of a familiar trope, this compelling debut is perfect for fans of Clay MacLeod Chapman, Simone St. James, and Grady Hendrix. Margaret holds steadfast to the sentiment that everything is survivable each September when her dream home, a stately Victorian that she and her husband purchased, becomes a macabre nightmare: blood seeps from walls, disembodied moans howl like the wind, and there is an increase in appearances of ghosts of former residents who met untimely ends. With surprisingly good humor despite the circumstances, Margaret is determined to stay put, diligently washing walls and paying little mind to otherworldly roommates, but after three Septembers, her husband reaches his breaking point and leaves. This absence means little to Margaret until the couple's adult daughter makes her first visit to the house one September, intent on finding out why her father isn't returning her calls, and Margaret must balance fielding her daughter's questions while going to increasingly extreme lengths to keep the ghosts at bay.

VERDICT The metaphor is layered and at times heartbreaking, as secrets held by both a house and a family come to light with terrifying poignancy in this wonderfully eerie debut. (Library Journal, 2023)

Things We Do for Love by Kristin Hannah

Life lessons.

Angie Malone, the youngest of a big, warm Italian-American family, returns to her Pacific Northwest hometown to wrestle with various midlife disappointments: her divorce, Papa's death, a downturn in business at the family restaurant, and, above all, her childlessness. After several miscarriages, she, a successful ad exec, and husband Conlan, a reporter, befriended a pregnant young girl and planned to adopt her baby—and then the birth mother changed her mind. Angie and Conlan drifted apart and soon found they just didn't love each other anymore. Metaphorically speaking, "her need for a child had been a high tide, an overwhelming force that drowned them. A year ago, she could have kicked to the surface but not now." Sadder but wiser, Angie goes to work in the struggling family restaurant, bickering with Mama over updating the menu and replacing the ancient waitress. Soon, Angie befriends another young girl, Lauren Ribido, who's eager to learn and desperately needs a job. Lauren's family lives on the wrong side of the tracks, and her mother is a promiscuous alcoholic, but Angie knows nothing of this sad story and welcomes Lauren into the DeSaria family circle. The girl listens in, wide-eyed, as the sisters argue and make wisecracks and—gee-whiz—are actually nice to each other. Nothing at all like her relationship with her sluttish mother, who throws Lauren

out when boyfriend David, en route to Stanford, gets her pregnant. Will Lauren, who's just been accepted to USC, let Angie adopt her baby? Well, a bit of a twist at the end keeps things from becoming too predictable. (Kirkus, 2004)

What Alice Forgot by Liane Moriarty

From Australian Moriarty (*The Last Anniversary*, 2006, etc.), domestic escapism about a woman whose temporary amnesia makes her re-examine what really matters to her.

Alice wakes from what she thinks is a dream, assuming she is a recently married 29-year-old expecting her first child. Actually, she is 39, the mother of three and in the middle of an acrimonious custody battle with her soon-to-be ex-husband Nick. She's fallen off her exercise bike, and the resulting bump on her head has not only erased her memory of the last 10 years but has also taken her psychologically back to a younger, more easygoing self at odds with the woman she gathers she has become. While Alice-at-29 is loving and playful if lacking ambition or self-confidence, Alice-at-39 is a highly efficient if too tightly wound supermom. She is also thin and rich since Nick now heads the company where she remembers him struggling in an entry-level position. Alice-at-29 cannot conceive that she and Nick would no longer be rapturously in love or that she and her adored older sister Elisabeth could be estranged, and she is shocked that her shy mother has married Nick's bumptious father and taken up salsa dancing. She neither remembers nor recognizes her three children, each given a distinct if slightly too cute personality. Nor does she know what to make of the perfectly nice boyfriend Alice-at-39 has acquired. As memory gradually returns, Alice-at-29 initially misinterprets the scattered images and flashes of emotion, especially those concerning Gina, a woman who evidently caused the rift with Nick. Alice-at-29 assumes Gina was Nick's mistress, only to discover that Gina was her best friend. Gina died in a freak car accident and in her honor, Alice-at-39 has organized mothers from the kids' school to bake the largest lemon meringue pie on record. But Alice-at-29 senses that Gina may not have been a completely positive influence.

Moriarty handles the two Alice consciousnesses with finesse and also delves into infertility issues through Elizabeth's diary.

Cheerfully engaging. (Kirkus, 2011)