



The Next Chapter: December 2021 Book Recommendations

[*A History of Wild Places*](#) by Shea Ernshaw

Atria Books (December 7, 2021)

“Travis Wren has an unusual talent for locating missing people. Hired by families as a last resort, he requires only a single object to find the person who has vanished. When he takes on the case of Maggie St. James—a well-known author of dark, macabre children’s books—he’s led to a place many believed to be only a legend. Called Pastoral, this reclusive community was founded in the 1970s by like-minded people searching for a simpler way of life. By all accounts, the commune shouldn’t exist anymore and soon after Travis stumbles upon it...he disappears. Just like Maggie St. James. Years later, Theo, a lifelong member of Pastoral, discovers Travis’s abandoned truck beyond the border of the community. No one is allowed in or out, not when there’s a risk of bringing a disease—rot—into Pastoral. Unraveling the mystery of what happened reveals secrets that Theo, his wife, Calla, and her sister, Bee, keep from one another. Secrets that prove their perfect, isolated world isn’t as safe as they believed—and that darkness takes many forms. Hauntingly beautiful, hypnotic, and bewitching, *A History of Wild Places* is a story about fairy tales, our fear of the dark, and losing yourself within the wilderness of your mind.”

[*An Accidental Odyssey \(An Exlibris Adventure\)*](#) by KC Dyer

Berkley (December 14, 2021)

“Gianna Kostas is on the cusp of a fairy-tale life. Sure, she's just lost her job, but she's about to marry one of New York's most eligible bachelors. On her way to taste wedding cakes, though, things go sideways. Shocking news sends Gia off on a wild journey halfway around the world in pursuit of her ailing—and nearly estranged—father. In Athens, she learns Dr. Kostas, a classics professor, is determined to retrace Odysseus's famous voyage. This is a journey her father is in no condition to take alone, so Gia faces a tough decision. When an unexpected job offer helps seal the deal and quash the guilt Gia feels from her disapproving groom-to-be, the journey is on. But as Gia adventures—and eats—her way around the Mediterranean, she discovers that confronting epic storms and ripped surfer dudes might be the easy part. Along the way, as she uncovers family secrets, finds heartbreak, and learns more about a certain archaeologist with a mysterious past of his own, Gia discovers that fairy-tale endings might be messy and complicated, but they can happen anywhere.”

[*Beasts of a Little Land*](#) by Juhea Kim

Ecco (December 7, 2021)

“An epic story of love, war, and redemption set against the backdrop of the Korean independence movement, following the intertwined fates of a young girl sold to a courtesan school and the penniless son of a hunter. In 1917, deep in the snowy mountains of occupied Korea, an impoverished local hunter on the brink of starvation saves a young Japanese officer from an attacking tiger. In an instant, their fates are connected—and from this encounter unfolds a saga that spans half a century. In the aftermath, a young girl named Jade is sold by her family to Miss Silver’s courtesan school, an act of desperation that will cement her place in the lowest social status. When she befriends an orphan boy named JungHo, who scrapes together a living begging on the streets of Seoul, they form a deep friendship. As they come of age, JungHo is swept up in the revolutionary fight for independence, and Jade becomes a sought-after performer with a new romantic prospect of noble birth. Soon Jade must decide whether she will risk

everything for the one who would do the same for her. From the perfumed chambers of a courtesan school in Pyongyang to the glamorous cafes of a modernizing Seoul and the boreal forests of Manchuria, where battles rage, Juhea Kim's unforgettable characters forge their own destinies as they wager their nation's. Immersive and elegant, *Beasts of a Little Land* unveils a world where friends become enemies, enemies become saviors, heroes are persecuted, and beasts take many shapes."

[Learwife](#) by J. R. Thorp

Pegasus Books (December 7, 2021)

"Inspired by Shakespeare's King Lear, this breathtaking debut novel tells the story of the most famous woman ever written out of literary history. "I am the queen of two crowns, banished fifteen years, the famed and gilded woman, bad-luck baleful girl, mother of three small animals, now gone. I am fifty-five years old. I am Lear's wife. I am here." Word has come. Care-bent King Lear is dead, driven mad and betrayed. His three daughters too, broken in battle. But someone has survived: Lear's queen. Exiled to a nunnery years ago, written out of history, her name forgotten. Now she can tell her story. Though her grief and rage may threaten to crack the earth open, she knows she must seek answers. Why was she sent away in shame and disgrace? What has happened to Kent, her oldest friend and ally? And what will become of her now, in this place of women? To find peace she must reckon with her past and make a terrible choice - one upon which her destiny, and that of the entire abbey, rests. Giving unforgettable voice to a woman whose absence has been a tantalising mystery, *Learwife* is a breathtaking novel of loss, renewal and how history bleeds into the present."

[Magical New York Christmas](#) by Anita Hughes

Griffin (September 28, 2021)

"A magical holiday love story set at the glamorous Plaza Hotel in New York City. It's Christmas week when 26-year-old Sabrina Post knocks on the door of the Vanderbilt suite at the Plaza Hotel in New York City, ready to accept the ghostwriting position for the memoir of Grayson Westcott—a famous art dealer. A struggling journalist, Sabrina can't believe her luck: a paycheck and six nights in her own suite at the Plaza. She feels like Eloise, the heroine from her favorite children's books. To make the job even more exciting, Grayson recounts how he worked as a butler at the Plaza sixty years ago for none other than the author of the Eloise books, Kay Thompson. What promises to be a perfect week is complicated when Sabrina meets Ian Wentworth, a handsome British visitor, at the hotel bar. When Ian assumes Sabrina is another wealthy guest at the hotel, she doesn't correct him—a decision she doesn't regret after learning that Ian is a member of the British aristocracy. But, things are not what they seem. The truth is: Ian is not a wealthy lord; he's actually the personal secretary of Lord Spencer Braxton. As the week unfolds, will Sabrina and Ian learn the truth about one another? Filled with the magic that can only be found at the Plaza Hotel during the holidays, and revealing facts about the author of the Eloise books, Anita Hughes's *A Magical New York Christmas* is both a holiday treat and a heartwarming story that reminds us that falling in love is the greatest miracle of all."

[Murder Under Her Skin: A Pentecost and Parker Mystery](#) by Stephen Spotswood

Doubleday (December 7, 2021)

"Rex Stout meets Agatha Christie with a fresh twist in the new *Pentecost and Parker Mystery*, a delightfully hardboiled high-wire act starring two daring woman sleuths dead set on justice as they set out to solve a murder at a traveling circus. Someone's put a blade in the back of the Amazing Tattooed Woman, and Willowjean "Will" Parker's former knife-throwing mentor has been stitched up for the crime. To uncover the truth, Will and her boss, world-famous detective Lillian Pentecost, travel south to the circus where they find a snakepit of old grudges, small-town crime, and secrets worth killing for. New York, 1946: The last time Will Parker let a case get personal, she walked away with a broken face, a

bruised ego, and the solemn promise never again to let her heart get in the way of her job. But she called Hart and Halloway's Travelling Circus and Sideshow home for five years, and Ruby Donner, the circus's tattooed ingenue, was her friend. To make matters worse the prime suspect is Valentin Kalishenko, the man who taught Will everything she knows about putting a knife where it needs to go. To suss out the real killer and keep Kalishenko from a date with the electric chair, Will and Ms. Pentecost join the circus in sleepy Stoppard, Virginia, where the locals like their cocktails mild, the past buried, and big-city detectives not at all. The two swiftly find themselves lost in a funhouse of lies as Will begins to realize that her former circus compatriots aren't playing it straight, and that her murdered friend might have been hiding a lot of secrets beneath all that ink. Dodging fistfights, firebombs, and flying lead, Will puts a lot more than her heart on the line in the search of the truth. Can she find it before someone stops her ticker for good?"

**[Observations by Gaslight: Stories from the World of Sherlock Holmes](#) by Lyndsay Faye
Mysterious Press (December 21, 2021)**

A new collection of Sherlockian tales that shows the Great Detective and his partner, Watson, as their acquaintances saw them. Beloved adventuress Irene Adler teams up with her former adversary in a near-deadly inquiry into a room full of eerily stopped grandfather clocks. Learn of the case that cemented the lasting friendship between Holmes and Inspector Lestrade, and of the tragic crime which haunted the Yarder into joining the police force. And witness Stanley Hopkins' first meeting with the remote logician he idolizes, who will one day become his devoted mentor. From familiar faces like landlady Mrs. Hudson to minor characters like Lomax the sub-librarian, *Observations by Gaslight*—entirely epistolary, told through diaries, telegrams, and even grocery lists—paints a masterful portrait of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson as you have never seen them before."

***The Clause in Christmas: A Poppy Creek Novel* by Rachael Bloome
Secret Garden Press; Hardback ed. edition (October 23, 2021)**

"An unexpected inheritance. A pesky clause in the will. And 25 days to avoid falling in love....Cassie Hayward hates Christmas. Especially this year. No job. Flat broke. And an ex most definitely on the naughty list. The unexpected inheritance of a charming Victorian cottage in the small town of Poppy Creek may be the Christmas miracle Cassie needs. Except for one itty-bitty problem: a clause in the will. To inherit the house, Cassie must complete a series of festive tasks every day in December leading up to Christmas. All overseen by the handsome, Christmas-loving lawyer Luke Davis. Luke is as strong and steady as the bespoke furniture he crafts as a hobby. He has to be. Stepping into his late father's shoes as the town lawyer comes with a sleigh full of responsibilities. Which means the captivating stranger collecting her inheritance is a distraction he can't afford. As the unlikely pair complete the daily tasks, fighting their attraction becomes more futile than putting jolly ole St. Nick on a diet. But when someone from Cassie's past reappears with the offer of a lifetime, Cassie will have to choose between love and the life she thought she wanted."

**[The Last Rose of Shanghai](#) by Weina Dai Randel
Lake Union Publishing (December 1, 2021)**

"In Japanese-occupied Shanghai, two people from different cultures are drawn together by fate and the freedom of music...1940. Aiyi Shao is a young heiress and the owner of a formerly popular and glamorous Shanghai nightclub. Ernest Reismann is a penniless Jewish refugee driven out of Germany, an outsider searching for shelter in a city wary of strangers. He loses nearly all hope until he crosses paths with Aiyi. When she hires Ernest to play piano at her club, her defiance of custom causes a sensation. His instant fame makes Aiyi's club once again the hottest spot in Shanghai. Soon they realize they share more than a passion for jazz—but their differences seem insurmountable, and Aiyi is engaged to another

man. As the war escalates, Aiyi and Ernest find themselves torn apart, and their choices between love and survival grow more desperate. In the face of overwhelming odds, a chain of events is set in motion that will change both their lives forever. From the electrifying jazz clubs to the impoverished streets of a city under siege, *The Last Rose of Shanghai* is a timeless, sweeping story of love and redemption.”

[The Sorority Murder](#) by Allison Brennan

MIRA; Original edition (December 28, 2021)

“Lucas Vega is obsessed with the death of Candace Swain, who left a sorority party one night and never came back. Her body was found after two weeks, but the case has grown cold. Three years later while interning at the medical examiner's, Lucas discovers new information, but the police are not interested. Lucas knows he has several credible pieces of the puzzle. He just isn't sure how they fit together. So he creates a podcast to revisit Candace's last hours. Then he encourages listeners to crowdsource what they remember and invites guest lecturer Regan Merritt, a former US marshal, to come on and share her expertise. New tips come in that convince Lucas and Regan they are onto something. Then shockingly one of the podcast callers turns up dead. Another hints at Candace's secret life, a much darker picture than Lucas imagined—and one that implicates other sorority sisters. Regan uses her own resources to bolster their theory and learns that Lucas is hiding his own secret. The pressure is on to solve the murder, but first Lucas must come clean about his real motives in pursuing this podcast—before the killer silences him forever.”

[The Spanish Daughter](#) by Lorena Hughes

Kensington (December 28, 2021)

“As a child in Spain, Puri always knew her passion for chocolate was inherited from her father. But it's not until his death that she learns of something else she's inherited—a cocoa estate in Vinces, Ecuador, a town nicknamed “París Chiquito.” Eager to claim her birthright and filled with hope for a new life after the devastation of World War I, she and her husband Cristóbal set out across the Atlantic Ocean. But it soon becomes clear someone is angered by Puri's claim to the estate...When a mercenary sent to murder her aboard the ship accidentally kills Cristóbal instead, Puri dons her husband's clothes and assumes his identity, hoping to stay safe while she searches for the truth of her father's legacy in Ecuador. Though freed from the rules that women are expected to follow, Puri confronts other challenges at the estate—newfound siblings, hidden affairs, and her father's dark secrets. Then there are the dangers awakened by her attraction to an enigmatic man as she tries to learn the identity of an enemy who is still at large, threatening the future she is determined to claim...”



Book descriptions provided by publishers.

Neenah Public Library

neenahlibrary.org/thenextchapter