



The Next Chapter: January Book Recommendations

***A Thousand Ships* by Natalie Haynes**

Harper (January 26, 2021)

“With her trademark passion, wit, and fierce feminism, Natalie Haynes gives much-needed voice to the silenced women of the Trojan War.”—Madeline Miller, author of *Circe*. This is the women’s war, just as much as it is the men’s. They have waited long enough for their turn . . . This was never the story of one woman, or two. It was the story of them all . . . In the middle of the night, a woman wakes to find her beloved city engulfed in flames. Ten seemingly endless years of conflict between the Greeks and the Trojans are over. Troy has fallen. From the Trojan women whose fates now lie in the hands of the Greeks, to the Amazon princess who fought Achilles on their behalf, to Penelope awaiting the return of Odysseus, to the three goddesses whose feud started it all, these are the stories of the women whose lives, loves, and rivalries were forever altered by this long and tragic war. A woman’s epic, powerfully imbued with new life, *A Thousand Ships* puts the women, girls and goddesses at the center of the Western world’s great tale ever told.”

***Before the Ruins* by Victoria Gosling**

Henry Holt and Co. (January 12, 2021)

“It’s the summer of 1996 and school’s out forever for Andy, her boyfriend Marcus, her best friend Peter, and Em. When Andy’s alcoholic mother predicts the apocalypse, the four teenagers decide to see out the end of the world at a deserted manor house, the site of a historic unsolved mystery. There they meet David—charming and unreliable, he seems to have appeared out of nowhere. David presents an irresistible lure for both Andy and Peter and complicates the dynamics of their lifelong friendship. When the group learns that a diamond necklace, stolen fifty years ago, might still be somewhere on the manor grounds, the Game—half treasure hunt, half friendly deception—begins. But the Game becomes much bigger than the necklace, growing to encompass years of secrets, lies, and, ultimately, one terrible betrayal.”

***Black Buck* by Mateo Askaripour**

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (January 5, 2021)

“An unambitious twenty-two-year-old, Darren lives in a Bed-Stuy brownstone with his mother, who wants nothing more than to see him live up to his potential as the valedictorian of Bronx Science. But Darren is content working at Starbucks in the lobby of a Midtown office building, hanging out with his girlfriend, Soraya, and eating his mother’s home-cooked meals. All that changes when a chance encounter with Rhett Daniels, the silver-tongued CEO of Sumwun, NYC’s hottest tech startup, results in an exclusive invitation for Darren to join an elite sales team on the thirty-sixth floor. After enduring a “hell week” of training, Darren, the only Black person in the company, reimagines himself as “Buck,” a ruthless salesman unrecognizable to his friends and family. But when things turn tragic at home and Buck feels he’s hit rock bottom, he begins to hatch a plan to help young people of color infiltrate America’s sales force, setting off a chain of events that forever changes the game. *Black Buck* is a hilarious, razor-sharp skewering of America’s workforce; it is a propulsive, crackling debut that explores ambition and race, and makes way for a necessary new vision of the American dream.”

[Finlay Donovan Is Killing It](#) by Elle Cosimano

Minotaur Books (February 2, 2021)

“Finlay Donovan is killing it . . . except, she’s really not. She’s a stressed-out single-mom of two and struggling novelist, Finlay’s life is in chaos: the new book she promised her literary agent isn’t written, her ex-husband fired the nanny without telling her, and this morning she had to send her four-year-old to school with hair duct-taped to her head after an incident with scissors. When Finlay is overheard discussing the plot of her new suspense novel with her agent over lunch, she’s mistaken for a contract killer, and inadvertently accepts an offer to dispose of a problem husband in order to make ends meet . . . Soon, Finlay discovers that crime in real life is a lot more difficult than its fictional counterpart, as she becomes tangled in a real-life murder investigation. Fast-paced, deliciously witty, and wholeheartedly authentic in depicting the frustrations and triumphs of motherhood in all its messiness, hilarity, and heartfelt moments, *Finlay Donovan Is Killing It* is the first in a brilliant new series from award-winning author Elle Cosimano.”

[Klara and the Sun](#) by Kazuo Ishiguro

Knopf (March 2, 2021)

“*Klara and the Sun* is a magnificent new novel from the Nobel laureate Kazuo Ishiguro--author of *Never Let Me Go* and the Booker Prize-winning *The Remains of the Day*. *Klara and the Sun*, the first novel by Kazuo Ishiguro since he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, tells the story of Klara, an Artificial Friend with outstanding observational qualities, who, from her place in the store, watches carefully the behavior of those who come in to browse, and of those who pass on the street outside. She remains hopeful that a customer will soon choose her. *Klara and the Sun* is a thrilling book that offers a look at our changing world through the eyes of an unforgettable narrator, and one that explores the fundamental question: what does it mean to love? In its award citation in 2017, the Nobel committee described Ishiguro's books as "novels of great emotional force" and said he has "uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world."

[The Echo Wife](#) by Sarah Gailey

Tor Books (February 16, 2021)

“When they said all happy families are alike, I don't think this is what they meant...’ Evelyn Caldwell's husband Nathan has been having an affair - with Evelyn Caldwell. Or, to be exact, with a genetically cloned replica. After a morning that begins with a confrontation and ends with Nathan's body bleeding out on the kitchen floor, the two Caldwell wives will have to think fast-before sharing everything includes sharing a jail cell. *The Echo Wife* is a non-stop thrill ride of lies, betrayal, and identity, perfect for fans of *Big Little Lies* and *Killing Eve*.”

[The Gilded Ones](#) by Namina Forna

Delacorte Press (February 9, 2021)

“Sixteen-year-old Deka lives in fear and anticipation of the blood ceremony that will determine whether she will become a member of her village. Already different from everyone else because of her unnatural intuition, Deka prays for red blood so she can finally feel like she belongs. But on the day of the ceremony, her blood runs gold, the color of impurity—and Deka knows she will face a consequence worse than death. Then a mysterious woman comes to her with a choice: stay in the village and submit to her fate, or leave to fight for the emperor in an army of girls just like her. They are called alaki—near-

immortals with rare gifts. And they are the only ones who can stop the empire's greatest threat. Knowing the dangers that lie ahead yet yearning for acceptance, Dekka decides to leave the only life she's ever known. But as she journeys to the capital to train for the biggest battle of her life, she will discover that the great walled city holds many surprises. Nothing and no one are quite what they seem to be—not even Dekka herself.”

[The Last Garden in England](#) by Julia Kelly

Gallery Books (January 12, 2021)

“*Present day*: Emma Lovett, who has dedicated her career to breathing new life into long-neglected gardens, has just been given the opportunity of a lifetime: to restore the gardens of the famed Highbury House estate, designed in 1907 by her hero Venetia Smith. But as Emma dives deeper into the gardens’ past, she begins to uncover secrets that have long lain hidden. *1907*: A talented artist with a growing reputation for her ambitious work, Venetia Smith has carved out a niche for herself as a garden designer to industrialists, solicitors, and bankers looking to show off their wealth with sumptuous country houses. When she is hired to design the gardens of Highbury House, she is determined to make them a triumph, but the gardens—and the people she meets—promise to change her life forever. *1944*: When land girl Beth Pedley arrives at a farm on the outskirts of the village of Highbury, all she wants is to find a place she can call home. Cook Stella Adderton, on the other hand, is desperate to leave Highbury House to pursue her own dreams. And widow Diana Symonds, the mistress of the grand house, is anxiously trying to cling to her pre-war life now that her home has been requisitioned and transformed into a convalescent hospital for wounded soldiers. But when war threatens Highbury House’s treasured gardens, these three very different women are drawn together by a secret that will last for decades.”

[The Wife Upstairs](#) by Rachel Hawkins

St. Martin's Press (January 5, 2021)

“Meet Jane. Newly arrived to Birmingham, Alabama, Jane is a broke dog-walker in Thornfield Estates—a gated community full of McMansions, shiny SUVs, and bored housewives. The kind of place where no one will notice if Jane lifts the discarded tchotchkes and jewelry off the side tables of her well-heeled clients. Where no one will think to ask if Jane is her real name. But her luck changes when she meets Eddie Rochester. Recently widowed, Eddie is Thornfield Estates’ most mysterious resident. His wife, Bea, drowned in a boating accident with her best friend, their bodies lost to the deep. Jane can’t help but see an opportunity in Eddie—not only is he rich, brooding, and handsome, he could also offer her the kind of protection she’s always yearned for. Yet as Jane and Eddie fall for each other, Jane is increasingly haunted by the legend of Bea, an ambitious beauty with a rags-to-riches origin story, who launched a wildly successful southern lifestyle brand. How can she, plain Jane, ever measure up? And can she win Eddie’s heart before her past—or his—catches up to her? With delicious suspense, incisive wit, and a fresh, feminist sensibility, *The Wife Upstairs* flips the script on a timeless tale of forbidden romance, ill-advised attraction, and a wife who just won't stay buried. In this vivid reimagining of one of literature's most twisted love triangles, which Mrs. Rochester will get her happy ending?”

[The Witch's Heart](#) by Genevieve Gornichec

Ace (February 9, 2021)

“When a banished witch falls in love with the legendary trickster Loki, she risks the wrath of the gods in this moving, subversive debut novel that reimagines Norse mythology. Angrboda’s story begins where most witches’ tales end: with a burning. A punishment from Odin for refusing to provide him with knowledge of the future, the fire leaves Angrboda injured and powerless, and she flees into the farthest

reaches of a remote forest. There she is found by a man who reveals himself to be Loki, and her initial distrust of him transforms into a deep and abiding love. Their union produces three unusual children, each with a secret destiny, who Angrboda is keen to raise at the edge of the world, safely hidden from Odin's all-seeing eye. But as Angrboda slowly recovers her prophetic powers, she learns that her blissful life—and possibly all of existence—is in danger. With help from the fierce huntress Skadi, with whom she shares a growing bond, Angrboda must choose whether she'll accept the fate that she's foreseen for her beloved family...or rise to remake their future. From the most ancient of tales this novel forges a story of love, loss, and hope for the modern age."

***Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know* by Adam Grant**

Viking (February 2, 2021)

"The bestselling author of *Give and Take* and *Originals* examines the critical art of rethinking: learning to question your opinions and open other people's minds, which can position you for excellence at work and wisdom in life. Intelligence is usually seen as the ability to think and learn, but in a rapidly changing world, there's another set of cognitive skills that might matter more: the ability to rethink and unlearn. In our daily lives, too many of us favor the comfort of conviction over the discomfort of doubt. We listen to opinions that make us feel good, instead of ideas that make us think hard. We see disagreement as a threat to our egos, rather than an opportunity to learn. We surround ourselves with people who agree with our conclusions, when we should be gravitating toward those who challenge our thought process. The result is that our beliefs get brittle long before our bones. We think too much like preachers defending our sacred beliefs, prosecutors proving the other side wrong, and politicians campaigning for approval--and too little like scientists searching for truth. Intelligence is no cure, and it can even be a curse: being good at thinking can make us worse at rethinking. The brighter we are, the blinder to our own limitations we can become."

[Yellow Wife](#) by Sadeqa Johnson

Simon & Schuster (January 12, 2021)

"Called "wholly engrossing" by New York Times bestselling author Kathleen Grissom, this harrowing story follows an enslaved woman forced to barter love and freedom while living in the most infamous slave jail in Virginia. Born on a plantation in Charles City, Virginia, Pheby Delores Brown has lived a relatively sheltered life. Shielded by her mother's position as the estate's medicine woman and cherished by the Master's sister, she is set apart from the others on the plantation, belonging to neither world. She'd been promised freedom on her eighteenth birthday, but instead of the idyllic life she imagined with her true love, Essex Henry, Pheby is forced to leave the only home she has ever known. She unexpectedly finds herself thrust into the bowels of slavery at the infamous Devil's Half Acre, a jail in Richmond, Virginia, where the enslaved are broken, tortured, and sold every day. There, Pheby is exposed not just to her Jailer's cruelty but also to his contradictions. To survive, Pheby will have to outwit him, and she soon faces the ultimate sacrifice."

Best Books of 2020

[*A Deadly Education*](#) by Naomi Novik

Del Rey (September 29, 2020)

"In the start of an all-new series, the bestselling author of *Uprooted* and *Spinning Silver* introduces you to a school for the magically gifted where failure means certain death--until one girl begins to unlock its many secrets. Enter a school of magic unlike any you have ever encountered: There are no teachers, no holidays, and no friendships save strategic ones. Survival is more important than any letter grade, for the school won't allow its students to leave until they graduate . . . or die. The rules are deceptively simple: Don't walk the halls alone. And beware of the monsters who lurk everywhere. El is uniquely prepared for the school's dangers. She may be without allies, but she possesses a dark power strong enough to level mountains and wipe out untold millions. It would be easy enough for El to defeat the monsters that prowl the school. The problem? Her powerful dark magic might also kill all the other students. So El is trying her hardest not to use her power . . . at least not until she has no other option. Meanwhile, her fellow student, the insufferable Orion Lake, is making heroism look like a breeze. He's saved hundreds of lives--including El's--with his flashy combat magic. But in the spring of their junior year, after Orion rescues El for the second time and makes her look like more of an outcast than she already is, she reaches an impulsive conclusion: Orion Lake must die. But El is about to learn some lessons she never could in the classroom: About the school. About Orion Lake. And about who she really is. Wry, witty, endlessly inventive, and mordantly funny--yet with a true depth at its heart--this enchanting novel reminds us that there are far more important things than mere survival."

[*A Useful Woman*](#) by Darcie Wilde

Berkley (May 3, 2016)

"Inspired by the novels of Jane Austen, this new mystery series set in 19th-century London introduces the charming and resourceful Rosalind Thorne, a woman privy to the secrets of high society--including who among the ton is capable of murder ... The daughter of a baronet and a minor heiress, Rosalind Thorne was nearly ruined after her father abandoned the family. To survive in the only world she knew, she began to manage the affairs of some of London society's most influential women, who have come to rely on her wit and discretion. So when aristocratic wastrel Jasper Aimesworth is found dead in Almack's, London's most exclusive ballroom, Rosalind must use her skills and connections to uncover the killer from a list of suspects that includes Almack's powerful patronesses--and her own former suitor Devon Winterbourne, now Lord Casselmaine. Torn between her old love and a growing attraction to a compelling Bow Street runner, Rosalind must not only unravel the mysteries surrounding Jasper's death, but the mysteries of her own heart as well." The first book in Wilde's *Rosalind Thorne Mystery Series*.

[*Mexican Gothic*](#) by Silvia Moreno-Garcia

Del Rey (June 30, 2020)

"After receiving a frantic letter from her newly-wed cousin begging for someone to save her from a mysterious doom, Noemí Taboada heads to High Place, a distant house in the Mexican countryside. She's not sure what she will find—her cousin's husband, a handsome Englishman, is a stranger, and Noemí knows little about the region. Noemí is also an unlikely rescuer: She's a glamorous debutante, and her chic gowns and perfect red lipstick are more suited for cocktail parties than amateur sleuthing. But she's also tough and smart, with an indomitable will, and she is not afraid: Not of her cousin's new husband, who is both menacing and alluring; not of his father, the ancient patriarch who seems to be fascinated by Noemí; and not even of the house itself, which begins to invade Noemí's dreams with visions of blood and doom. Her only ally in this inhospitable abode is the family's youngest son. Shy and

gentle, he seems to want to help Noemí, but might also be hiding dark knowledge of his family's past. For there are many secrets behind the walls of High Place. The family's once colossal wealth and faded mining empire kept them from prying eyes, but as Noemí digs deeper she unearths stories of violence and madness. And Noemí, mesmerized by the terrifying yet seductive world of High Place, may soon find it impossible to ever leave this enigmatic house behind."

Plain Bad Heroines by Emily M. Danforth

William Morrow (October 20, 2020)

"1902, the Brookhants School for Girls. Flo and Clara are obsessed with each other and with Mary MacLane, the author of a scandalous bestselling memoir. The girls establish their own private club and call it the Plain Bad Heroine Society. Their bodies are discovered in a nearby apple orchard, with a copy of Mary's book splayed beside them, the victims of a swarm of stinging, angry yellow jackets. Within five years three more people die on the property-- and the Brookhants School for Girls closes its doors forever. The now abandoned and crumbling Brookhants is back in the news when writer Merritt Emmons publishes a breakout book celebrating the queer, feminist history surrounding the "haunted and cursed" Gilded Age institution. Her book inspires a controversial horror film adaptation starring lesbian it girl Harper playing the ill-fated heroine Flo, and former child star Audrey Wells as Clara. But as Brookhants opens its gates once again for filming, soon it's impossible to tell where the curse leaves off and Hollywood begins."

Rodham by Curtis Sittenfeld

Random House (May 19, 2020)

"In 1971, Hillary Rodham is a young woman full of promise. Life magazine covered her Wellesley commencement speech, she's attending Yale Law School, and she's on the forefront of student activism and the women's rights movement. Then she meets a fellow law student named Bill Clinton. A charismatic Southerner, Bill is already laying the groundwork for his political career. In each other, Hillary and Bill find a profound intellectual, emotional, and physical connection that neither has previously experienced. In the real world, Hillary followed Bill back to Arkansas, and he proposed several times. Although she turned him down more than once, she eventually accepted and became Hillary Clinton. But in Curtis Sittenfeld's powerfully imagined tour de force of fiction, Hillary follows a different path. Listening to her doubts about the prospective marriage, she endures a devastating break-up and leaves Arkansas. Over the next four decades, she blazes her own trail--one that unfolds in public as well as in private, that crosses paths again (and again) with Bill Clinton, that raises questions about the trade-offs all of us must make to build a life. Brilliantly weaving actual historical events into a riveting fictional tale, Sittenfeld delivers an uncannily astute story for our times. In exploring the loneliness, moral ambivalence, and iron determination that characterize the quest for political power, as well as both the exhilaration and painful compromises demanded of female ambition in a world still mostly run by men, *Rodham* is a singular and unforgettable novel."

The Hilarious World of Depression by John Moe

St. Martin's Press (May 5, 2020)

"For years John Moe, critically-acclaimed public radio personality and host of *The Hilarious World of Depression* podcast, struggled with depression; it plagued his family and claimed the life of his brother in 2007. As Moe came to terms with his own illness, he began to see similar patterns of behavior and coping mechanisms surfacing in conversations with others, including high-profile comedians who'd struggled with the disease. Moe saw that there was tremendous comfort and community in open

dialogue about these shared experiences and that humor had a unique power. Thus was born the podcast *The Hilarious World of Depression*. Inspired by the immediate success of the podcast, Moe has written a remarkable investigation of the disease, part memoir of his own journey, part treasure trove of laugh-out-loud stories and insights drawn from years of interviews with some of the most brilliant minds facing similar challenges. Throughout the course of this powerful narrative, depression's universal themes come to light, among them, struggles with identity, lack of understanding of the symptoms, the challenges of work-life, self-medicating, the fallout of the disease in the lives of our loved ones, the tragedy of suicide, and the hereditary aspects of the disease. *The Hilarious World of Depression* illuminates depression in an entirely fresh and inspiring way.”

[The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue](#) by V.E. Schwab

Tor Books (October 6, 2020)

“France, 1714: in a moment of desperation, a young woman makes a Faustian bargain to live forever—and is cursed to be forgotten by everyone she meets. Thus begins the extraordinary life of Addie LaRue, and a dazzling adventure that will play out across centuries and continents, across history and art, as a young woman learns how far she will go to leave her mark on the world. But everything changes when, after nearly 300 years, Addie stumbles across a young man in a hidden bookstore and he remembers her name.”

[The Lost Book of Adana Morea](#) by Michael Zapata

Hanover Square Press (February 4, 2020)

“The story of a Latin American science fiction writer and the lives her lost manuscript unites decades later in post-Katrina New Orleans. In 1929 in New Orleans, a Dominican immigrant named Adana Moreau writes a science fiction novel. The novel earns rave reviews, and Adana begins a sequel. Then she falls gravely ill. Just before she dies, she destroys the only copy of the manuscript. Decades later in Chicago, Saul Drower is cleaning out his dead grandfather's home when he discovers a mysterious manuscript written by none other than Adana Moreau. With the help of his friend Javier, Saul tracks down an address for Adana's son in New Orleans, but as Hurricane Katrina strikes they must head to the storm-ravaged city for answers.”

[The Mountains Sing](#) by Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai

Algonquin Books (March 17, 2020)

“*The Mountains Sing* tells an enveloping, multigenerational tale of the Trần family, set against the backdrop of the Việt Nam War. Trần Diệu Lan, who was born in 1920, was forced to flee her family farm with her six children during the Land Reform as the Communist government rose in the North. Years later in Hà Nội, her young granddaughter, Hương, comes of age as her parents and uncles head off down the Hồ Chí Minh Trail to fight in a conflict that tore apart not just her beloved country, but also her family. Vivid, gripping, and steeped in the language and traditions of Việt Nam, *The Mountains Sing* brings to life the human costs of this conflict from the point of view of the Vietnamese people themselves, while showing us the true power of kindness and hope. *The Mountains Sing* is celebrated Vietnamese poet Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai's first novel in English.”

[The Office: The Untold Story of the Greatest Sitcom of the 2000s](#) by Andy Greene

Dutton; Illustrated edition (March 24, 2020)

“The untold stories behind *The Office*, one of the most iconic television shows of the twenty-first century, told by its creators, writers, and actors. When did you last hang out with Jim, Pam, Dwight, Michael, and the rest of Dunder Mifflin? It might have been back in 2013, when the series finale aired . . . or it might have been last night, when you watched three episodes in a row. But either way, long after the show first aired, it’s more popular than ever, and fans have only one problem—what to watch, or read, next. Fortunately, *Rolling Stone* writer Andy Greene has that answer. In his brand-new oral history, *The Office: The Untold Story of the Greatest Sitcom of the 2000s*, Greene will take readers behind the scenes of their favorite moments and characters.”

[The Vanishing Half](#) by Brit Bennett

Riverhead Books (June 2, 2020)

"The Vignes twin sisters will always be identical. But after growing up together in a small, southern black community and running away at age sixteen, it's not just the shape of their daily lives that is different as adults, it's everything: their families, their communities, their racial identities. Ten years later, one sister lives with her black daughter in the same southern town she once tried to escape. The other secretly passes for white, and her white husband knows nothing of her past. Still, even separated by so many miles and just as many lies, the fates of the twins remain intertwined. What will happen to the next generation, when their own daughters' storylines intersect? Weaving together multiple strands and generations of this family, from the Deep South to California, from the 1950s to the 1990s, Brit Bennett produces a story that is at once a riveting, emotional family story and a brilliant exploration of the American history of passing.”

[Writers & Lovers](#) by Lily King

Grove Press (March 3, 2020)

“Blindsided by her mother's sudden death, and wrecked by a recent love affair, Casey Peabody has arrived in Massachusetts in the summer of 1997 without a plan. Her mail consists of wedding invitations and final notices from debt collectors. A former child golf prodigy, she now waits tables in Harvard Square and rents a tiny, moldy room at the side of a garage where she works on the novel she's been writing for six years. At thirty-one, Casey is still clutching onto something nearly all her old friends have let go of: the determination to live a creative life. When she falls for two very different men at the same time, her world fractures even more. Casey's fight to fulfill her creative ambitions and balance the conflicting demands of art and life is challenged in ways that push her to the brink. *Writers & Lovers* follows Casey—a smart and achingly vulnerable protagonist—in the last days of a long youth, a time when every element of her life comes to a crisis. Written with King's trademark humor, heart, and intelligence, *Writers & Lovers* is a transfixing novel that explores the terrifying and exhilarating leap between the end of one phase of life and the beginning of another.”



Book descriptions provided by publishers.

Neenah Public Library

920-886-6315

library@neenahlibrary.org

neenahlibrary.org