



## The Next Chapter: May 2021 Book Recommendations

### [Brat: An '80s Story](#) by Andrew McCarthy

Grand Central Publishing (May 11, 2021)

“Most people know Andrew McCarthy from his movie roles in *Pretty in Pink*, *St. Elmo's Fire*, *Weekend at Bernie's*, and *Less than Zero*, and as a charter member of Hollywood's Brat Pack. That iconic group of ingenues and heartthrobs included Rob Lowe, Molly Ringwald, Emilio Estevez, and Demi Moore, and has come to represent both a genre of film and an era of pop culture. In his memoir *Brat: An '80s Story*, McCarthy focuses his gaze on that singular moment in time. The result is a revealing look at coming of age in a maelstrom, reckoning with conflicted ambition, innocence, addiction, and masculinity. New York City of the 1980s is brought to vivid life in these pages, from scoring loose joints in Washington Square Park to skipping school in favor of the dark revival houses of the Village where he fell in love with the movies that would change his life. Filled with personal revelations of innocence lost to heady days in Hollywood with John Hughes and an iconic cast of characters, *Brat* is a surprising and intimate story of an outsider caught up in a most unwitting success.”

### [How Lucky](#) by Will Leitch

Harper (May 11, 2021)

“For readers of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and *Nothing to See Here*, a first novel as suspenseful and funny as it is moving, the unforgettable story of a fiercely resilient young man living with a physical disability, and his efforts to solve a mystery unfolding right outside his door. Daniel leads a rich life in the university town of Athens, Georgia. He's got a couple close friends, a steady paycheck working for a regional airline, and of course, for a few glorious days each Fall, college football tailgates. He considers himself to be a mostly lucky guy—despite the fact that he's suffered from a debilitating disease since he was a small child, one that has left him unable to speak or to move without a wheelchair. Largely confined to his home, Daniel spends the hours he's not online communicating with irate air travelers observing his neighborhood from his front porch. One young woman passes by so frequently that spotting her out the window has almost become part of his daily routine. Until the day he's almost sure he sees her being kidnapped...”

### [How Stella Learned to Talk: The Groundbreaking Story of the World's First Talking Dog](#) by Christina Hunger

William Morrow (May 4, 2021)

“When speech-language pathologist Christina Hunger first came home with her puppy, Stella, it didn't take long for her to start drawing connections between her job and her new pet. During the day, she worked with toddlers with significant delays in language development and used Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices to help them communicate. At night, she wondered: *If dogs can understand words we say to them, shouldn't they be able to say words to us? Can dogs use AAC to communicate with humans?* Christina decided to put her theory to the test with Stella and started using a paw-sized button programmed with her voice to say the word “outside” when clicked, whenever she took Stella out of the house. A few years later, Stella now has a bank of more than thirty word buttons,

and uses them daily either individually or together to create near-complete sentences. *How Stella Learned to Talk* is part memoir and part how-to guide. It chronicles the journey Christina and Stella have taken together, from the day they met, to the day Stella “spoke” her first word, and the other breakthroughs they’ve had since. It also reveals the techniques Christina used to teach Stella, broken down into simple stages and actionable steps any dog owner can use to start communicating with their pets.”

**[I Thought You Said This Would Work](#) by Ann Garvin**

**Lake Union Publishing (May 1, 2021)**

“A road trip can drive anyone over the edge—especially two former best friends—in bestselling author Ann Garvin’s funny and poignant novel about broken bonds, messy histories, and the power of forgiveness. Widowed Samantha Arias hasn’t spoken to Holly Dunfee in forever. It’s for the best. Samantha prefers to avoid conflict. The blisteringly honest Holly craves it. What they still have in common puts them both back on speed dial: a mutual love for Katie, their best friend of twenty-five years, now hospitalized with cancer and needing one little errand from her old college roomies. It’s simple: travel cross-country together, steal her loathsome ex-husband’s VW camper, find Katie’s diabetic Great Pyrenees at a Utah rescue, and drive him back home to Wisconsin. If it’ll make Katie happy, no favor is too big (one hundred pounds), too daunting (two thousand miles), or too illegal (ish), even when a boho D-list celebrity hitches a ride and drives the road trip in fresh directions. Samantha and Holly are following every new turn—toward second chances, unexpected romance, and self-discovery—and finally blowing the dust off the secret that broke their friendship. On the open road, they’ll try to put it back together—for themselves, and especially for the love of Katie.”

**[Luck of the Titanic](#) by Stacey Lee**

**G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers (May 4, 2021)**

“Valora Luck has two things: a ticket for the biggest and most luxurious ocean liner in the world, and a dream of leaving England behind and making a life for herself as a circus performer in New York. Much to her surprise though, she's turned away at the gangway; apparently, Chinese aren't allowed into America. But Val has to get on that ship. Her twin brother Jamie, who has spent two long years at sea, is there, as is an influential circus owner, whom Val hopes to audition for. Thankfully, there's not much a trained acrobat like Val can't overcome when she puts her mind to it. As a stowaway, Val should keep her head down and stay out of sight. But the clock is ticking and she has just seven days as the ship makes its way across the Atlantic to find Jamie, perform for the circus owner, and convince him to help get them both into America. Then one night the unthinkable happens, and suddenly Val's dreams of a new life are crushed under the weight of the only thing that matters: survival.”

**[Last Summer at the Golden Hotel](#) by Elyssa Friedland**

**Berkley (May 18, 2021)**

“A family reunion in the Catskills brings hilarity and nostalgia when two clans convene for the summer at their beloved getaway. In its heyday, the Golden Hotel was the crown jewel of the hotter-than-hot Catskills vacation scene. For more than sixty years, the Goldman and Weingold families—best friends and business partners—have presided over this glamorous resort, which served as a second home for well-heeled guests and celebrities. But the Catskills are not what they used to be—and neither is the relationship between the Goldmans and the Weingolds. As the facilities and management begin to fall apart, a tempting offer to sell forces the two families together again to make a heart-wrenching decision. Can they save their beloved Golden, or is it too late? Long-buried secrets emerge, new dramas

and financial scandal erupt, and everyone from the traditional grandparents to the millennial grandchildren wants a say in the hotel's future. But business and pleasure clash when the hotel owners rediscover the magic of a bygone era of nonstop fun, even as they grapple with what may be their last resort.”

**Mary Jane by Jessica Anya Blau**  
**Custom House (May 11, 2021)**

“In 1970s Baltimore, fourteen-year-old Mary Jane loves cooking with her mother, singing in her church choir, and enjoying her family’s subscription to the Broadway Showtunes of the Month record club. Shy, quiet, and bookish, she’s glad when she lands a summer job as a nanny for the daughter of a local doctor. A respectable job, Mary Jane’s mother says. In a respectable house. The house may look respectable on the outside, but inside it’s a literal and figurative mess: clutter on every surface, Impeachment: Now More Than Ever bumper stickers on the doors, cereal and takeout for dinner. And even more troublesome (were Mary Jane’s mother to know, which she does not): the doctor is a psychiatrist who has cleared his summer for one important job—helping a famous rock star dry out. A week after Mary Jane starts, the rock star and his movie star wife move in. Over the course of the summer, Mary Jane introduces her new household to crisply ironed clothes and a family dinner schedule, and has a front-row seat to a liberal world of sex, drugs, and rock and roll (not to mention group therapy). Caught between the lifestyle she’s always known and the future she’s only just realized is possible, Mary Jane will arrive at September with a new idea about what she wants out of life, and what kind of person she’s going to be.”

**People We Meet on Vacation by Emily Henry**  
**Berkley (May 11, 2021)**

“What happens when best friends with nothing in common come together, fall apart, and fall in love? The Vacationers meets When Harry Met Sally..., from the author of Beach Read When Poppy met Alex, there was no spark, no chemistry, and no reason to think they'd ever talk again. Alex is quiet, studious, and destined for a future in academia. Poppy is a wild child who only came to U of Chicago to escape small-town life. But after sharing a ride home for the summer, the two form a surprising friendship. After all, who better to confide in than someone you could never, ever date? Over the years, Alex and Poppy's lives take them in different directions, but every summer the two find their way back to each other for a magical weeklong vacation. Until one trip goes awry, and in the fallout, they lose touch. Now, two years later, Poppy's in a rut. Her dream job, her relationships, her life--none of it is making her happy. In fact, the last time she remembers feeling truly happy was on that final, ill-fated summer trip. The answer to all her problems is obvious: She needs one last vacation to win back her best friend. As a hilariously disastrous week unfolds and tensions rise, Poppy and Alex are forced to confront what drove them apart--and decide what they're willing to risk for the chance to be together.”

**Realm Breaker by Victoria Aveyard**  
**HarperTeen (May 4, 2021)**

“A strange darkness grows in Allward. Even Corayne an-Amarat can feel it, tucked away in her small town at the edge of the sea. She soon discovers the truth. She is the last of an ancient lineage--and the last hope to save the world from destruction. But she won't be alone. Even as darkness falls, she is joined by a band of unlikely companions: a squire, forced to choose between home and honor, an immortal, avenging a broken promise, an assassin, exiled and bloodthirsty, an ancient sorceress, whose

riddles hide an eerie foresight, a forger with a secret past, a bounty hunter with a score to settle. Together they stand against a vicious opponent, invincible and determined to burn all kingdoms to ash, and an army unlike anything the realm has ever witnessed."

**[The Anthropocene Reviewed: Essays on a Human-Centered Planet](#) by John Green**

**Dutton (May 18, 2021)**

"The Anthropocene is the current geological age, in which human activity has profoundly shaped the planet and its biodiversity. In this remarkable symphony of essays adapted and expanded from his groundbreaking podcast, John Green reviews different facets of the human-centered planet—from the QWERTY keyboard and Staphylococcus aureus to the Taco Bell breakfast menu—on a five-star scale. John Green's gift for storytelling shines throughout this artfully curated collection that includes both beloved essays and all-new pieces exclusive to the book."

**[The Blacktongue Thief](#) by Christopher Buehlman**

**Tor Books (May 25, 2021)**

"Kinch Na Shannack owes the Takers Guild a small fortune for his education as a thief, which includes (but is not limited to) lock-picking, knife-fighting, wall-scaling, fall-breaking, lie-weaving, trap-making, plus a few small magics. His debt has driven him to lie in wait by the old forest road, planning to rob the next traveler that crosses his path. But today, Kinch Na Shannack has picked the wrong mark. Galva is a knight, a survivor of the brutal goblin wars, and handmaiden of the goddess of death. She is searching for her queen, missing since a distant northern city fell to giants. Unsuccessful in his robbery and lucky to escape with his life, Kinch now finds his fate entangled with Galva's. Common enemies and uncommon dangers force thief and knight on an epic journey where goblins hunger for human flesh, krakens hunt in dark waters, and honor is a luxury few can afford."

**[The Guncle](#) by Steven Rowley**

**G.P. Putnam's Sons (May 25, 2021)**

"From the bestselling author of *Lily and the Octopus* and *The Editor* comes a warm and deeply funny novel about a once-famous gay sitcom star whose unexpected family tragedy leaves him with his niece and nephew for the summer. Patrick, or Gay Uncle Patrick (GUP, for short), has always loved his niece, Maisie, and nephew, Grant. That is, he loves spending time with them when they come out to Palm Springs for weeklong visits, or when he heads home to Connecticut for the holidays. But in terms of caretaking and relating to two children, no matter how adorable, Patrick is, honestly, overwhelmed. So when tragedy strikes and Maisie and Grant lose their mother and Patrick's brother has a health crisis of his own, Patrick finds himself suddenly taking on the role of primary guardian. Despite having a set of "Guncle Rules" ready to go, Patrick has no idea what to expect, having spent years barely holding on after the loss of his great love, a somewhat-stalled acting career, and a lifestyle not-so-suited to a six- and a nine-year-old. Quickly realizing that parenting—even if temporary—isn't solved with treats and jokes, Patrick's eyes are opened to a new sense of responsibility, and the realization that, sometimes, even being larger than life means you're unfailingly human. With the humor and heart we've come to expect from bestselling author Steven Rowley, *The Guncle* is a moving tribute to the power of love, patience, and family in even the most trying of times."

**[The Haunting of Alma Fielding: A True Ghost Story](#) by Kate Summerscale**

**Penguin Press (April 27, 2021)**

“London, 1938. In the suburbs of the city, a young housewife has become the eye in a storm of chaos. In Alma Fielding's modest home, china flies off the shelves and eggs fly through the air; stolen jewellery appears on her fingers, white mice crawl out of her handbag, beetles appear from under her gloves; in the middle of a car journey, a turtle materializes on her lap. The culprit is incorporeal. As Alma cannot call the police, she calls the papers instead. After the sensational story headlines the news, Nandor Fodor, a Hungarian ghost hunter for the International Institute for Psychical Research, arrives to investigate the poltergeist. But when he embarks on his scrupulous investigation, he discovers that the case is even stranger than it seems. By unravelling Alma's peculiar history, Fodor finds a different and darker type of haunting, a tale of trauma, alienation, loss and revenge. He comes to believe that Alma's past has bled into her present, her mind into her body. There are no words for processing her experience, so it comes to possess her. As the threat of a world war looms, and as Fodor's obsession with the case deepens, Alma becomes ever more disturbed. With characteristic rigor and insight, Kate Summerscale brilliantly captures the rich atmosphere of a haunting that transforms into a very modern battle between the supernatural and the subconscious.”

**[The Invisible Husband of Frick Island](#) by Colleen Oakley**

**Berkley (May 25, 2021)**

“Sometimes all you need is one person to really see you. Piper Parrish's life on Frick Island—a tiny, remote town smack in the middle of the Chesapeake Bay—is nearly perfect. Well, aside from one pesky detail: Her darling husband, Tom, is dead. When Tom's crab boat capsized and his body wasn't recovered, Piper, rocked to the core, did a most peculiar thing: carried on as if her husband was not only still alive, but right there beside her, cooking him breakfast, walking him to the docks each morning, meeting him for their standard Friday night dinner date at the One-Eyed Crab. And what were the townspeople to do but go along with their beloved widowed Piper? Anders Caldwell's career is not going well. A young ambitious journalist, he'd rather hoped he'd be a national award-winning podcaster by now, rather than writing fluff pieces for a small town newspaper. But when he gets an assignment to travel to the remote Frick Island and cover their boring annual Cake Walk fundraiser, he stumbles upon a much more fascinating tale: an entire town pretending to see and interact with a man who does not actually exist. Determined it's the career-making story he's been needing for his podcast, Anders returns to the island to begin covert research and spend more time with the enigmatic Piper—but he has no idea out of all the lives he's about to upend, it's his that will change the most.”

**[The Last Thing He Told Me](#) by Laura Dave**

**Simon & Schuster (May 4, 2021)**

“A gripping mystery about a woman who thinks she's found the love of her life—until he disappears. Before Owen Michaels disappears, he smuggles a note to his beloved wife of one year: *Protect her*. Despite her confusion and fear, Hannah Hall knows exactly to whom the note refers—Owen's sixteen-year-old daughter, Bailey. Bailey, who lost her mother tragically as a child. Bailey, who wants absolutely nothing to do with her new stepmother. As Hannah's increasingly desperate calls to Owen go unanswered, as the FBI arrests Owen's boss, as a US marshal and federal agents arrive at her Sausalito home unannounced, Hannah quickly realizes her husband isn't who he said he was. And that Bailey just may hold the key to figuring out Owen's true identity—and why he really disappeared. Hannah and Bailey set out to discover the truth. But as they start putting together the pieces of Owen's past, they soon realize they're also building a new future—one neither of them could have anticipated.”

**[The Secret History of Home Economics: How Trailblazing Women Harnessed the Power of Home and Changed the Way We Live](#) by Danielle Dreilinger**

**W. W. Norton & Company (May 4, 2021)**

“The surprising, often fiercely feminist, always fascinating, yet barely known, history of home economics. The term “home economics” may conjure traumatic memories of lopsided hand-sewn pillows or sunken cakes. But obscured by common conception is the story of the revolutionary science of better living. The field exploded opportunities for women in the twentieth century by reducing domestic work and providing jobs as professors, engineers, chemists, and businesspeople that were otherwise foreclosed. In *The Secret History of Home Economics*, Danielle Dreilinger traces the field's history from small farms to the White House, from Victorian suffragists to Palo Alto techies. Home economics followed the currents of American culture even as it shaped them; Dreilinger brings forward the racism within the movement along with the strides taken by Black women who were influential leaders and innovators. She also looks at the personal lives of home economics' women, as they chose being single, shared lives with women, or tried for egalitarian marriages. This groundbreaking and engaging history restores a maligned subject to its rightful importance.”

**[While Justice Sleeps](#) by Stacey Abrams**

**Doubleday (May 11, 2021)**

“Avery Keene, a brilliant young law clerk for the legendary Justice Howard Wynn, is doing her best to hold her life together—excelling in an arduous job with the court while also dealing with a troubled family. When the shocking news breaks that Justice Wynn—the cantankerous swing vote on many current high-profile cases—has slipped into a coma, Avery’s life turns upside down. She is immediately notified that Justice Wynn has left instructions for her to serve as his legal guardian and power of attorney. Plunged into an explosive role she never anticipated, Avery finds that Justice Wynn had been secretly researching one of the most controversial cases before the court—a proposed merger between an American biotech company and an Indian genetics firm, which promises to unleash breathtaking results in the medical field. She also discovers that Wynn suspected a dangerously related conspiracy that infiltrates the highest power corridors of Washington. As political wrangling ensues in Washington to potentially replace the ailing judge whose life and survival Avery controls, she begins to unravel a carefully constructed, chesslike sequence of clues left behind by Wynn. She comes to see that Wynn had a much more personal stake in the controversial case and realizes his complex puzzle will lead her directly into harm’s way in order to find the truth. *While Justice Sleeps* is a cunningly crafted, sophisticated novel, layered with myriad twists and a vibrant cast of characters. Drawing on her astute inside knowledge of the court and political landscape, Stacey Abrams shows herself to be not only a force for good in politics and voter fairness but also a major new talent in suspense fiction.”



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