



## The Next Chapter: August 2021 Book Recommendations

### [Afterparties: Stories](#) by Anthony Veasna So

**Ecco (August 3, 2021)**

“A vibrant story collection about Cambodian-American life--immersive and comic, yet unsparing--that offers profound insight into the intimacy of queer and immigrant communities. Seamlessly transitioning between the absurd and the tenderhearted, balancing acerbic humor with sharp emotional depth, *Afterparties* offers an expansive portrait of the lives of Cambodian-Americans. As the children of refugees carve out radical new paths for themselves in California, they shoulder the inherited weight of the Khmer Rouge genocide and grapple with the complexities of race, sexuality, friendship, and family. A high school badminton coach and failing grocery store owner tries to relive his glory days by beating a rising star teenage player. Two drunken brothers attend a wedding afterparty and hatch a plan to expose their shady uncle's snubbing of the bride and groom. A queer love affair sparks between an older tech entrepreneur trying to launch a "safe space" app and a disillusioned young teacher obsessed with *Moby-Dick*. And in the sweeping final story, a nine-year-old child learns that his mother survived a racist school shooter.”

### [Clark and Division](#) by Naomi Hirahara

**Soho Crime (August 3, 2021)**

“Set in 1944 Chicago, Edgar Award-winner Naomi Hirahara’s eye-opening and poignant new mystery, the story of a young woman searching for the truth about her revered older sister's death, brings to focus the struggles of one Japanese American family released from mass incarceration at Manzanar during World War II. Chicago, 1944: Twenty-year-old Aki Ito and her parents have just been released from Manzanar, where they have been detained by the US government since the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, together with thousands of other Japanese Americans. The life in California the Itos were forced to leave behind is gone; instead, they are being resettled two thousand miles away in Chicago, where Aki’s older sister, Rose, was sent months earlier and moved to the new Japanese American neighborhood near Clark and Division streets. But on the eve of the Ito family’s reunion, Rose is killed by a subway train. Aki, who worshipped her sister, is stunned. Officials are ruling Rose’s death a suicide. Aki cannot believe her perfect, polished, and optimistic sister would end her life. Her instinct tells her there is much more to the story, and she knows she is the only person who could ever learn the truth. Inspired by historical events, *Clark and Division* infuses an atmospheric and heartbreakingly real crime fiction plot with rich period details and delicately wrought personal stories Naomi Hirahara has gleaned from thirty years of research and archival work in Japanese American history.”

**[Piglet: The Unexpected Story of a Deaf, Blind, Pink Puppy and His Family](#) by Melissa Shapiro DVM and Mim Eichler Rivas**

**Atria Books (August 3, 2021)**

“In the tradition of the beloved New York Times bestsellers *Marley and Me* and *Oogy: The Dog Only a Family Could Love*, a charming, inspirational memoir about empathy, resilience, kindness, and an adorable deaf blind pink dog. When Connecticut veterinarian Melissa Shapiro gets a call about a tiny deaf blind puppy rescued from a hoarding situation in need of fostering, she doesn’t hesitate to say, “yes.” Little does she know how that decision will transform her, her family, and legions of admirers destined to embrace the saga of the indomitable pink pup. One of the most anxious dogs Melissa had ever encountered, the traumatized Piglet weighed under two pounds upon his welcome into the Shapiro household—which included Melissa’s husband Warren and their three college-aged kids, plus six other rescued dogs. After weeks of reassurance, and lots of love, Piglet connected, gained confidence, and his extraordinary spirit emerged. Melissa soon forged a powerful bond with Piglet, allowing the two to communicate without sound or visual cues. Two months later, when the day arrived to say good-bye to the now dashing, six-pound pink boy dog with the larger than life spirit, Melissa faced a heart-wrenching decision. Could she hand him over to someone willing to give Piglet the full-time attention he required or could she adapt her schedule and her household to make a permanent place for him in her life and work? Of course, the answer was simple: love would find a way. Curious, engaged, and incredibly eager to learn, Piglet quickly became part of the family. What started out as a few simple Facebook posts of Piglet and his pack rapidly evolved into a global celebration of Piglet’s infectiously positive mindset. *Piglet: The Unexpected Story of a Deaf, Blind, Pink Puppy and His Family* fully illustrates this heartwarming story of one special little puppy with a purpose to teach the power of empathy, love, and kindness.”

***My Heart Is a Chainsaw* by Stephen Graham Jones**

**Gallery / Saga Press (August 31, 2021)**

“Shirley Jackson meets Friday the 13th in *My Heart Is a Chainsaw*, written by the author of *The Only Good Indians* Stephen Graham Jones, called “a literary master” by National Book Award winner Tananarive Due and “one of our most talented living writers” by Tommy Orange. Alma Katsu calls *My Heart Is a Chainsaw* “a homage to slasher films that also manages to defy and transcend genre.” On the surface is a story of murder in small-town America. But beneath is its beating heart: a biting critique of American colonialism, Indigenous displacement, and gentrification, and a heartbreaking portrait of a broken young girl who uses horror movies to cope with the horror of her own life. Jade Daniels is an angry, half-Indian outcast with an abusive father, an absent mother, and an entire town that wants nothing to do with her. She lives in her own world, a world in which protection comes from an unusual source: horror movies...especially the ones where a masked killer seeks revenge on a world that wronged them. And Jade narrates the quirky history of Proofrock as if it is one of those movies. But when blood actually starts to spill into the waters of Indian Lake, she pulls us into her dizzying, encyclopedic mind of blood and masked murderers, and predicts exactly how the plot will unfold. Yet, even as Jade drags us into her dark fever dream, a surprising and intimate portrait emerges...a portrait of the scared and traumatized little girl beneath the Jason Voorhees mask: angry, yes, but also a girl who

easily cries, fiercely loves, and desperately wants a home. A girl whose feelings are too big for her body. *My Heart Is a Chainsaw* is her story, her homage to horror and revenge and triumph.”

***The Almost Legendary Morris Sisters: A True Story of Family Fiction* by Julie Klam  
Riverhead Books (August 10, 2021)**

“New York Times–bestselling author Julie Klam’s funny and moving story of the Morris sisters, distant relations with mysterious pasts. Ever since she was young, Julie Klam has been fascinated by the Morris sisters, cousins of her grandmother. According to family lore, early in the twentieth century the sisters’ parents decided to move the family from Eastern Europe to Los Angeles so their father could become a movie director. On the way, their pregnant mother went into labor in St. Louis, where the baby was born and where their mother died. The father left the children in an orphanage and promised to send for them when he settled in California—a promise he never kept. One of the Morris sisters later became a successful Wall Street trader and advised Franklin Roosevelt. The sisters lived together in New York City, none of them married or had children, and one even had an affair with J. P. Morgan. The stories of these independent women intrigued Klam, but as she delved into them to learn more, she realized that the tales were almost completely untrue. *The Almost Legendary Morris Sisters* is the revealing account of what Klam discovered about her family—and herself—as she dug into the past. The deeper she went into the lives of the Morris sisters, the slipperier their stories became. And the more questions she had about what actually happened to them, the more her opinion of them evolved. Part memoir and part confessional, and told with the wit and honesty that are hallmarks of Klam’s books, *The Almost Legendary Morris Sisters* is the fascinating and funny true story of one writer’s journey into her family’s past, the truths she brings to light, and what she learns about herself along the way.”

***The Magic of Found Objects* by Maddie Dawson  
Lake Union Publishing (August 1, 2021)**

“From the bestselling author of *Matchmaking for Beginners* comes a feel-good story about becoming who you were meant to be all along. Phronsie Linnelle was conceived at Woodstock in a serendipitous liaison between a free-spirited hippie and a farmer’s son and was born with magical wonder flickering in her DNA and rationality knit into her bones. All her life she’s been torn between the two. But now that she’s been betrayed by both love and the mother she once idolized, her rational side is winning. So when her best friend from childhood proposes that they give up on romance and marry each other, Phronsie agrees. Who better to spend your life with than your best friend? Maybe the connection they already have is love. Maybe there’s no falling to be done. But immediately after they announce their engagement, she encounters someone who makes a very charming and compelling argument for revisiting romance. While her even-keeled stepmother argues for the safety that comes with her new engagement and her mother relays messages from the universe to hold out for true love, Phronsie must look to her own heart to find the answers that have been there all along.”

***The Manningtree Witches* by A. K. Blakemore  
Catapult (August 10, 2021)**

“*Wolf Hall* meets *The Favourite* in this beguiling debut novel that brilliantly brings to life the residents of a small English town in the grip of the seventeenth-century witch trials and the young woman tasked

with saving them all from themselves. England, 1643. Puritanical fervor has gripped the nation. And in Manningtree, a town depleted of men since the wars began, the hot terror of damnation burns in the hearts of women left to their own devices. Rebecca West, fatherless and husbandless, chafes against the drudgery of her days, livened only occasionally by her infatuation with the handsome young clerk John Edes. But then a newcomer, who identifies himself as the Witchfinder General, arrives. A mysterious, pious figure dressed from head to toe in black, Matthew Hopkins takes over the Thorn Inn and begins to ask questions about what the women on the margins of this diminished community are up to. Dangerous rumors of covens, pacts, and bodily wants have begun to hang over women like Rebecca—and the future is as frightening as it is thrilling. Brimming with contemporary energy and resonance, *The Manningtree Witches* plunges its readers into the fever and menace of the English witch trials, where suspicion, mistrust, and betrayal run amok as a nation's arrogant male institutions start to realize that the very people they've suppressed for so long may be about to rise up and claim their freedom.”

**[The People We Keep](#) by Allison Larkin**

**Gallery Books (August 3, 2021)**

“Little River, New York, 1994: April Sawicki is living in a motorless motorhome that her father won in a poker game. Failing out of school, picking up shifts at Margo’s diner, she’s left fending for herself in a town where she’s never quite felt at home. When she “borrows” her neighbor’s car to perform at an open mic night, she realizes her life could be much bigger than where she came from. After a fight with her dad, April packs her stuff and leaves for good, setting off on a journey to find a life that’s all hers. Driving without a chosen destination, she stops to rest in Ithaca. Her only plan is to survive, but as she looks for work, she finds a kindred sense of belonging at Cafe Decadence, the local coffee shop. Still, somehow, it doesn’t make sense to her that life could be this easy. The more she falls in love with her friends in Ithaca, the more she can’t shake the feeling that she’ll hurt them the way she’s been hurt. As April moves through the world, meeting people who feel like home, she chronicles her life in the songs she writes and discovers that where she came from doesn’t dictate who she has to be. This lyrical, unflinching tale is for anyone who has ever yearned for the fierce power of found family or to grasp the profound beauty of choosing to belong.”

**[The Perfume Thief](#) by Timothy Schaffert**

**Doubleday (August 3, 2021)**

“Clementine is a seventy-two year-old reformed con artist with a penchant for impeccably tailored suits. Her life of crime has led her from the uber-wealthy perfume junkies of belle epoque Manhattan, to the scented butterflies of Costa Rica, to the spice markets of Marrakech, and finally the bordellos of Paris, where she settles down in 1930 and opens a shop bottling her favorite extracts for the ladies of the cabarets. Now it's 1941 and Clem's favorite haunt, Madame Boulette's, is crawling with Nazis, while Clem's people--the outsiders, the artists, and the hustlers who used to call it home--are disappearing. Clem's first instinct is to go to ground--it's a frigid Paris winter and she's too old to put up a fight. But when the cabaret's prize songbird, Zoe St. Angel, recruits Clem to steal the recipe book of a now-missing famous Parisian perfumer, she can't say no. Her mark is Oskar Voss, a Francophile Nazi bureaucrat, who wants the book and Clem's expertise to himself. Hoping to buy the time and trust she needs to pull off her scheme, Clem settles on a novel strategy: Telling Voss the truth about the life and loves she came to

Paris to escape. Complete with romance, espionage, champagne towers, and haute couture, this full-tilt sensory experience is a dazzling portrait of the underground resistance of twentieth-century Paris and a passionate love letter to the power of beauty and community in the face of insidious hate.”

**[The Secret History of Food: Strange but True Stories About the Origins of Everything We Eat](#) by Matt Siegel**

**Ecco (August 31, 2021)**

“An irreverent, surprising, and entirely entertaining look at the little-known history surrounding the foods we know and love. Is Italian olive oil really Italian, or are we dipping our bread in lamp oil? Why are we masochistically drawn to foods that can hurt us, like hot peppers? Far from being a classic American dish, is apple pie actually . . . English? “As a species, we're hardwired to obsess over food,” Matt Siegel explains as he sets out “to uncover the hidden side of everything we put in our mouths.” Siegel also probes subjects ranging from the myths--and realities--of food as aphrodisiac, to how one of the rarest and most exotic spices in all the world (vanilla) became a synonym for uninspired sexual proclivities, to the role of food in fairy- and morality tales. He even makes a well-argued case for how ice cream helped defeat the Nazis. *The Secret History of Food* is a rich and satisfying exploration of the historical, cultural, scientific, sexual, and, yes, culinary subcultures of this most essential realm. Siegel is an armchair Anthony Bourdain, armed not with a chef's knife but with knowledge derived from medieval food-related manuscripts, ancient Chinese scrolls, and obscure culinary journals. Funny and fascinating, *The Secret History of Food* is essential reading for all foodies.”

**[The Reading List](#) by Sara Nisha Adams**

**William Morrow (August 3, 2021)**

“An unforgettable and heartwarming debut about how a chance encounter with a list of library books helps forge an unlikely friendship between two very different people in a London suburb. Widower Mukesh lives a quiet life in Wembley, in West London after losing his beloved wife. He shops every Wednesday, goes to Temple, and worries about his granddaughter, Priya, who hides in her room reading while he spends his evenings watching nature documentaries. Aleisha is a bright but anxious teenager working at the local library for the summer when she discovers a crumpled-up piece of paper in the back of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It's a list of novels that she's never heard of before. Intrigued, and a little bored with her slow job at the checkout desk, she impulsively decides to read every book on the list, one after the other. As each story gives up its magic, the books transport Aleisha from the painful realities she's facing at home. When Mukesh arrives at the library, desperate to forge a connection with his bookworm granddaughter, Aleisha passes along the reading list...hoping that it will be a lifeline for him too. Slowly, the shared books create a connection between two lonely souls, as fiction helps them escape their grief and everyday troubles and find joy again.”

**[The Turnout](#) by Megan Abbott**

**G.P. Putnam's Sons (August 3, 2021)**

“Bestselling and award-winning author Megan Abbott's revelatory and mesmerizing new novel set against the hothouse of a family-run ballet studio. With their long necks and matching buns and pink tights, Dara and Marie Durant have been dancers since they can remember. Growing up, they were

homeschooled and trained by their glamorous mother, founder of the Durant School of Dance. After their parents' death in a tragic accident nearly a dozen years ago, the sisters began running the school together, along with Charlie, Dara's husband and once their mother's prized student. Marie, warm and soft, teaches the younger students; Dara, with her precision, trains the older ones; and Charlie, sidelined from dancing after years of injuries, rules over the back office. Circling around one another, the three have perfected a dance, six days a week, that keeps the studio thriving. But when a suspicious accident occurs, just at the onset of the school's annual performance of *The Nutcracker*—a season of competition, anxiety, and exhilaration—an interloper arrives and threatens the sisters' delicate balance. Taut and unnerving, *The Turnout* is Megan Abbott at the height of her game. With uncanny insight and hypnotic writing, it is a sharp and strange dissection of family ties and sexuality, femininity and power, and a tale that is both alarming and irresistible.”

***Then She Vanishes* by Claire Douglas  
Harper (August 3, 2021)**

“A twisty, compulsive thriller full of jolting shocks and startling secrets involving two sisters, a disappearance, a double murder, and a reporter determined to find the truth from the bestselling author of *Local Girl Missing*, *Last Seen Alive*, and *Do Not Disturb*. Everything changed the night she disappeared . . . On a summer's night in 1994, sixteen-year-old Flora Powell vanished from her sleepy seaside town without a trace. Their hearts shattered, Flora's mother, her sister Heather, and Heather's best friend Jess had to somehow carry on not knowing what happened. Twenty-five years later, tragedy strikes again when Heather walks into a stranger's house and allegedly kills two people in cold blood. Why would this loving wife and doting new mother commit such a heinous crime? Jess, now a reporter, returns to the hometown she left behind to cover the case and dig for answers. But this isn't like any other story. Jess was like a sister to the Powell girls, until the summer that tore them all apart. What happened to the girl she used to know? The question haunts Jess and propels her to find the key that may unlock the mysteries involving both sisters. But the search may reveal more . . . a darker side to this idyllic place she thought she knew.”

***Velvet Was the Night* by Silvia Moreno-Garcia  
Del Rey (August 17, 2021)**

“From the New York Times bestselling author of *Mexican Gothic* comes a riveting noir about a daydreaming secretary, a lonesome thug, and the mystery of the missing woman that brings them together. 1970s Mexico City. Maite is a secretary who lives for one thing: the latest issue of *Secret Romance*. While student protests and political unrest consume the city, Maite escapes into stories of passion and danger. Her next-door neighbor, Leonora, a beautiful art student, seems to live a life of intrigue and romance that Maite envies. When Leonora disappears under suspicious circumstances, Maite finds herself searching for the missing woman--and journeying deeper into Leonora's secret life of student radicals and dissidents. Meanwhile, someone else is also looking for Leonora at the behest of his boss, a shadowy figure who commands goon squads dedicated to squashing political activists. Elvis is an eccentric thug who longs to escape his own life: He loathes violence and loves old movies and rock 'n' roll. But as Elvis searches for the missing woman, he comes to observe Maite from a distance--and grows more and more obsessed with this woman who shares his love of music, and the unspoken loneliness of

his heart. Now as Maite and Elvis come closer to discovering the secrets behind Leonora's disappearance, they can no longer escape the danger that threatens to consume their lives, with hitmen, government agents, and Russian spies aiming to protect Leonora's secrets—at gunpoint.”

**[We Are the Brennans](#) by Tracey Lange**

**Celadon Books (August 3, 2021)**

“In the vein of Mary Beth Keane’s *Ask Again, Yes* and Cynthia D'Aprix Sweeney's *The Nest*, Tracey Lange’s *We Are the Brennans* explores the staying power of shame—and the redemptive power of love—in an Irish Catholic family torn apart by secrets. When twenty-nine-year-old Sunday Brennan wakes up in a Los Angeles hospital, bruised and battered after a drunk driving accident she caused, she swallows her pride and goes home to her family in New York. But it’s not easy. She deserted them all—and her high school sweetheart—five years before with little explanation, and they've got questions. Sunday is determined to rebuild her life back on the east coast, even if it does mean tiptoeing around resentful brothers and an ex-fiancé. The longer she stays, however, the more she realizes they need her just as much as she needs them. When a dangerous man from her past brings her family’s pub business to the brink of financial ruin, the only way to protect them is to upend all their secrets—secrets that have damaged the family for generations and will threaten everything they know about their lives. In the aftermath, the Brennan family is forced to confront painful mistakes—and ultimately find a way forward, together.”

**[We Were Never Here](#) by Andrea Bartz**

**Ballantine Books (August 3, 2021)**

“Emily is having the time of her life—she’s in the mountains of Chile with her best friend, Kristen, on their annual reunion trip, and the women are feeling closer than ever. But on the last night of the trip, Emily enters their hotel suite to find blood and broken glass on the floor. Kristen says the cute backpacker she brought back to their room attacked her, and she had no choice but to kill him in self-defense. Even more shocking: The scene is horrifyingly similar to last year’s trip, when another backpacker wound up dead. Emily can’t believe it’s happened again—can lightning really strike twice? Back home in Wisconsin, Emily struggles to bury her trauma, diving headfirst into a new relationship and throwing herself into work. But when Kristen shows up for a surprise visit, Emily is forced to confront their violent past. The more Kristen tries to keep Emily close, the more Emily questions her motives. As Emily feels the walls closing in on their cover-ups, she must reckon with the truth about her closest friend. Can Emily outrun the secrets she shares with Kristen, or will they destroy her relationship, her freedom—even her life?”



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