

Reading list: Must-read books for summer 2022

By **Moira Macdonald**

The Seattle Times

Sure, you could be spending these pre-summer days doing outdoor activities — but wouldn't you rather be reading? For those whose answer to that question is an enthusiastic "yes," here are four new books worth staying indoors for.

'LOVE MARRIAGE' BY MONICA ALI

This is one of those enchanting books full of people making bad decisions, but you find yourself rooting for them regardless. Ali, previously a Booker Prize finalist for "Brick Lane," introduces us to two small families: the Ghoramis, consisting of India-born parents Shaokat and Anisah and their grown children Yasmin and Arif, and the Sangsters, British national and single mother Harriet and her grown son Joe. Yasmin and Joe are doctors (as is Shaokat), engaged to be married as the book begins, but Yasmin worries about how her traditional parents will react to Harriet, a well-known and outspoken feminist writer. She's wise to have worried, as the

months before the wedding are filled with pronouncements, misunderstandings, sexual missteps and a gradual examination, by all of the characters, of love and passion.

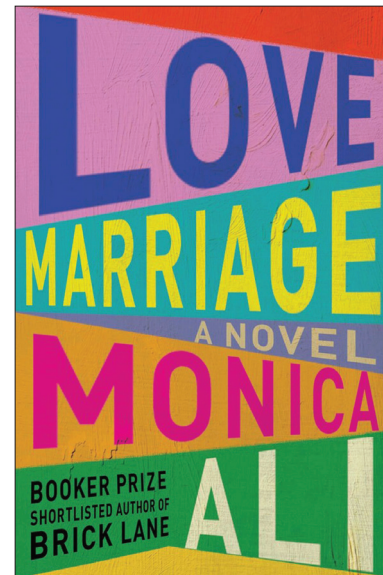
'TRACY FLICK CAN'T WIN' BY TOM PERROTTA

More than 20 years after the 1998 novel "Election" (made into a darkly comic film the following year), Tracy Flick is back, and she's still bitter. The girl determined to win the presidential election at her high school no matter what — because she deserved it — is now a woman in her 40s who hates vacations, struggles to connect emotionally with others (including her own daughter) and has convinced herself that a dark incident in her past means nothing, because she's moved on. Now acting principal at a different high school, she believes that she deserves the top job, but as in high school, there are obstacles in her path: scheming colleagues, tedious committee assignments, a parade of people simply unwilling to recognize Tracy's obvious worth. It's a book populated with middle-aged people disappointed in what

life has brought — and yet, "Tracy Flick Can't Win" is an oddly uplifting read. Perrotta's great gift is that he lets his love for his characters, flaws and all, shine through, and Tracy emerges as a much richer, more sympathetic character than in the earlier book; she has grown, as has her creator. I was rooting hard for Tracy Flick to, finally, win.

'THE WOMAN IN THE LIBRARY' BY SULARI GENTILL

Of course I needed to include a mystery in this mini-roundup, and this one's deliciously tricky book-within-a-book-within-a-book structure won me over instantly. Australian author Gentill clearly had some fun with mirrors while plotting her book out: At its center is Freddie, a young Australian woman in Boston on a writing fellowship. She's working on a novel — and she's actually a heroine created by another Australian writer named Hannah, who's sending her chapters to an American writer friend for feedback (he's named Leo, and he's also in Hannah's book). Got that? Anyway, Freddie and her



Simon & Schuster

writer friends think they may have overheard a murder in the reading room at the Boston Public Library — it is, notes Freddie, the opposite of a locked-room mystery. Investigations are launched, fingers are pointed, potentially dangerous liaisons unfold and I was turning those pages like there was cake at the finish line. And, hmm, what exactly is going on with Leo?

'LESSONS IN CHEMISTRY' BY BONNIE GARMUS

Interesting that I was reading Garmus' delightful debut in the

same time period as watching "Julia," the new HBO series about Julia Child: Both are stories set in the 1960s, in which a woman found an unexpectedly wide audience as the star of a television cooking show. But Elizabeth Zott, Garmus' unflappable heroine, is no cheerily lilting Child: She's a no-nonsense presence, a single mother and a brilliant chemist who lost her job in a research lab because (so they said) she was pregnant and unwed. Through an unexpected series of circumstances, Elizabeth ends up hosting the local cooking show "Supper at Six," where she focuses on the science of cooking and on ahead-of-her-time female empowerment. "She never smiled. She never made jokes. And her dishes were as honest and down-to-earth as she was." It's a novel full of dark moments, and yet "Lessons in Chemistry" feels richly funny. Elizabeth Zott is a unique heroine, and you find yourself wishing she wasn't fictional: A lot of us — perhaps even Julia Child — might have enjoyed watching "Supper at Six."

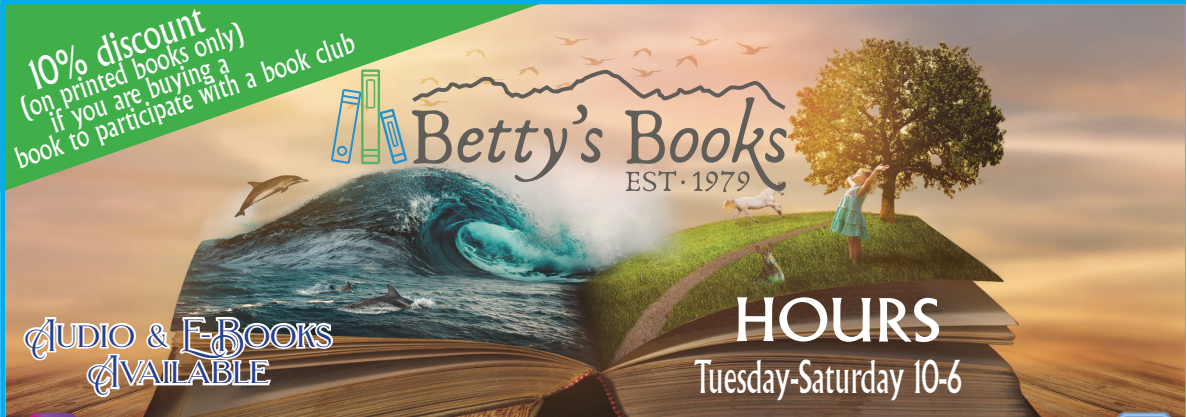


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