

THE SHELF

5 feel-good books to get you in the mood for fall



As our calendars flip to October, often reckoned as a transition period between summer and the crisp fall season, it becomes fairly hard to restrain ourselves from back-to-back reruns of *Gilmore Girls* and *The Secret History*. This list embraces the imminent autumn season with open arms and five cosy, feel-good books.

NUR-E-JANNAT ALIF

The Pumpkin Spice Café (Dream Harbor #1)
LAURIE GILMORE
One More Chapter, 2023

Speaking of *Gilmore Girls*, the first addition to our list is a hearty romantic novel by Laurie Gilmore. This book is a written rendition of Stars Hollow itself—starting from the quirky characters to its eternally golden atmosphere. When Jeanie's aunt unexpectedly leaves her the cherished Pumpkin Spice Café in the quaint town of Dream Harbor, she seizes the opportunity to escape her monotonous desk job and kick off afresh. However, a local farmer by the name of Logan puts all her plans to waste. Logan, a cranky old-time resident of Dream Harbor, does everything in his power to avoid the town's constant gossip, but the new owner of the town's café sends his life into complete disruption. Although her upbeat nature grates on his nerves, there is something about her that he cannot quite ignore, no matter how hard he tries. For fans of the Lorelai-Luke ship, this would be the ideal pick-me-up!

In the Company of Witches (Evenfall Witches B&B #1)
AURALEE WALLACE
Berkley, 2021

For readers who aren't too keen on romance, perhaps a cosy mystery might be of interest. *In the Company of Witches* by Auralee Wallace is the tale of the Warren Witches. Thanks to their discreet use of magic, the modest and peaceful New England village of Evenfall has been blessed with wealth for four centuries. Thus far, no challenge has proven too difficult for them to handle. When Constance Graves, a notoriously difficult and argumentative local, is found dead at the bed and breakfast run by Brynn Warren and her aunts, it first appears to be a tragic accident. However, it does not take long to realise that something far darker is at play, and Aunt Nora is first on the list of prime

suspects. Desperate to clear Nora's name, Brynn finds herself frustrated by the realisation that two years ago, the task might have been easier. As a witch of the dead, she has the rare ability to commune with spirits, and while the dead rarely recall the circumstances of their own passing, they often remember fragments of their lives that could provide crucial clues. Since the death of her husband, Brynn has avoided using her powers and now doubts whether she even can. Relying on her aunts' magic and her personal investigative instincts, Brynn sets out to uncover the truth. In doing so, she may also rediscover the gift she once thought she could leave behind forever.

The Other Lives of Miss Emily White
A.J. ELWOOD
Titan Books, 2023

If gothic, sinister literature tickles your feel-good fancy, then *The Other Lives of Miss Emily White* is the book for you! In 1864, Ivy is sent away from her family's farm to a crumbling boarding school, where she feels utterly alone. Shunned for her working-class roots and mourning her sister's recent death, she finds solace in Mademoiselle Emily Blanc, a graceful new teacher who nurtures her artistic talent. Ivy's admiration deepens as her relationship with Emily develops, but soon, strange rumours begin to circulate—students claim Mademoiselle Blanc can appear in two places at once, teaching in the classroom while simultaneously strolling in the garden. As a mysterious book about a teacher with a doppelgänger comes to light, Ivy's obsession with Mademoiselle Blanc spirals out of control, rendering her desperate to protect the one person she sees as her only ally.

Monojder Odvut Bari (Odvutture #1)
SHIRSHENDU MUKHOPADHYAY
Ananda Publishers Private Limited, 1978

A cult classic in the realm of middle-grade Bangla literature, any book recommendation list is incomplete without a mention of

Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay's *Odvutture* series. An eccentric cast of characters resides in Manoj's sprawling, and somewhat straggling, ancestral home. Dukkhohoron babu, the tutor, insists on teaching only with his feet propped up. Satish Bharadwaj, the family priest, pets two ghosts—Handu and Bhundu—for company. Thakurjee, the hot-tempered aunt, is obsessed with keeping everything spotlessly clean, while Ganesh Ghoshal, the music teacher, attempts to hang himself two to three times every month. Chaos erupts, however, when Manoj's uncle discovers a revolver. As if things could not get any stranger, the bumbling detective, Baradacharan, stumbles into the scene, and the mystery of a missing prince only adds to the madness.

A Psalm for the Wild-Built (Monk and Robot #1)
BECKY CHAMBERS
Tordotcom, 2021

And lastly, tying this list off with a fantasy/sci-fi suggestion, *A Psalm for the Wild-Built* is a novella that digs profoundly into the quiet crevices of the human heart. The Panga robots became self-aware centuries ago, abandoned their tools, and disappeared into the woods, becoming a part of folklore and myth. One day, a tea monk's tranquil existence is upended by the unexpected arrival of a robot who has been sent to Earth to see how humanity is doing. The robot's sole objective is to ascertain answers to a specific question—"What do people need?"—and it cannot return until a satisfactory explanation is obtained. The response, however, is hardly straightforward, and the monk and the robot find themselves frequently asking each other this very question.

Nur-E-Jannat Alif is a gender studies major and part-time writer who dreams of authoring a book someday. Find her at @literatureinsolitude on Instagram or send her your book/movie/television recommendations at nurejannatalif@gmail.com.

কপ্তাই বাঁধ: বর-পরং ডুবুরিদের আত্মকথন



সন্দ্বাদনা
সমারী চাকমা

WHAT WE'RE READING THIS WEEK

AMREETA LETHE

Kaptai Baadh: Bor-Porong
Samari Chakma
The University Press Limited, 2024

"Lorana morana shoman," reads a Chakma proverb in the book's introduction: "Being forcibly displaced from one's land is akin to death." *Kaptai Baadh: Bor-Porong*, edited by Samari Chakma, collects the harrowing experiences of several inhabitants of the original town of Rangamati, which was entirely submerged during the construction of the Kaptai Dam between 1957-1962. The project led to a mass migration, known as "Bor-porong" or the Great Exodus in the Chakma language, and inundated over 50 thousand acres of land (40% of all arable land in the Chittagong Hill Tracts) and 100,000 people's homes, property, and possessions. *Kaptai Baadh: Bor-Porong* serves as an indispensable record of the region's indigenous oral history, with personal accounts shedding light on how mega projects such as the Kaptai Dam not only forcibly displaced tens of thousands, forever severing many from their communities and forcing even more to migrate, but also failed to deliver on grand promises of "development for all". Over 60 years following the dam's construction, its effects continue to shape the sociopolitical realities and enduring struggles of indigenous populations in the region even today.

BOOK REVIEW: FICTION

It's summer, it's New York, and the girls are dressed up (and broke)

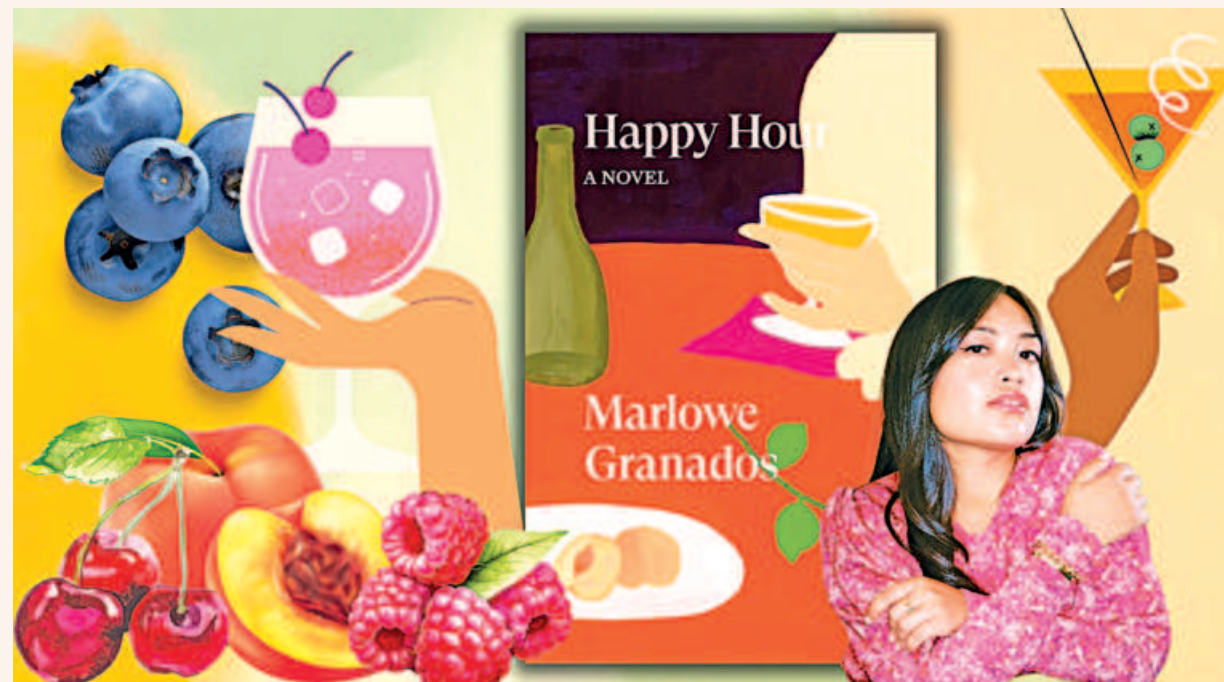
A book review of 'Happy Hour' (Verso, 2020) by Marlowe Granados

ARSHI IBSAN RADIFAH

Happy Hour greeted me like a warm hug. This is definitely one of the sweetest books I've read this year, and possibly one of the sweetest books I will ever read.

The book follows main characters Isa Ipley and Gala Novak along their five(ish)-month stint of trying to pay their way through summer in New York with mostly charm and wit, and occasionally some money on the side. They're subletting a room in an apartment which is wearing them thin on finances so they plan to go to the flea market and set up shop, only to go get drinks after and keep on struggling to pay rent.

Like the modern-day Lucy and Ethel duo, Gala is often a bit neurotic and gets on Isa's nerves, while Isa is more on the quieter side. Isa describes it as: "The amount of effort that goes into appeasing that girl is absurd. I am never thanked; it's just always expected." But that is not to say that Gala is made to be the villain of the story; there, frankly, is none. It is just a delightful tall tale of two young girls strutting about in the New York heat in their designer knock-offs. It's like if Carrie Bradshaw swapped out her closet full of Louboutins for thrifted ones, and instead of "wondering" away on her laptop in her big Manhattan penthouse, she gets busy selling second-hand, vintage clothes at the



flea market at a profit—it is one of the best things ever.

All the chapters of the novel are written like journal entries. It is Isa's diary and we get to take a peek into their life on a handful of days every month from May to September. We follow them through their misadventures and late night, and get acquainted with Gala's delinquency fairly quickly when she smacks a

beer bottle into a John-Henry's head because she is convinced that he is annoying Isa with his "timid" attempts at flirtation.

There is a large cast of characters that accompany the girls throughout the course of their stay in New York, but we don't always remember much about them because we don't really have to. The hero of the story is Isa and her faithful co-conspirator, Gala, and

everything else is mere decoration for the plot, which itself is also very erratic. But not in a disengaged way where it does not make sense, but rather fittingly, because this is exactly what the point of view would have been like for a pair of 20-year-olds navigating their way around a city they know nothing about. One minute we're sitting next to a gold-toothed taxi driver playing a song about love and

longing and next we're wondering if a fig isn't just an outside-in caterpillar.

However, one of the core foundations of the book is Isa and Gala's unrelenting friendship. This is possibly one of the most honest portrayals of female friendships I've come across, especially at 21. Their love for each other is fierce and sometimes they don't express it in the right way. They bicker and fight, but Isa knows she would not prefer anyone else's company but Gala's.

There are varied opinions when it comes to this book. Some have described it as aimless, with a sporadic plot that ultimately leads nowhere, calling it a less depressing version of Ottessa Moshfegh's novel *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* (Penguin Books, 2019).

Because I remember being 11 years old and sneaking off after lights out to catch reruns of *Sex and The City* on AXN, before my mother ultimately figured it out and shooed me back to bed, the storyline of *Happy Hour* played into the mystique of it all for me—of New York City, and more particularly women in New York City.

Arshi Ibsan Radifah is a literature major who loves unreliable narrators and Wes Anderson movie sets. If she had it her way she would have liked to play bass for a girl band in the '90s, but for now she'll suffice by rewatching Empire Records.

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