

From the Stacks
By Julie Orf
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The middle of July brings hot temperatures and high humidity, pool time, fresh watermelon, and cool drinks. I hope that you have reliable air conditioning and a good play list of good music. "Lovely Day" by Bill Withers would be one a top contender on my list with the peaceful mood and sense of happiness. Seals and Crofts' "Summer Breeze" also lightens my mood with smooth harmonies but I don't often get to the beach. If I were reading summer romance novels, I would definitely want John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John's "Summer Nights" from Grease to blast through the tree leaves. So, I have some pink lemonade and a stack new books!

Florence Knapp's *The Names* draws readers into the story of one family with exceptional sensitivity and depth. In the wake of a catastrophic storm, Cora sets off with her nine-year-old daughter, Maia, to register her son's birth. Her husband, Gordon, a local doctor, respected in the community but a terrifying and controlling presence at home, intends for her to name the infant after him. When the registrar asks what she would like to call the child, Cora hesitates and what follows are three alternate versions of Cora's and her young son's lives, shaped by her choice of name.

Fredrik Backman returns with a funny, deeply moving tale of four teenagers whose friendship creates a bond so powerful that it changes a complete stranger's life twenty-five years later in *My Friends*. During a pivotal summer, a group of teenagers escapes difficult home lives by finding a connection on an abandoned pier. Through shared jokes, secrets, and small rebellions, they discover a bond that gives them purpose. From this transformative summer emerges a transcendent painting, unexpectedly entrusted to eighteen-year-old Louisa. She embarks on a cross-country journey to uncover its origins and determine its fate that ultimately reveals an unexpected path to a successful conclusion and highlights the enduring power of friendship and art.

Nicole "Nic" Monroe is stuck in a rut in her hometown. Her life has been on hold for seven years, ever since her older sister, Kasey, vanished without a trace. Kasey's disappearance mirrored that of another young woman, Jules Connor, two weeks prior, leaving both cases cold and Nic in despair. Just as Nic yearns to move on, Jules's sister, Jenna Connor, enters her life, reigniting hope. What follows is a gripping story of two sisters determined to find their missing loved ones, no matter the cost. Ashley Flowers has penned a slick, chilling mystery in *The Missing Half*.

Set in the twentieth-century South Carolina, *Where the Rivers Merge* by Mary Alice Monroe is a sweeping, multigenerational saga of a family's enduring love and profound sacrifices. It tells the story of a resilient woman determined to protect her family's legacy

and the land she loves amidst a changing world. In 1908, Mayfield is the Rivers family grand estate where free-spirited, Eliza, refuses to conform to societal norms. With the Great War and family strife, she must adapt traditions. Then, eighty years later, Eliza has fought to maintain the family legacy but now she must confront her greedy son and the future of the estate.

On her 1968 wedding day in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Rafaela marries with high hopes, unaware her move to the American Midwest will bring disappointment. In the 1980s, her daughter, Ruth, desperate to belong in St. Louis, sheds her Puerto Rican identity. Decades later, Ruth's own daughter, Daisy, returns to San Juan, prompting Rafaela and Ruth to reflect on their lives. When a 2023 hurricane critically injures Daisy, Rafaela and Ruth return to San Juan. At Daisy's bedside, they revisit their past, their loves, risks, triumphs, and heartbreaks as old memories and buried secrets resurface, forcing the family to confront where they truly belong. In her latest novel, *Speak to Me of Home*, best-selling author Jeanine Cummins writes a family story about defining home.