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TBR is a quarterly newsletter of the Women's Fiction Writers Association.

Click here to learn more about WFWA.

At TBR, we believe women's ordinary lives are worthy of literary attention. As readers, our attention is limited, our energy finite. From the quiet debut novel to the bestseller, it can be hard to choose which books get our attention, yet all books have something to offer. In her poem "Sometimes," Mary Oliver writes, "Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it." The women's fiction featured in this issue call Oliver's instructions to mind because each author here discovered their story by paying attention to seemingly ordinary moments. Their books remind us that sometimes our power isn't loud. Sometimes our power is quiet, patient, and persistent. So this fall we're reading books that explore everyday breakthroughs and resilience, relationships and self-discovery, new beginnings and the courage to grow. At TBR, we're ready to be moved by the beauty of our shared experiences, and we invite you to read along with us.

BOOK TALK WITH...

...Kitt McClain

Why do you write women's fiction: I enjoy exploring themes of emotional and psychological growth that embrace joy, family, and sisterhood. I write about complex women who make difficult decisions. I realize now that years of thinking intensively about a character's choices inevitably make me examine my own.

Something you hope readers will take away from your writing: That healing is possible for all of us and it's never too late to start again. We deserve healthy relationships and to be loved and respected.

What sparked the idea for your latest novel: When researching my family's genealogy, the story of the women in my tree intrigued me. I knew many of their stories but overlapping characteristics caught my attention. They were resilient and brave. I wondered what we pass on to the next generation beyond genetics. That was the beginning of not only *Becoming Liz*, but an entire series.

Favorite character in a novel (yours or other): Liz, of course. She's flawed and wonderfully human. She's funny and smart. Most of all, Liz is brave enough to face her fears.

Becoming Liz by Kitt McClain

Elizabeth Rutland doesn't fall apart. She plans and adjusts, holding the pieces together before anyone sees the cracks. But when a public betrayal dismantles everything she thought was secure, she control she relies on fails. The life she had built fractures. *Becoming Liz* traces one woman's unraveling and the slow work of becoming whole. As Elizabeth confronts the truth, she must decide who she is without perfection and if she's brave enough to choose herself.

Learn more on Kitt's [website](#).

...Jessica Strawser

Favorite book when you were a child: Anything and everything by Judy Blume.

Book you wish you could read again for the first time: *The Husband's Secret* by Liane Moriarty.

A fictional character you'd love to meet: Bridget Jones. I can't think of anyone more fun to meet for a girl's night out!

Them's you're drawn to in the books you read: The strength of ordinary women facing extraordinary circumstances, the importance of friendship and found families, and the sense of hope and empowerment that comes from knowing we are never as alone as we might feel.

What sparked the idea for your latest novel: The realization that I'd never been taught when, or if it's ever okay, to quit something, even when it's bringing me far more frustration than joy—only that quitters never win.

The Quitters Club by Jessica Strawser

When four ride-or-die friends mark their 40th birthdays with a liberating pact to quit the things making them unhappy, a husband gets a much-needed wake-up call, a public career exit becomes a never-too-late return to college, a singles retreat is a widow's perfect escape, and a childless life becomes a plan to travel the world. But letting go is more complicated than they imagined. Confronting hard truths about love, loss, and starting over, these women must discover what's worth fighting for—and what's best left behind.

Learn more on Jessica's [website](#).

...Christine Gunderson

Something readers would be surprised to learn about you: I can swear in Norwegian.

Favorite book when you were a child: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. I spent much of my childhood tapping on furniture searching for secret passages to Narnia.

Book you'll never part with: A disintegrating paperback copy of *Some Tame Gazelle* by Barbara Pym. Her books are brilliant, wry, hilarious, and gentle. It's about spinsters in an English village in the 1930s. There is zero action, but I think it's a perfect novel.

Book you wish you'd written: *Yesteryear*. I loved it and thought the concept was genius. I wish I'd thought of it.

Book you hid: I had a terrible addiction to Barbara Cartland novels in high school. I hid them from my classmates because I was vaguely aware this was not "cool" reading material. I still have a soft spot for heroines who take breakfast on a tray the morning after a ball.

Have you always known you wanted to be a writer: Yes. I attempted to write my first novel in fourth grade. It was called *Millicent's Revenge*, best described as Anne of Green Gables meets *Trouble Belden*. In Narnia. With horses.

What sparked the idea for your latest novel: The spark for *Behind White Picket Fences* came from my own life as a mother of three, who spends an enormous amount of time in the car, and from listening to the experiences of other overwhelmed mothers when I attended book club meetings to discuss my first book *Friends with Secrets*. During those discussions, I realized we are all running on the same parenting hamster wheel, and I started to wonder what would happen if a group of moms tried to live in a different way.

Behind White Picket Fences by Christine Gunderson

From the author of *Friends with Secrets* comes a witty page-turner about three overscheduled moms who trade carpooling for homeschooling, only to stumble into a decades-old murder mystery. Fusing page turning suspense with keenly observed humor, this homage to female friendship explores the hamster wheel of modern motherhood and the consequences for jumping off of it.

Learn more on Christine's [website](#).

...Ramona Matta

Why do you write women's fiction: I love diving into the complexities of human relationships and personal growth. It is a space that allows for rich, character-driven exploration and genuine connection with readers.

Something readers would be surprised to learn about you: Many writers thrive on caffeine, but I don't drink any at all. Instead, I get my writing done and juggle all my work fueled by herbal tea or occasionally hot chocolate!

How do you balance reading and writing: Because I write a lot, I tend to be a slower reader. When I do read, poetry is my absolute favorite. I love taking my time savoring verse rather than rushing through a massive volume of books.

What sparked the idea for your latest novel: *Valley Girl* came from a desire to explore the quiet resilience we find when life forces us to navigate profound personal and emotional shifts.

What you hope readers will take away from your writing: I write from a very emotional place. My biggest hope is that readers feel deeply seen and find inspiration even in the most heartbreaking challenges.

Valley Girl by Ramona Matta

When a tragic accident shatters Valerie's quiet life, she discovers her mother harbored a lifetime of closely guarded secrets, including the identity of her biological father. Desperate for answers, Valerie leaves New York for a Colorado mountain town, where a trail of decades-old mystery leads her straight to an unexpected romance. Can she uncover her true lineage without losing her heart along the way?

Learn more on Ramona's [website](#).

...Duston Spear

Favorite book when you were a child: My favorite book in my parents' library was a book on how to draw different fonts. Each alphabet included diagrams for constructing the letters, strokes by stroke. That memory shifts onto the keys of my grandfather's Corona typewriter, watching him bang out an army of letters in regimented lines. This connection between the physical presence of text and the meaning of words extended into my art practice. I made stencils and alphabets and mimicked other people's handwriting.

Book you love to cheerlead: I love to cheerlead *A Ghost in the Throat* by Irish poet, Doreen Ní Ghriola. At its center is an eighteenth-century lament by Eibhlís Dubh Ní Chonail, titled *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*. Ní Ghriola encountered the poem as a schoolgirl. Then, years later, raising small children, she became obsessed with it and began translating it. I love the way she turns the words over and over, working meaning out of them, carrying what she calls "a female text" alongside the chores of ordinary life.

Favorite line from your book: I gave my *Bird Girl* protagonist a Tidewater Virginia childhood and a grandmother who made her read *Moby-Dick*. When Rebekah finally finished the book, her grandmother asked, "Was it worth it?" "Yes," Rebekah said, "because he got to write the novel he wanted to write."

That may be the heart of *Bird Girl*: An unrecognized artist spends 40 years painting the entire text of *Moby-Dick* onto seven canvases. Was it worth it? Yes. She got to make the work she wanted to make.

Bird Girl by Duston Spear

When a podcast revives interest in Rebekah Hunnicutt's past as muse to a celebrated Soho artist, it exposes the work she has quietly made for decades. Moving between 1970s New York and present-day Western Massachusetts, *Bird Girl* is a novel about art, ambition, friendship, betrayal, late recognition—and the woman determined to reclaim the story of her own creative life.

Learn more on Duston's [website](#).

...Jill Bronfman

Something readers would be surprised to learn about you: I'm a secret painter. I admire performance and conceptual artists who use their bodies, the environment, and other materials to make their art. I've been painting on canvases recently, trying to figure out how to use words and images together. I put the paint on the canvas first, and then draw on top with a sharp marker, outlining after the fact, which is something I also do as a writer.

Something you hope readers will take away from your writing: I wanted the mother-daughter story to be important, because my relationships with my mother and my daughter are important. I also wanted to say something about what's going on in the world right now. So balancing the personal and the political, while making it meaningful, was the most challenging thing about writing the book.

How do you balance reading and writing: I always want to read more, and I am constantly thinking of ways to get little doses of fiction and poetry into my life.

Favorite character in a novel (yours or other): Cassie is kind of an open-ended character in *Thanks for Meeting Me Here*, but in some ways she's the most important character. I hope to see her character brought to life in a feature film one day.

Thanks for Meeting Me Here by Jill Bronfman

Thanks for Meeting Me Here won the Keepers of the Fire Prize for Fiction from Raven Chronicles Press. It's a short novel set in the near future about a mother and daughter who meet in a London tea shop to discover the secrets they've been holding on to for years. The novel is perfect for fans of Margaret Atwood and Sally Rooney.

Learn more on Jill's [website](#).

NEW & NOTEWORTHY

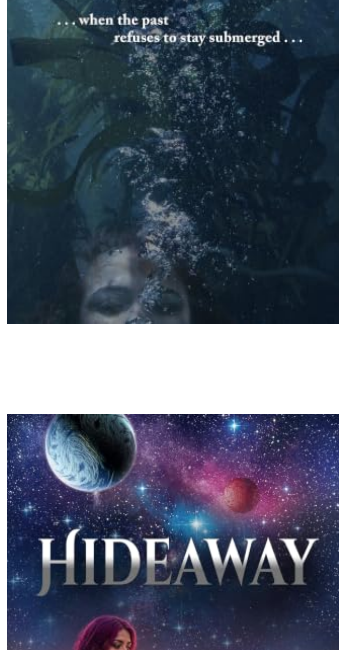
Looking for a book to pair with your pumpkin spice latte? Here are 12 women's fiction titles to warm your hearts and hands this season.



In the Company of Whales by Judy M. Taylor

A washed-up punk rocker has no business getting involved with the rescue of 19 killer whales, but somehow Carla gets in way over her head. Teaming up with an attractive marine biologist and an elderly woman with a broken hip and a sweet dog, Carla risks everything to save the whales. Time is running out. In *the Company of Whales* is about the power of friendship, finding your purpose, and making your own second chances.

Visit Judy's [website](#) to find out more!



The Mentor by Angela Douglas

The book was fiction. The pain was real. The consequences are deadly. Professor Karla Dobbs has everything: literary acclaim, a bestseller, and a film adaptation. Until a former student claims it was plagiarized. As a university lockdown begins, threats escalate. Then Karla's online mentorship program receives disturbingly personal submissions from an anonymous writer known as The Protégé who predicts what happens next. Someone is watching her. Someone is writing her. And suddenly people around her are dying.

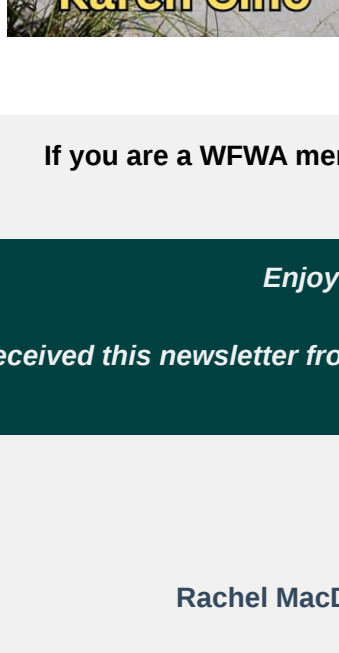
Visit Angela's [website](#) to find out more!



Regret No More by Wendy Haller

When family duty brings Becca Flannigan back to the home she escaped, she and her mother must face the regrets and misunderstandings that have defined their relationship for years. This emotionally rich novel explores forgiveness, generational trauma, and the complicated love that binds mothers and daughters.

Visit Wendy's [website](#) to find out more!



What Ruth Learned by Alexandra Hayne

When Ruth Sullivan's life stalls, what begins as a quest to reinvent herself becomes a journey into the mystery of her family's past. In a dual-timeline narrative set in modern-day Los Angeles and 1950s Hollywood, Ruth rediscovers her parentage—a woman who called herself C-Note and a former priest searching for identity—and is forced to confront her own choices along with her fractured family's secrets and sorrows.

Visit Alexandra's [website](#) to find out more!

All Afternoon by Susan Kleinman

Set in 1978, *All Afternoon* follows Marilyn Weisfeld, a once-promising writer who abandoned her literary ambitions for marriage and motherhood years earlier. When bestselling author Henry Goldfarb encourages her to start writing again, she glimpses the more fulfilling life she could be living—if only she can find the courage to reach for it. Poignant and funny, *All Afternoon* will resonate with any woman who has ever felt torn between her own dreams and the expectations of others.

Visit Susan's [website](#) to find out more!

Miracle Grow of the Mind by Carol LaHines

Miracle Grow of the Mind is a funny, heartbreaking exploration of parenthood, disability, medical bureaucracy, Big Agro, food allergies, and environmental pathogens centered around four-year-old Griffin, who was born prematurely, and his parents Amy and Michael. Smart, wry, and deeply human, this novel examines the ways love, absurdity, and hope intersect in the messy work of raising a child.

Visit Carol's [website](#) to find out more!

Love and Other Incurable Ailments by Linda K. Steniewicz

When an anxious overthinker discovers a box of discarded love letters, she ends up chasing a fantasy 900 miles from Michigan to Ocracoke, NC, in search of the stranger who wrote them. There, she discovers unexpected friendships, uncomfortable truths, and the possibility of love. But when her imagined happy ending goes awry, she must decide if holding on or letting go is the bravest thing she can do.

Visit Linda's [website](#) to find out more!

The Bonnet Brigade by Christy Matheson

When the fortune supporting Celia Westhaven's family disappears, she must secure their futures with a husband, hopefully Peter Alcott. But when Peter receives anonymous threats against his sister, he insists he cannot marry Celia, leaving her willing to wed anyone who will provide for her. As Celia's prospects dwindle and she tries to outmaneuver the London marriage market, Celia and Peter must decide whether love is worth risking everything.

Visit Christy's [website](#) to find out more!

Mermaid by Michéle Esposito

They were the girls who didn't drown. As children, sisters May and Kate survived the unthinkable. Decades later, when Kate disappears, May is forced to unravel the secrets surrounding their mother's final act. And as she searches for her sister, she also finds an unexpected second chance with Buddy, her first and true love. *Mermaid* is a story of sisterhood, resilience, forgiveness, and finding hope after heartbreak.

Visit Michéle's [website](#) to find out more!

Hideaway by Monica Goertzen Hertlein

After stealing from corrupt law enforcement, Mary flees the spaceport streets for a remote rural outpost, hoping for refuge with the only person she trusts in the world. But when she finds love as well as a safe haven, she must decide whether to be honest with her found family and risk losing her last chance for a real home or be exposed as a thief when the law catches up to her.

Visit Monica's [website](#) to find out more!

Really (Almost) True Story by Jodi Jones

Patricia, a chronic people pleaser, is exhausting herself taking care of everybody else while feeling unseen. When her husband surprises her with her first vacation in years—bringing his disapproving mother and her weiner dog, Midge—Patricia accidentally becomes a bit famous (or infamous). With the help of Midge and new friend Sunny, Patricia tries to navigate her notoriety without losing her job, her marriage, or her mind.

Visit Jodi's [website](#) to find out more!

Sun, Sand and Secrets by Karen Cino

Sun, Sand and Secrets follows four women on a week-long getaway full of humor and love. Molly, healing from her painful divorce in her new beach home, grapples with unexpected emotions after reuniting with an old love. Sadie turns her family's golf course and has trust issues with her husband. Emma's abusive husband monitors her every move. Lily has financial issues and unresolved grief over her husband's death. Together, all the women must confront their pasts and futures.

Visit Karen's [Goodreads](#) to find out more!

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