



BiblioFiles

By Ruth Freeman

Readers' Advisor @ the Rowayton Library

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A Summer Grab Bag

'The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates' by Wes Moore is a tale for our time. It's a story of how close we come to completely different outcomes in our lives, depending on surprisingly small events. A step in the wrong direction at the wrong age and one of two boys (the writer) has a successful future and one, his namesake, will spend his life in prison. The author's father dies when he is only 8, leaving his mother to raise their family. Through sheer determination and the help of father figures she turns Wes's life around in time for him to flourish at military school and go on to college. Sadly this scenario was not duplicated for the "other" Wes Moore and he slipped into a life of crime. This is a thoughtful look at how hard it is for poor, fatherless boys to make it in our society.

'Happy Now?' by Kathleen Shonk is different and that's a compliment. The main character is newly widowed and living in Chicago. You wouldn't think such a sad topic would produce such comforting looks at the strength of family and the courage it takes to recreate a life worth getting out of bed for. Beautifully written and poignant – we can never know everything about the people we love.

'Sissinghurst' by Adam Nicholson is part memoir, part history of a famous British garden in transition. The effort to bring the farm back organically in order to support the machinery of feeding thousands of visitors to the gardens is really interesting. The book is loaded with historical and agricultural details about the Kent region, the soil and the quirky Sackville – West family. Nicholson shines a light on the tortured relationships of his grandparents and parents. He points out the difficulty of change, and the uncomfortable position of living someplace that isn't technically yours (Sissinghurst is as National Trust property). Recommended for gardeners and Anglophiles.

'Strip' by Thomas Perry is the hit beach book of 2010. I love his characters and deadpan observations of the crazy quilt southern CA life. Joe Carver is the underestimated, very original, and clever antagonist who needs to stay one step ahead of an assortment of goons who have mistakenly identified him as someone they should eliminate. Perry's surprising plot developments keep you guessing. The complications that arise from everyone's warring agendas are nicely tied up in an understated manner. There are also plenty of laughs in these pages to balance the dead



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body count. Finally, the wry delivery is perfect for the three ring circus Perry always has under control.

'Innocent' should be Scott Turow's final installment of the Rusty Sabich drama. It's hard to imagine even this brilliant lawyer surviving more than two trips through the court's witness box. It's twenty years after "Presumed Innocent" and Rusty's son has grown up while in many ways Rusty hasn't, although he is a judge on the State Supreme Court. Still married to Barbara at age sixty, he is questioning some of the decisions he made in 'Presumed Innocent'. It's not essential to have read that book first but I think it would make 'Innocent' richer. The writing is terrific; Turow is a master of pacing and character development so reading him is a real pleasure. Especially recommended for those in search of literate summer reading.

'The Invisible Bridge' by Julie Orringer is a wonderfully sweeping atmospheric novel about three Hungarian brothers caught in the WWII maelstrom in Europe. The main character Andras arrives in Paris to go to architecture school, while his older brother Tibor goes to Modena, Italy to study medicine. Their youngest brother, Matyas, stays in Budapest. The Levi brothers are Jewish, which combined with Hungary's ill considered decision to side with Germany means deprivation and hardship become part of their lives as soon as the war starts. The brothers, their lovers, family and friends are fully drawn and realistic. It's amazing to think there was a time when you were not in immediate touch with anyone important to you. One of the tensions in this book is the constant uncertainty of not knowing where or how your loved ones are.

'The Bucolic Plague' by Josh Kilmer-Purcell is comical. Two gay, very urban New Yorkers buy a stately home in upstate Sharon Springs New York and start finding their inner farmer. Vegetables, goats, numerous flies, and their local farmer contribute to a humorous education. This book, which preceded their TV show 'Beekman 1802', traces their first two years as owners of the house. Who knew how funny a herd of goats could be.

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