Books

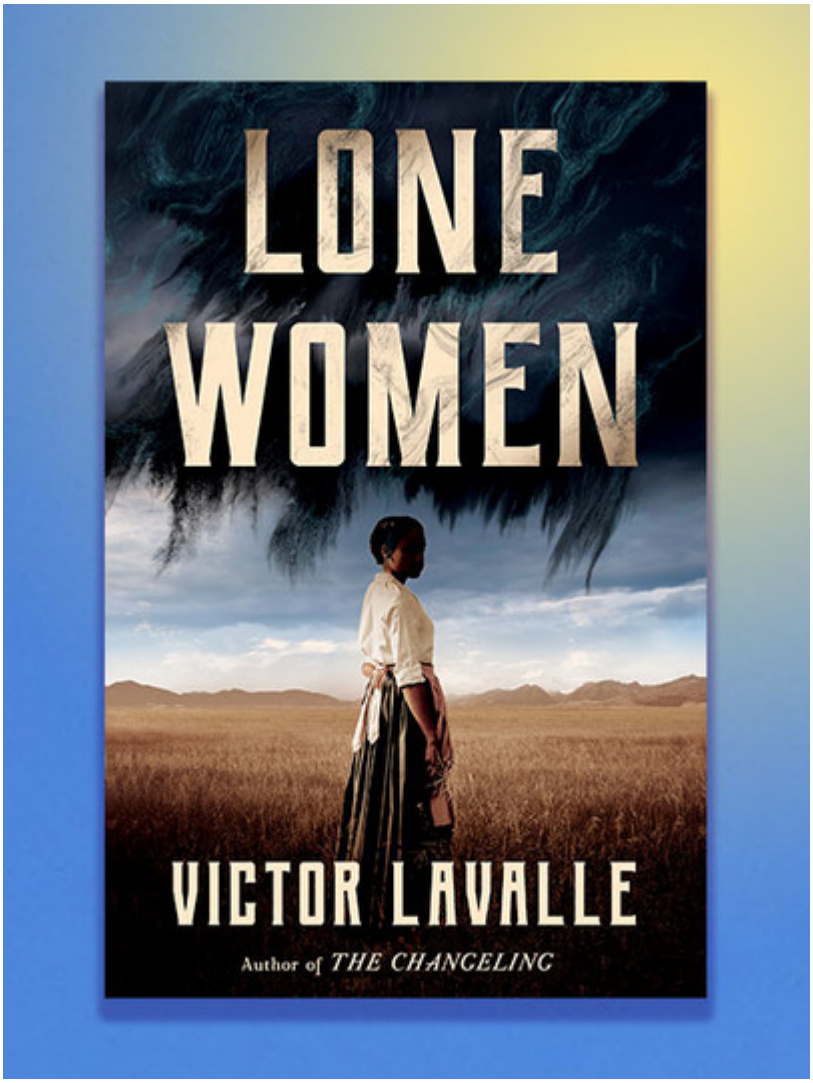
8 New Novels by Columbia Alumni to Read This Summer

By
Rebecca Shapiro
|
Jul. 12, 2023



Len Small

Whether you're tucking a book into your carry-on, spending the afternoon at the beach, or just stealing an hour to relax, there's no better time to get hooked on reading than summer. Here are eight new novels, all by Columbia alumni, to add to your list.



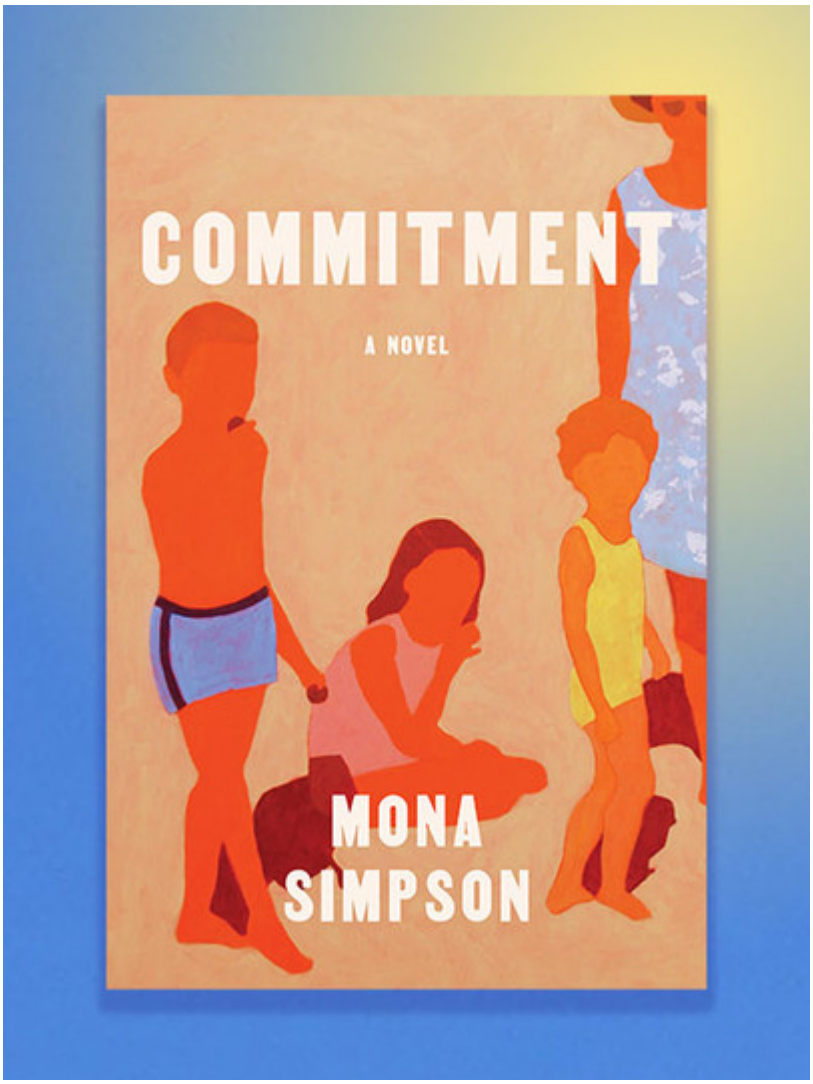
One World

Lone Women

By Victor LaValle ’98SOA

The Homestead Act of 1862, which promised 160 acres of free federal land in the American West to anyone who could tame it, had an unexpected result: thousands of unmarried women seized the unprecedented opportunity to own property. In his latest novel, Columbia writing professor Victor LaValle imagines the life of one of them, Adelaide Henry, who makes her way to Montana in 1915 with nothing but a locked steamer trunk and a lot of dark secrets. As the only Black woman in the windswept territory, she has plenty of challenges to overcome. But in LaValle’s genre-bending world, things are not always as they seem. Combining elements of historical fiction and classic Westerns with horror and the supernatural, the novelist

showcases his inventive, wholly original storytelling.



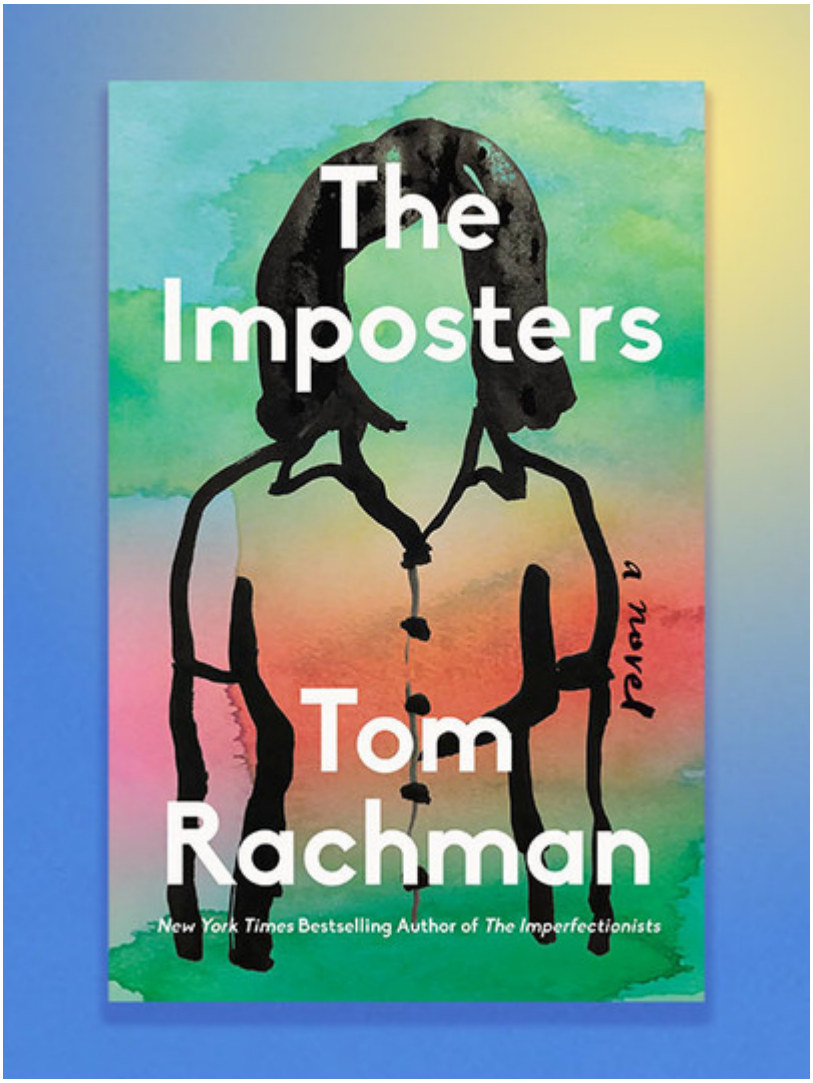
Knopf

Commitment

By Mona Simpson ’85SOA

Diane Aziz is a gentle, absent-minded nurse, trying hard as a single mom to set up a better future for her three children. But when her oldest son, Walter, leaves for college, Diane falls apart. Unable to pay the bills, get to work, and eventually even leave her bed, she is discreetly sent to a state institution for the mentally ill. What’s meant to be a short stay turns permanent, and her children — the distracted Walter, ambitious Lina, and aimless Donnie — need to find a way to fend for themselves. In her seventh novel, Mona Simpson deftly recreates a time and place — 1970s Los

Angeles — and shows the devastating toll that depression can take on a whole family.



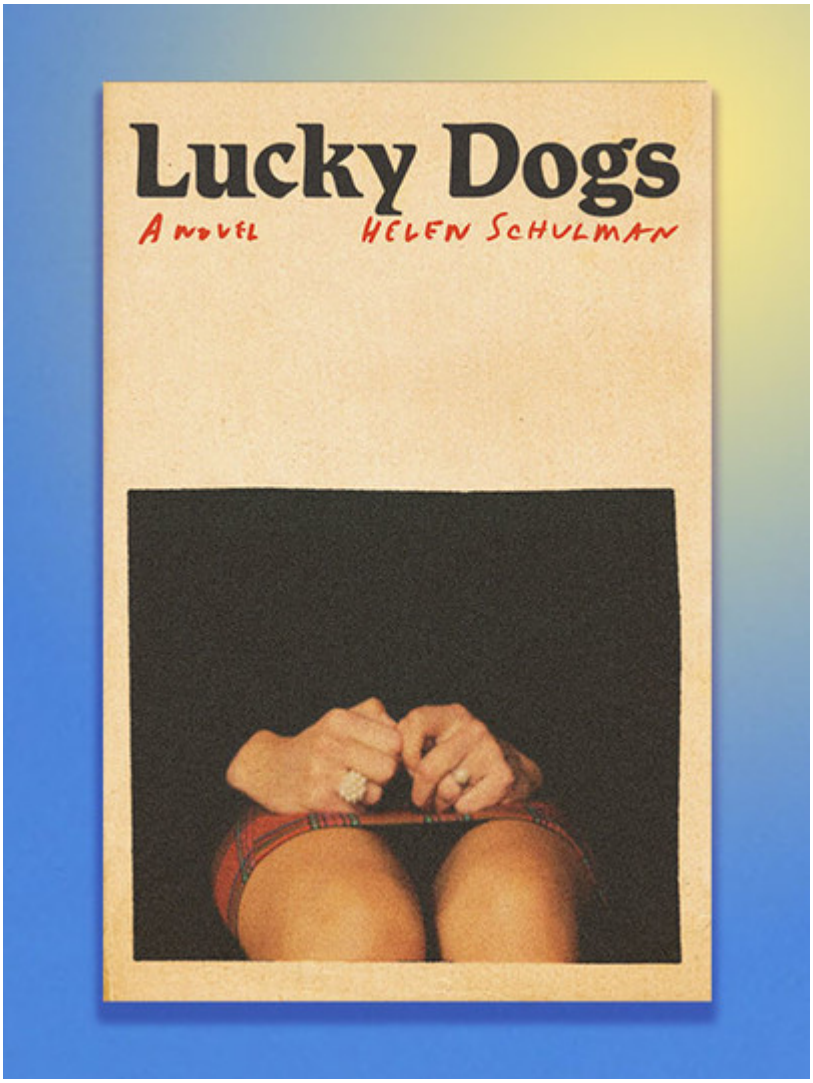
Bond Street Books

The Imposters

By Tom Rachman ’98JRN

In the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic, an ornery writer named Dora Frenhofer sits alone in her London home and tries to finish one last novel before dementia consumes her mind entirely. As a study in character development, she desperately tries to imagine the futures of various people in her own life, from her estranged daughter, a Los Angeles comedy writer, to her brother, who went missing in India decades ago, to a translator who, in Dora’s mind, belongs in prison. Tom Rachman

spends a chapter on each, which often makes the book feel more like linked stories than a novel — until he cleverly builds to the final chapter, tying all the disparate threads together in a satisfying conclusion.



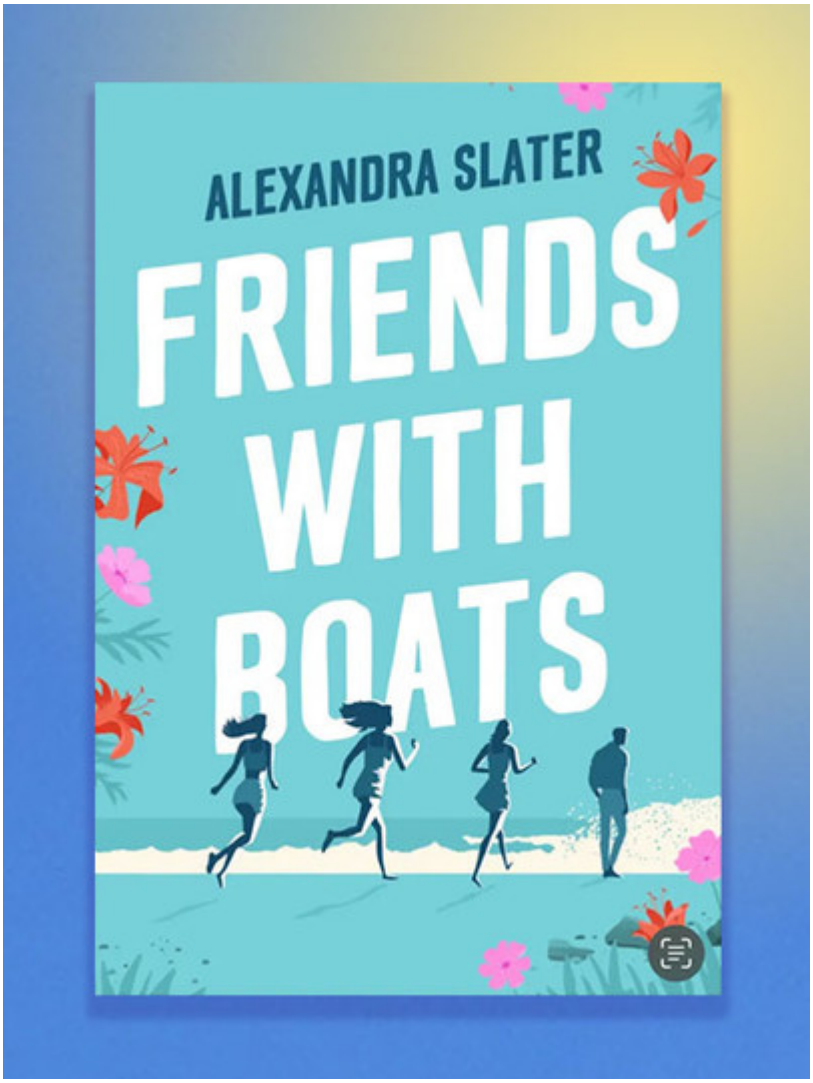
Knopf

Lucky Dogs

By Helen Schulman ’86SOA

On a summer night at an ice-cream stand in Paris, two women are brought together by the unwelcome attention of men. One is an American actress hiding from the public eye in the wake of a #MeToo scandal; the other, a European on a weeklong holiday. Both have been victims of sexual violence. When the European pulls a knife to defend the American, a fast friendship is born. But things get a bit more

complicated from there. Inspired by the story of Rose McGowan, an actress pivotal in taking down Harvey Weinstein, and Stella Penn Pechanac, a private intelligence agent from the firm Weinstein hired to spy on McGowan, Helen Schulman's novel is a timely story of power, betrayal, and the complexities of being a woman in the age of the Internet.



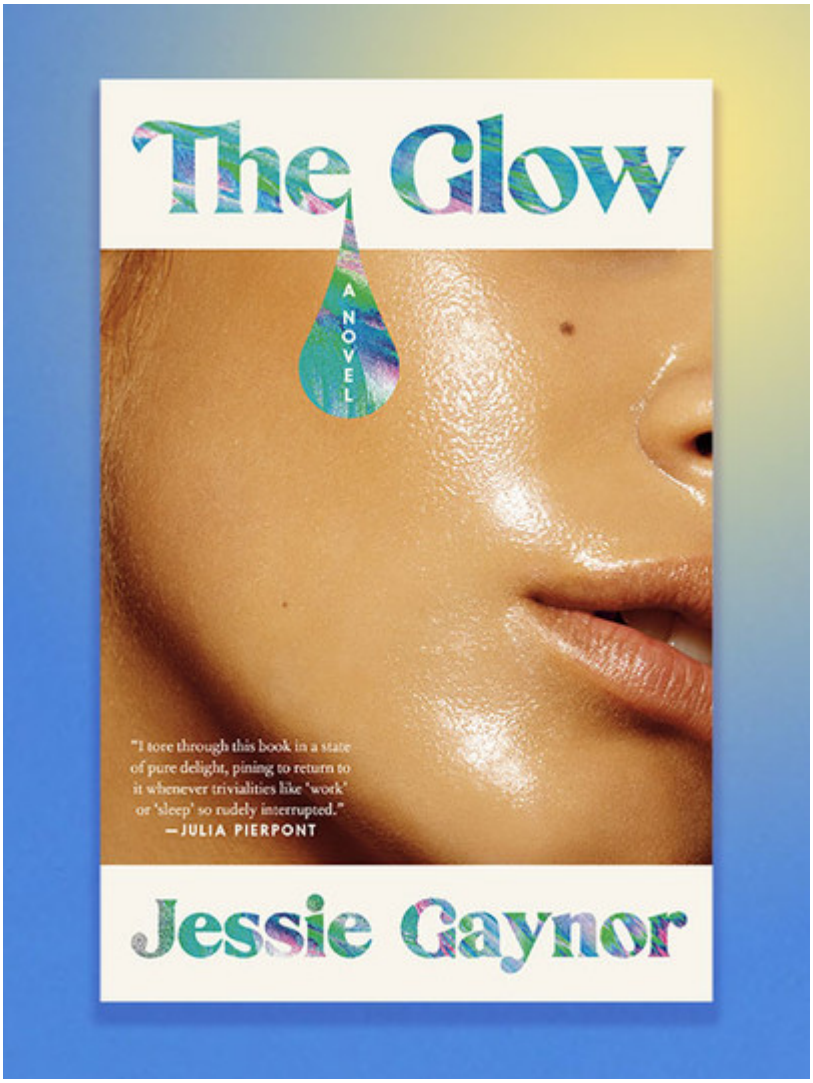
River Grove Books

Friends with Boats

By Alexandra Slater '96CC

When the dashing (and newly divorced) Mack Taylor goes home to Cape Cod to open a resort, he decides to get in touch with old flame Sadie. But then Mack meets Sadie's two best friends and soon all three are vying for his attention, despite some

inconvenient husbands and children in the mix. Alexandra Slater is an award-winning journalist, but this is her first novel — a breezy beach read with plenty of juicy details about the social lives of well-heeled summer residents of the Cape.



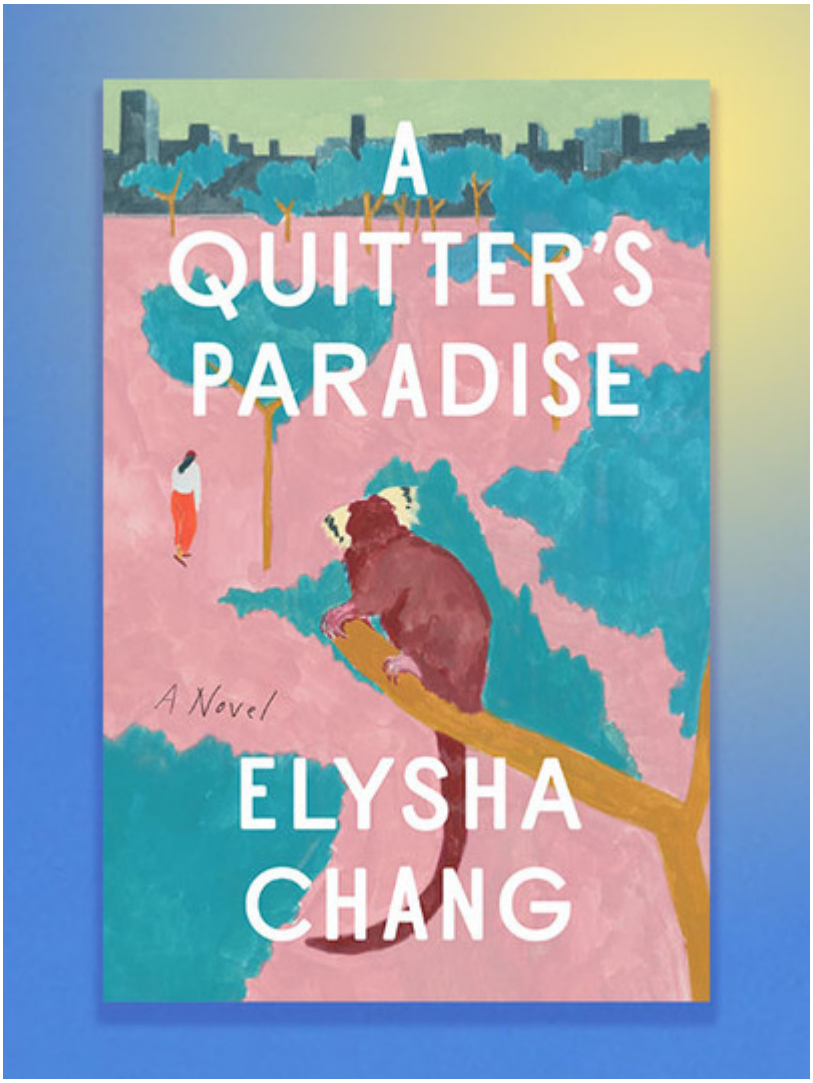
Random House

The Glow

By Jessie Gaynor ’08CC

After slacking off at work, Jane Dorner — a twentysomething New York publicist drowning in medical debt — needs a Hail Mary to keep her job. Then she comes across FortPath, a rustic “wellness retreat” that she’s sure she can make into the next big thing. Determined to transform FortPath founder Cass and her unassuming husband Tom into the perfect influencer couple, Jane dives headfirst into their world

of Zen koans and zucchini smoothies. Jessie Gaynor’s debut novel is a smart satire about the crossroads of health and wealth and the manipulative ways that social media has come to rule them both.



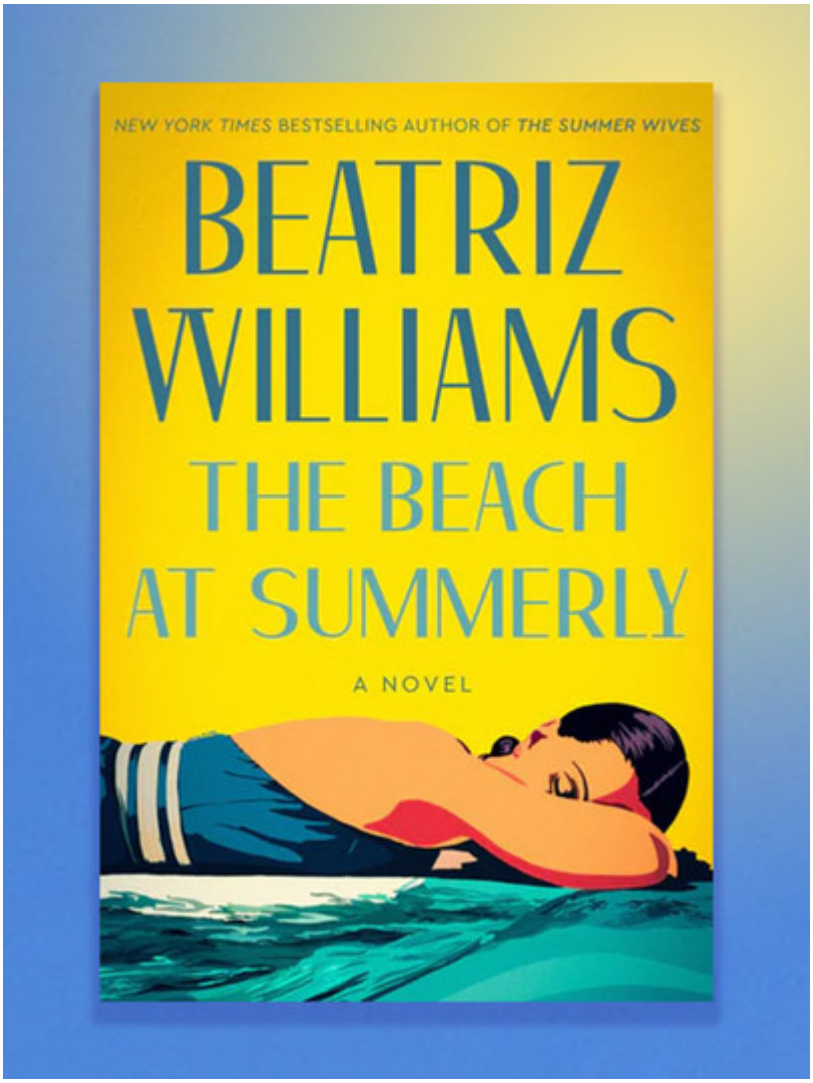
SJP Lit

A Quitter’s Paradise

By Elysha Chang ’11SOA

Eleanor Liu is doing everything she can to avoid dealing with her mother Rita’s death — an activity that mostly involves some serious self-sabotage. She drops out of her neuroscience PhD program to work in her husband's lab, then blows up that job with some questionable side projects and her marriage with an affair. Finally, Eleanor returns to her childhood home to go through Rita’s things, giving her much-needed

perspective on her mother’s life as a Taiwanese immigrant and the impact that had on her childhood. Elysha Chang’s debut novel deals deftly with grief, with enough wit and comic hijinks to keep it from feeling dour.



William Morrow

The Beach at Summerly

By Beatriz Williams ’99BUS

It is the summer of 1946, and the wealthy Peabody family has gathered at Summerly, their New England seaside resort, for the first time since the war ended. The caretaker’s daughter, Emilia Winthrop, spent the war years caring for her ailing mother and yearns for a life beyond the resort — especially after the arrival of a worldly relative who encourages Emilia’s dreams. But then an FBI agent shows up, with news that has tragic implications for the Winthrop and Peabody families alike.

Best-selling novelist Beatriz Williams again proves herself a master of the summer read, combining the best elements of a historical romance and a page-turning spy thriller.

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