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*Book Club*

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A MONTHLY WINE JOURNEY CURATED FOR ADVENTUROUS SOULS

# thebacklabel®

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THIS MONTH'S BOOK PAIRINGS BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

## *Read it Forward*

Read it Forward has a healthy obsession with authors, stories and the readers who love them. The online community is dedicated to helping book lovers find their next great read through weekly giveaways, editorial and newsletters. Their mission is to guide avid readers toward a literary future full of books that inform, entertain, inspire and delight.

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# BOOK CLUB

BY *Alexandra Pastron*

Some of you may remember that earlier this year thebacklabel took a long hard look at the connections between wine and film noir - of which there are many. We argued that every movie could be made better by the presence of wine (and popcorn!), and we stand by that. But recently we realized that there is an even stronger connection between wine and another form of storytelling: books! Many a great author, from Homer to Maya Angelou to yours truly, relied on wine for their writing process - head on over to [pg. 13](#) for even more on wine in literature. Now you could snuggle up with your bottle and book and call it a cozy night in. Or, since both wine and books are served best with friends, you could round everyone up for book club!

This month, we teamed up with Read it Forward to bring you some of their all-time favorite reads - and we can guarantee you're going to love them too. There's a wide range of stories here (both in our bottles and their books), from a captivating science-fiction thriller ([pg. 8](#)) to a transportive French love story ([pg. 18](#)) to the real-life events that lead to the creation of the first immortal cell line ([pg. 16](#)). In short, each of these books will take you on a wild journey - much like this month's wines!

In searching for the best bottles worthy of pairing with these stories, we looked far and wide. This month is a truly international selection, and each wine has been carefully selected to complement the book at hand. Starting in California, the [2016 Rotation Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon](#) ([pg. 11](#)) is a blend of aged and fresh juice, which we have paired with *The Baker's Daughter* ([pg. 12](#)), the story of two women from very different

generations coming together. Skip all the way over to Sicily with the [2013 Fondo Antico, Chardonnay](#) ([pg. 15](#)) and we've got two tales of families working together across generations - both at this family-owned winery and in *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* ([pg. 16](#)). We've always been firm believers that the best wines are the ones with real-life stories behind them, and getting to connect these wines with such rich pieces of literature has made that even more apparent!

Finally, no book club is complete without proper snacks! We've put together our recommendations for some bites that are native to where each wine is from, for the truly immersive experience. Head on over to [pg. 21](#) to put it all together.

So what are you waiting for? We've given you the wine, the books and the food - just add friends and you've got yourself a book club!

# STEEP SLOPES MAKE BETTER WINE

BY VICKI DENIG



**CLOSE YOUR EYES AND** picture the most gorgeous vineyard scenery you can imagine; gnarly vines, plump grapes and *rolling green hills* as far as the eye can see - now stop right there. Rolling green hills. Why is it that every time we envision vineyard perfection, the canvas always includes a scenery of sharp inclines? Secret, it's no coincidence. When it comes to great wine, the best of the best comes from grapes grown on steep hillsides.

So what is it about these intense inclines that make for such great grapes? Believe it or not, a lot of things. Here's why...

First and foremost, elevation is key. As elevations begin to climb, temperatures begin to fluctuate. This is where the impact (and importance) of diurnal temperature swings come in. Basically, diurnal temperature swings represent the difference in daytime and nighttime temperatures of a given area. Generally, the larger the fluctuation, the better.

Warmer daytime temperatures allow grapes to ripen, raising sugar levels and allowing them to reach optimal maturity. However, descending temperatures at night preserve acidity within the grapes, ensuring that the future wine remains clean and crisp, rather than weighed down and flabby.

Which leads us to our second point: sunlight. Not only is the elevation of a vineyard's slope important, but its *aspect* is just as significant, meaning the direction in which the hillside faces. For northern hemisphere vineyards, southern exposure (in other words, facing the equator) is ideal, and for southern hemisphere vineyards, vice-versa. The aspect of slopes determine the amount of sunlight the grapes receive, reverting back to our first point: more sunshine, more ripeness, which therefore leads to optimal sugar levels. As we all know, basic fermentation requires yeast and sugar to create CO<sub>2</sub> and alcohol, making

the amount of sugar within grapes an essential part of the winemaking process. When it comes to vineyard slopes, bring on the heat (during the day, that is).

Now let's hone in on that recurring word - steep. The degree of inclination is critical when it comes to the natural drainage of vines. Depending on the type, certain soils can only handle a specific amount of water, making the removal of excess rainfall an essential part of maintaining a healthy vineyard. With steep slopes, irrigation can occur naturally on its own, simply by allowing excess water to trickle down the hillside via gravity. In addition to water, air drainage is also an important factor when it comes to maintaining a healthy vineyard. With steep slopes, chilly air can move down hillsides faster, provided there are minimal trees, bushes, or other barriers in the way. Allowing chilly air to drain from a vineyard site is necessary, especially during springtime, so as to protect flowering vines against

late-season frosts. Slopes and drainage, for both water and air, go hand in hand.

And on the topic of soil, slopes are where it's at. Generally speaking, the soils on hillsides are usually lower in nutrients, which is actually advantageous for grape growing. If a vine receives an abundance of nutrients, it will essentially go into a vegetative state, meaning that it will stop producing fruit. In order for grape growing to continue, the vine must be forced to work a little harder, meaning it is actually helpful for winemakers to have roots in less fertile soils. When it comes to soils, the struggle is real.

Whether your favorite bottles of vino hail from the steep terraces of the Douro (like this month's [Gateway Douro DOC pg. 7](#)), the rolling hills of Montalcino, or the even cooler-climate inclines of the Mosel, there's no doubt about it - each and every one are highly delicious.

## 2015 GATEWAY, DOURO DOC

50% Touriga Franca, 30% Tinta Roriz, 20% Touriga Nacional



- Douro, Portugal
- Putting up fall decorations, whiffs of cinnamon in the air.
- Ready Player One
- After Midnight - blink-182



- Dark fruits like bruised blueberries and bleeding blackberries with nutmeg and cinnamon.
- Big tannins like chalky desert sand with a festive layering of spice, fruit and wet rock.
- Bold meaty pastas, or your mom's Wednesday night meat loaf you grew up eating.

This wine's region gets its name from the Douro river that runs through it. This part of Portugal is hot and dry, perfect for growing one of the country's most popular native red grapes, Touriga Nacional, which you'll find in this bottle! Touriga Nacional is a grape that grows in smaller quantities, making it all the more precious, so be sure to appreciate its presence here!

In the glass you'll find intense fruity flavors like a juicy blueberry pie that has been sitting by the open kitchen window as a breeze floats in off the lake. Tastes like resting near rolling green hills and weepy old trees that line a briny stream. Voluptuous fruit that will envelope your palate and keep you warm all winter long.



## READY PLAYER ONE

**AUTHOR:** Ernest Cline

**GENRE:** Science Fiction

**PAIRING:** This is a story about a boy who only feels alive when immersed in an alternate reality - what wine could be more fitting than the transportive **Gateway, Douro DOC?**

It's the not-so-distant future of 2044 and the only time teenager Wade Watts really feels alive is when he's deep in the virtual utopia known as the OASIS. Wade's entire life revolves around studying the puzzles hidden within this digital world. These puzzles are based on their creator's obsession with the pop culture of decades past (think: 2017) and guarantee serious power and cash money to whoever can untangle their secrets. But when Wade stumbles upon the first clue, he comes face-to-face with players willing to kill for the ultimate prize. In order to survive, Wade will have to win—and confront the real world he's always trying to escape.

Ready Player One - Cover Design: Jim Massey; © Broadway Books

## 2015 NEXO, GARNACHA

100% Garnacha



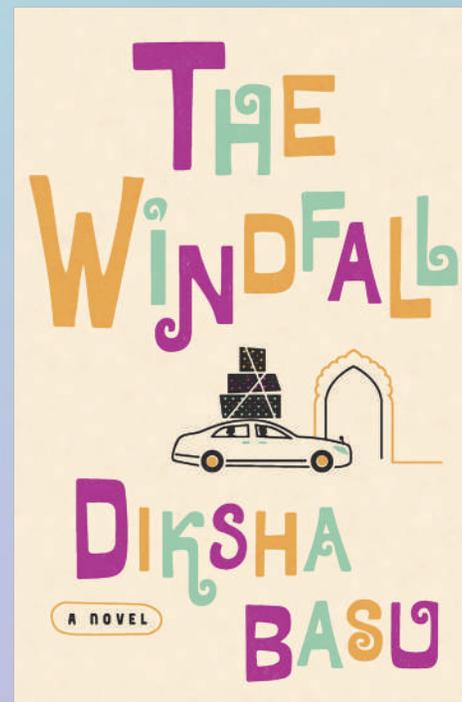
- Cariñena, Spain
- Snuggling by a crackling campfire on a breezy beach at 2 am.
- The Windfall
- Silence - Marshmello



- Energized cranberry jam with wet and volcanic earth, like walking along loose asphalt roads.
- Firm tannins that feel like licking overly eroded sedimentary rocks, gritty and thin.
- This is a meat and potatoes kind of wine - who needs love when you have a juicy-ass steak?

While most of the world's Garnacha - or Grenache, as we all know it in the US - is grown in France, we'd argue that the Spanish do it best. Typically, this medium-bodied wine would have a slightly higher alcohol content (around 15% ABV), but this Nexo Garnacha is on the lower end, making it a perfect pairing for balancing out spicier foods, so bring on the sriracha!

At first sip, this wine will make you think of bonfire embers filling the air with a slightly sweet musk. There are notes of underripe plums, freshly crushed raspberry marmalade and cranberry punch and the smell when you open a bag of beef jerky. Medium acidity that makes your mouth water and beg for another meat pie to curl up with by a fire.



### THE WINDFALL

**AUTHOR:** Diksha Basu

**GENRE:** Literary Fiction

**PAIRING:** While this Nexo, Garnacha is from Spain, it strives to fit in with any cuisine, similar to Mr. and Mrs. Jha's intentions when they move across town.

For the past thirty years, Mr. and Mrs. Jha's lives were enmeshed in the petty dramas that come with tight quarters and gossipy neighbors. Finally, they think they've settled comfortably into retirement, thrilled their son is attending an American business school. But when Mr. Jha comes into a huge and unexpected amount of money, he and Mrs. Jha move from their cramped housing complex to the wealthier side of town. The move triggers a chain of events that rock their neighbors, marriage and their son—who is grappling with his own struggles, trying to keep his love life and slipping grades under wraps. All of this brings unintended consequences, ultimately causing the Jha family to discover what really matters.

The Windfall - Cover Design: Elena Giavaldi; © Crown Publishing

## 2016 ROTATION CELLARS, CABERNET SAUVIGNON

100% Cabernet Sauvignon



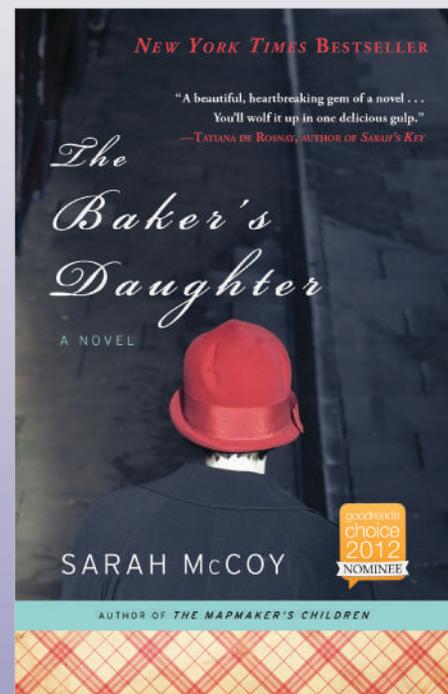
- Napa, California
- Feeling the first fall breeze brush still tanned shoulders.
- The Baker's Daughter
- Make You Miss Me - Sam Hunt



- Sweet, overripe heirloom tomatoes. Black tea and your mom's linen closet, fresh and clean.
- Medium body clad with light tannin that sticks to the back of your mouth.
- A wine that screams for a clam pasta with lots of butter and oil, this wine is comfort food.

Did you know that Cabernet Sauvignon is actually a hybrid of red Cabernet Franc and white Sauvignon Blanc? And that this hybrid occurred out of complete happenstance? And that this happy coincidence became the most widely planted grape varietal for most of the 20th century?! Well, it's all true, and this Rotation Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon is a wonderful example of what this sturdy red grape is capable of.

This wine smells like taking a deep, chest-expanding breath while sitting perched high on a cliff. Wet, grass-stained bramble berry notes laced in the smell of fresh open air. It tastes like violets that have been set on fire by the snap of a bonfire with floral bright raspberry notes. A sizable body ties it all together, making this an all-around banger of a wine.



### THE BAKER'S DAUGHTER

**AUTHOR:** Sarah McCoy

**GENRE:** Historical Fiction

**PAIRING:** Rotation Cellars, Cabernet Sauvignon is a blend of aged and young wine making it perfect to enjoy while following the story of two women from different eras coming together as they face similar life-altering realizations.

In the final year of World War II, Elsie Schmidt is not unlike most teenagers—as anxious for her first sip of alcohol as she is for her first kiss. However, unlike most teenagers, she and her family have almost survived the entirety of the war's terror thanks to protection from a Nazi official who wants to marry her. But when an escaped Jewish boy arrives on her doorstep, she knows that opening the door could threaten everything. Decades later in El Paso, Texas, Reba Adams shows up at Elsie's German Bakery hoping to write a cheerful holiday story. Instead, she uncovers a tale that resonates deeply with her own troubled past.

The Baker's Daughter – Cover Design: Chin-Yee Lai; © Broadway Books

# WINE IN LITERATURE THROUGHOUT HISTORY

BY **MORGAN KATZ**

ILLUSTRATION **TAMARA RAHOUMI**



**IF YOU'VE EVER HAD** to write a paper, article, story, novel or any coherent string of words, you're aware of the struggle known as writer's block. To get the creative juices flowing, a relatively common solution is to turn to the juice itself. Because alcohol decreases inhibitions and judgement, which in many cases is not good, it's the perfect tool when it comes to accessing the creative thoughts in your head. While everyone has their drink of choice, we prefer wine when trying to tap into our imaginations, and we aren't the only ones.

Wine has been influencing authors since the time of the ancient Greeks. They're responsible for creating the epic poem along with the genres of comedy and drama. We also have them to thank for laying the foundation for how literature looks today, and guess what. A lot of them were influenced by wine, and it has been present in literature ever since.

Ancient Greece was the innovation center when it came to improving winemaking and viticulture. They shared this knowledge with their other friends around Europe - Italy, France, Russia and Austria - who are also known for producing literary icons. Greek comedy playwright Aristophanes understood the importance of wine when trying to stimulate creative thoughts.

"Quickly, bring me a beaker of wine, so that I may wet my mind and say something clever."

Another Greek author that might sound familiar, Homer, is famous for potentially one the most well-known epic poems in classical literature, "The Odyssey." We think he can be considered a credible source when he said, "No poem was ever written by a drinker of water."

Fast forward a few (or more than a few) centuries to the man deemed the greatest writer in the English language, William Shakespeare, who wrote 38 plays, over 100 sonnets and a few long form poems - many of which have references to the good ol' drink.

"Good wine, good company, good welcome can make good people," as said in Henry VIII.

Because he spent so much time in France during the founding of our country, it makes a lot of sense that Benjamin Franklin was an avid wine lover. Although he didn't leave behind a huge legacy in the literature world, he was one of the main authors of the Declaration of Independence, which should count for something.

"Wine is constant proof that God loves us and wants us to be happy;" we couldn't agree with you more, Ben.

As we make our way into more progressive times, we see an increase in big name authors who were good friends with the bottle. The Jazz Age, the 20s in America until the Great Depression, was a period in which people were living lavishly, spending money and drinking heavily. "The Great Gatsby" is a perfect example of this time and F. Scott Fitzgerald said it best in his book when he wrote, "Too much of anything is bad, but too much Champagne is just right." Hard to argue with that.

As much as we love bubbly, we also love the underdogs of the wine world who don't get the attention they deserve. Poet Maya Angelou gets an extra dose of praise because not only did she drink while she wrote, but she drank sherry while she wrote. She once told a reporter for the Paris Review the items she took to her hotel room while writing her seminal works which included yellow notepads, the Bible, a dictionary, thesaurus, an ashtray and a bottle of sherry.

Putting pen to paper isn't easy, but these huge names in literature have shown us that it's okay to use a little wine to help loosen up and get those thoughts out of your head and onto paper. If they can do it, why not you?

## 2013 FONDO ANTICO, CHARDONNAY

100% Chardonnay



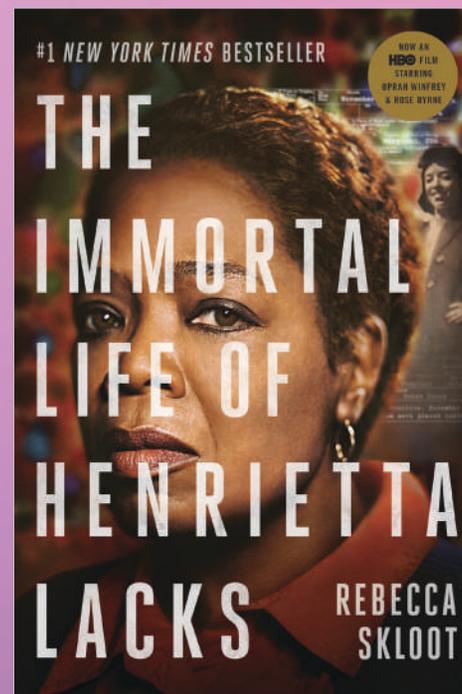
- Sicily, Italy
- Meeting your new lover's family for the first time.
- The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks
- Collide - Howie Day



- Baking spice, nutmeg and damp bark with sweet cream notes and grilled pineapple.
- Rich and lush body with sweet spice and candied yellow fruits like guava and lemon.
- The richness of this wine can be a buffer - don't be afraid to bring on the hearty tomato sauce!

Chardonnay is a grape people either love or hate. It seems these days there is no one who is half-hearted about it. This is a great expression that will show you what old world Chardonnay can be. Integrated oak that isn't overpowering, nuances of citrus and baking spice but also that of wet gravel. Chardonnay doesn't need to be the bipolar grape that we have cracked it up to be!

Fondo Antico is a family-owned winery spanning multiple generations. The family values protecting the environment and tries to do their part to reduce their carbon footprint by using alternative energy sources and reducing the use of pesticides on the farm. Fondo Antico has won awards for three years in row for diligence of environmental protection.



## THE IMMORTAL LIFE OF HENRIETTA LACKS

**AUTHOR:** Rebecca Skloot

**GENRE:** Biography

**PAIRING:** Just as family plays an important role for the children of Henrietta Lacks, it is also front and center for the Polizzotti-Scuderi family-owned winery that produces this **Fondo Antico, Chardonnay**.

Her name was Henrietta Lacks, but scientists everywhere came to know her as HeLa. She was a poor black tobacco farmer whose cells were taken without her knowledge in 1951. As the first "immortal" human cells ever grown in culture, these cells became some of the most important tools in medicine, as they were essential for developing the polio vaccine, cloning, gene mapping and more. Although Henrietta's cells have been bought and sold by the billions, she remained virtually unknown, and her family couldn't even afford health insurance. It's a riveting story of the collision between ethics, race and medicine; of scientific discovery and faith healing; and of a daughter filled with questions about the mother she never knew.

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks - Cover Art: © 2017 Home Box Office, Inc.; Cover Design: Christopher Brand; © Broadway Books

## 2015 ROCK POINT, PINOT GRIS

100% Pinot Gris



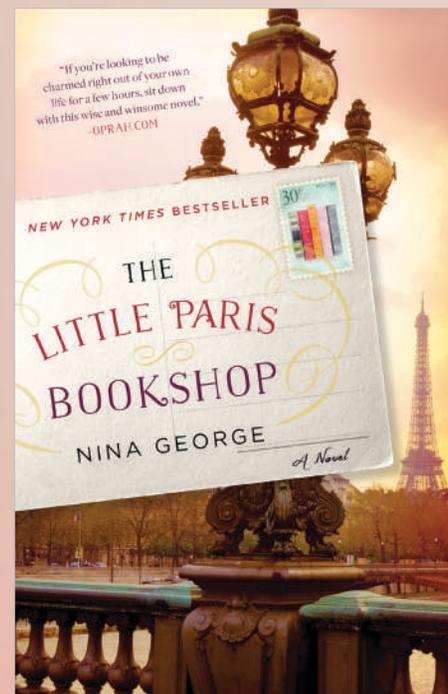
- Gold Hill, Oregon
- Dancing like nobody's watching under a yellow sunset.
- The Little Paris Bookshop
- Ain't It Fun - Paramore



- Smells like a straw hat in late summer, the aroma of yellow pastures enveloping you.
- Light body with a crispness that waltzes slowly to the back of the palate.
- This light wine is easy to pair. Think hard cheeses, charcuterie and good friends.

While California tends to dominate west coast wine production, Oregon has its own thing going on. This wine comes from an area with a rich pioneer-era history of territory wars, gold mining and development brought by the rail road. Now, however, it's just a quiet vineyard producing some deliciously complex wine!

There is a kaleidoscope of textures, aromas and tastes unparalleled in this bottle: salt, toast and citrus. Tastes like opening your eyes to yellow sun beams flooding your bedroom. Sitting up in cloud white sheets, stretching your palms to the baby blue sky out the open windows. Wispy curtains dance in the draft coming off the ocean and you can taste the brine hanging in the air by just breathing deep.



### THE LITTLE PARIS BOOKSHOP

**AUTHOR:** Nina George

**GENRE:** Contemporary Romance

**PAIRING:** This **Rock Point, Pinot Gris** comes to us from the banks of Oregon's historic Rogue River - not unlike the River Seine Mr. Perdu's bookstore floats down.

Monsieur Perdu calls himself a literary apothecary—he can prescribe a book to fix a broken heart, but it has yet to be seen if he can fix his own. From his floating bookstore in a barge on the Seine, he prescribes novels for life's challenges. The only person he can't seem to heal through literature is himself; he's still heartbroken after his great love disappeared. She left him with only a letter, which he has never opened. When Perdu is finally tempted to read the letter, he leaves for the south of France, hoping to make peace with his loss and discover the end of the story. Joined by a bestselling author and a lovelorn chef, Perdu travels along the country's rivers, dispensing his wisdom and his books.

The Little Paris Bookshop - Cover Design: Elena Giavaldi; © Broadway Books

## 2014 ALAIA, VERDEJO

100% Verdejo



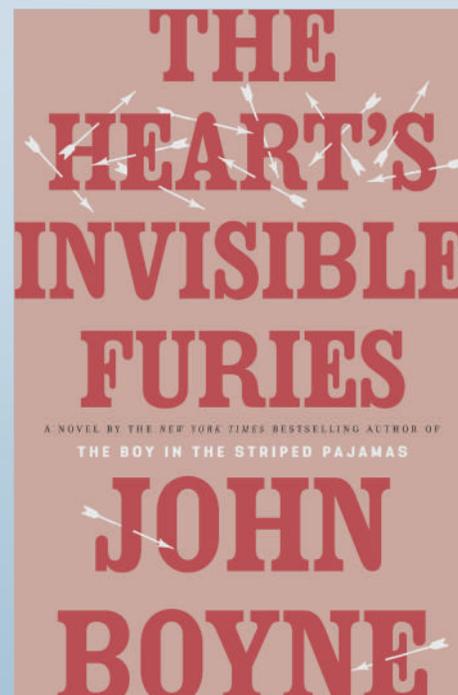
-  Castilla-Leon, Spain
-  Laying under a clear midnight sky on warm flannel blankets.
-  The Heart's Invisible Furies
-  Best Days - Matt White



-  Sandy seashells and sun-drenched lemon rinds with honeyed floral notes dripping in sandstone.
-  Round and full, plush and clean, soft and silky toting a sexy medium body.
-  This wine will definitely bring out the freshness in salads and seafood beautifully.

A lot of TLC went into this Spanish wine. The juice was monitored and tested daily to control the fermentation process and to prevent oxidation. The result is a super high quality wine! This Verdejo hails from Castilla-Leon where the wine culture is over 2,000 years old. Red wine dominates in this region so when we find a tasty white from the area, it's definitely worth trying.

This is a medium body white wine bursting with notes of bruised peaches, tropical citrus and white flower notes all cloaked in an ash-like minerality. Hints of orange, wet, slightly soft and freshly fallen autumn leaves. Tastes like chewing on thin-petaled flowers that grow through shrubs in an English tea garden. Ready to drink and will brighten up any palate.



### THE HEART'S INVISIBLE FURIES

**AUTHOR:** John Boyne

**GENRE:** Literary Fiction

**PAIRING:** Also hailing from Europe, **Alaia, Verdejo** is the wine to drink with this book. It pairs extremely well with sharp foods - not unlike the abrasive world Cyril is trying to decipher.

Cyril Avery is not a real Avery—or at least, that's what his adoptive parents tell him. And he never will be. Born out of wedlock to a teenage girl who has been exiled from her rural Irish home, he is adopted by a proper-yet-eccentric couple in Dublin. Ultimately, Cyril is lost in the world, tethered only by his friendship with the infinitely trendy (and dangerous) Julian Woodbead. As a result of both good luck and random coincidence, Cyril will spend his life uncovering his true self. Over the course of many, many years, he struggles to discover an identity, a home, a country and more.

The Heart's Invisible Furies – Cover Design: Christopher Brand; © Hogarth

# DIY: BOOK CLUB SNACKIES

BY THE WA CREW

ILLUSTRATION TAMARA RAHOUMI

**SURE, WINE IS A NECESSARY** addition to your book club - but you're also going to need some snacks! We've whipped up some suggestions for finger foods that come from the same regions as this month's bottles. So close your eyes, sip on some Garnacha and nibble on some jamón and *try* to tell us you don't feel just a little bit like you've been transported to the heart of España. Complete with good friends and great reads, and you've got yourself the fixings for the perfect book club meeting.

## PORTUGAL [Gateway](#), [Douro DOC](#)

Chouriço (Portuguese sausage)

Bolinhos de Bacalhau (Portuguese cod fritters)

## SPAIN [Nexo](#), [Garnacha](#)

Jamón ibérico

Manchego

## CALIFORNIA [Rotation Cellars](#), [Cabernet Sauvignon](#)

California almonds

Avocado

## ITALY [Fondo Antico](#), [Chardonnay](#)

Prosciutto

Parmesan

## OREGON [Rock Point](#), [Pinot Gris](#)

TouVelle cheese

Pear

## SPAIN [Alaia](#), [Verdejo](#)

Apples

Queso castellano



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