

The Reading Mood Map

Six ways to name the story you need



I do not know what I am in the mood for is rarely an absence of preference. Usually, the preference has not found its words. Begin with the effect you want a story to have, then use one of the six prompts on the next page to ask for a sharper recommendation.

HOW TO USE IT

Choose the mood that sounds like the change you want now. Combine two if one feels too simple.

Choose the effect you want

These are reading moods, not permanent types of reader.

01 SHELTER

To feel held by the boundaries of a story.

A contained setting, a voice you trust, recurring rituals, legible relationships, or the sense that emotional order will return.

ASK FOR

A novel with warmth and consequence, a strong sense of place and an ending that does not abandon me.

02 SPARK

To become alert to the world again.

A daring structure, unfamiliar setting, ferociously observant narrator, or one idea that keeps opening doors.

ASK FOR

Fiction with a distinctive intelligence and one element I probably have not encountered before.

03 ACHE

The clean release of feeling something fully.

Close attention to loss, love, time, or the distance between people, with enough room for the feeling to arrive.

ASK FOR

An emotionally exact novel that earns its sadness and leaves some tenderness behind.

04 MOMENTUM

A book that keeps making the next page necessary.

An urgent voice, early movement, short chapters, escalating choices, or a social situation tightening like a knot.

ASK FOR

A novel that moves early, with clear stakes and no long wait for the story to declare itself.

05 MISCHIEF

The pleasure of a story refusing to behave.

Wit, unreliable narration, audacious plots, and surprise that feels earned rather than arbitrary.

ASK FOR

Clever, humane fiction with a sly voice and the nerve to wrong-foot me.

06 VASTNESS

To feel your own scale change.

Centuries, landscapes, systems, invented worlds, or ideas larger than one life - with a human thread to hold.

ASK FOR

Fiction with a large imaginative horizon, but a human thread I can hold.

COMBINE TWO

Shelter + Mischief asks for safety without blandness. Momentum + Ache asks for emotional force without a slow approach. Spark + Vastness asks to be astonished by scale or thought.