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CROOK'S CORNER BOOK PRIZE SHORTLIST ANNOUNCED
\$5,000 Prize to be Awarded for Best Debut Novel Set in the South

CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA, OCTOBER 1, 2026—Today, the Crook's Corner Book Prize Foundation announces the four finalists for best debut novel set in the American South.

The Shortlist is:

- [The Resettlement of Vesta Blonik](#) by Denise Smith Cline, Regal House Publishing
- [God Is Harder on Girls](#) by Ella Dodson, Chapel Hill Press
- [This Here Is Love](#) by Princess Joy L. Perry, W. W. Norton & Company
- [The Slip](#) by Lucas Schaefer, Simon & Schuster

"The novels on this year's shortlist reflect the depth, diversity, and vitality of storytelling in the American South. We're delighted to recognize these four authors and their distinctive contributions to Southern literature," says Megan Crunkleton, Foundation President.

The winner of the \$5000 prize will be announced in January 2027. Although eligible books must be predominantly set in the South, authors may live anywhere, and all genres of fiction, except for Young Adult, are eligible.

Judging this year's Prize is acclaimed author [Katy Simpson Smith](#). Born and raised in Jackson, Mississippi, Smith is the author of the novels *The Maltese Version*, *The Story of Land and Sea*, *Free Men*, *The Everlasting*, and *The Weeds*, as well as *We Have Raised All of You: Motherhood in the South, 1750–1835*. She received a PhD in history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and an MFA from the Bennington Writing Seminars. She currently teaches fiction at the Bennington College Writing Seminars and lives in New Orleans.

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About the Crook's Corner Book Prize

Inspired by the literary prizes awarded by famous Parisian cafés such as the Deux Magots and the Café de Flore, the Crook's Corner Book Prize honors the iconic Crook's Corner, which for 40 years was a culinary, literary, and artistic beacon in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Sadly, Crook's Corner closed in 2021. However, the Crook's Corner Book Prize continues its annual award, a fitting homage to the unforgettable restaurant. For more information on the Prize and submission guidelines, please visit www.CrooksCornerBookPrize.com or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).