

Booklist 2023 - 2024

English



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the booklist explained

This booklist was compiled by Senia's department of English Literature. Its members are Cees van den Akker, Henny de Boer, Alfred Haandrikman, Christa de Jager, Tiny Kleinee-Ram, Corrie Meesters, Simone Punselie and Andrew Spink. The reader's guides were written by members of the group, other volunteers and students studying English.

other booklists

All the booklists about other subjects can be found on senia.nl. The Dutch (moderne literatuur) list also includes Dutch translations of books originally written in English.

difficulty level

🐼 indicates how difficult the book is..



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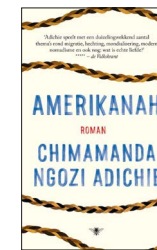
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Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
Amerikanah

E23-01
2017 | 477 pages



A white person calls a neighbourhood multi-cultural when 9% of the residents are black. A black person doesn't call it multi-cultural unless 40% of the residents are black. Similarly, while white people think racism is no longer an issue, black people certainly think it still is. Ifemelu grows up in Nigeria but later goes to the United States to study. There, she discovers racism and starts to write a blog about this. Her friend Obinze, meanwhile, moves to London, where it is difficult for Nigerians to find well-paid work. Interwoven in this lively story with its well-described characters is a wonderful love story.

I really enjoyed reading this novel because it gave me a lot of insight in cultural differences and racism and also an impression of life in Lagos. I loved the colourful descriptions of the African sounds and smells and the contrast with the clean and over-organised life in the US.



Monica Ali
Love Marriage

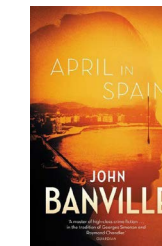
E23-02
2022 | 499 pages



When Joe Sangster, a specialist in obstetrics and gynaecology, and Yasmin Ghorami, a junior doctor currently working on a dementia-friendly ward, decide to get married, it is time for their parents to meet. Yasmin worries that her father and mother, Shaokat and Anisah, who are from a Muslim

Indian background, may find it difficult to get along with Joe's mother Harriet, a feminist strongly in favour of sexual freedom. As they get to know each other, it turns out that both families have deeply hidden secrets and that these are responsible for the sometimes strained relationships between the family members. The story is mainly told from Yasmin's perspective.

Monica Ali's engaging writing style pulls you in and it is interesting to watch Yasmin grow from being confused and sometimes unreasonable and judgemental into a woman who takes charge of her life. She is no longer afraid to make some difficult choices.



John Banville
April in Spain

E23-03
2021 | 356 pages



A young Irish woman, Phoebe Quirke, receives a phone call from her father. He is convinced that while on holiday in San Sebastian, he has caught a glimpse of Phoebe's best friend, April, long after she was presumed to have been murdered by her brother. After talking to April's Uncle Bill, who is a government minister, Phoebe decides to join her father in Spain, accompanied by Detective Inspector St John Strafford, to find out whether her friend is indeed still alive. At that same time, the hitman Terry Tice is urged to travel to San Sebastian to find April.

An Irish intrigue that comes to a conclusion in Spain. A precisely written, thrilling novel concerning the arrogance of power in Ireland in the 1950s.



Jo Browning Wroe
A Terrible Kindness

E23-04
2022 | 380 pages



It is October 1966 when the novel starts. William Lavery, 19 years old and recently qualified as an embalmer, responds to a call for his services in a Welsh village struck by a terrible natural disaster. After attending to the bodies of numerous young children, he is struck by memories of his own childhood, dominated by conflicts between his mother and his father's family, and by his experiences in a strict boarding school for choristers. After his return from Wales, William joins his family's firm of undertakers and eventually marries his long-term girlfriend, Gloria. But despite building up a successful professional life and a good partnership with his wife, he remains haunted by his memories until, years later, he has a chance meeting with a boyhood friend and visits Wales with Gloria, finding the place totally changed.

A gripping debut novel about the struggle for a balanced life.



Hernan Diaz
Trust

E23-05
2022 | 416 pages



Trust shows the reader four versions of a story. Firstly, *Bonds*, presented as a novel by Harold Vanner, describes how Wall Street businessman Benjamin Rask manages to amass a huge fortune in spite of the financial crises in New York in the early twentieth century, while his wife Helen struggles with mental health issues in

an institution in Switzerland. In the second manuscript, Andrew Bevel, on whom the character Benjamin Rask is based, is furious about how he and his wife Mildred are portrayed. So he hires Ida Partenza, a young aspiring author and daughter of an Italian anarchist, to write his autobiography. By then, Mildred has died and so Ida only hears Andrew's side of the story. Decades later, however, when Ida unexpectedly has access to Mildred's diaries, a surprising picture emerges.

We keep on reading because we want to learn 'the truth', but at the same time we are forced to think about how fiction works and to what extent a narrator can be trusted.



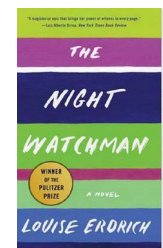
Jennifer Egan
The Candy House

E23-06
2022 | 334 pages
🐼🐼🐼🐼

When Bix Bouton, the founder of tech company Mandala, finds himself short of ideas, he hears about experiments involving brain sensors to upload an animal's perception. Within a few years he has developed a new technology, Own Your Unconscious, that enables people to access all their memories and share them with others. But not everyone is happy with this innovation. Anthropologist Miranda Kline, for example, is Bouton's biggest critic. Chris Salazar, CEO of non-profit organisation Mondrian, wants to escape all data-gathering. Other key characters include Alfred and Miles Hollander and Miranda's daughters, Lana and Melora. Their relations and friends come to life in a series of stories showing the consequences of the use of the internet and social media from different perspectives

and at different times in the past and the future.

In beautiful and versatile prose Jennifer Egan sketches a tangible image of a range of characters in a world in which human relations are more and more controlled by tech companies.



Louise Erdrich
The Night Watchman

E23-07
2020 | 464 pages
🐼🐼🐼🐼

As there were only a few good pieces of farmland on the reservation, most people had to live off jobs at the jewel-bearing plant in Turtle Mountain. One of the employees is 19-year-old Patrice (Pixie) Paranteau, who is very good at Indian beadwork and earns just enough to help her family to survive. After her sister Vera disappears, Pixie travels to Minneapolis to look for her. Her uncle Thomas Wazhashk, the tribe's leader, who works as a night watchman at the plant, is fighting against the government's termination policy. His character is based on the author's grandfather.

Many colourful characters are woven into this beautiful story with their longing for a decent life and love. This book truly draws you into Native American life.



Melissa Fu
Peach Blossom Spring

E23-08
2022 | 385 pages
🐼🐼🐼🐼

This well-written, gripping family saga tells the story of three generations, starting in China

during the Second Sino-Japanese War. A mother and her son travel across China, fleeing from the atrocities of the war. On the way the mother tells him stories while showing a scroll on which fables are depicted. The journey ends in Taiwan. In the next part we follow the son to the United States, where he goes for graduate studies, marries and gets a daughter. The final part is about the daughter growing up in search of her identity: Chinese or American? She wants to know more about her father's past, but he is not able to tell her because his memories are too painful.

It was a great pleasure reading this book because the author manages to draw such a vivid picture that it feels as if you yourself are part of the story.



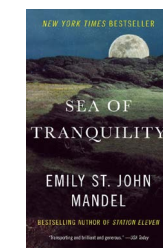
Claire Keegan
Small Things Like These

E23-09
2021 | 116 pages
🐼🐼🐼🐼

It is December 1985 in a small town in Ireland. Bill Furlong, a coal merchant and family man, is facing the busiest season of the year. Married to Eileen and having five daughters, he often struggles to make ends meet. But he is hopeful about the future of his daughters, who go to the town's only good school for girls, which is run by an order of nuns. One morning, when delivering an order at the convent, he discovers a girl in the coal shed who asks him for help. This prompts Bill to start thinking about his own life, the lives of his daughters and the life of the girl in the coal shed. Then he takes his final step

A beautifully written book about one man's thoughts, explained in a philosophical way and examining

how we can take responsibility even if we have to go against the prevailing rules.

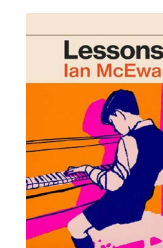


Emily St. John Mandel
Sea of Tranquility

E23-10
2022 | 255 pages
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Three different characters in three different times (the 20th, 21st and 23rd centuries) have unusual experiences that leave them perplexed and change the course of the rest of their lives. In 1912, Edwin is sent to Canada following a family disagreement on colonial matters; in 2020, receptionist Mirella is confronted with impossible developments in a video performance, and in 2203 novelist Olive encounters a new contagious disease on her book tour. All three characters also encounter a mysterious stranger while hearing violin music and background noises reminiscent of a railway station. Finally, in 2401, Gaspary, born in the Lunar Colony in the Sea of Tranquility, goes to work for the Time Institute and finds himself conflicted between his duties for the institute and his compassion for the people he is supposed to observe.

An intriguing story, stretching your imagination and challenging you to balance the book's fantasy world with existing reality.

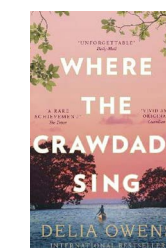


Ian McEwan
Lessons

E23-11
2022 | 448 pages
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Roland Baines, born in 1948 whose life is described over a period of 70 years, seems a promising boy, but doesn't live up to this promise. Fate plays an important part in this. He doesn't finish school. After various odd jobs, during which he appears to be a gifted piano player, he marries British-German Alissa. But she leaves him and their seven-month-old son to pursue a career in writing. Roland raises his son single-handedly. Later on he meets his wife again in East Berlin, just before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Over a period of half a century Roland builds his own walls and crashes into others he doesn't want to crash into. Other historic events, such as the troubles in the Middle East in the 1950s, the Cuban missile crisis and the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, also figure in the background of this book.

Lessons describes the life of a baby-boomer who, in despair, watches his life go by. McEwan states that his novel is partly autobiographical.



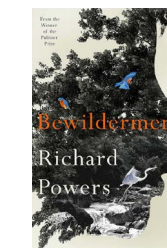
Delia Owens
Where the Crawdads Sing

E23-12
2019 | 384 pages
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Where the Crawdads Sing follows the story of Kya, an abandoned girl living in the marshlands of North Carolina during the 1950s and 60s. Despite her isolated life and difficult upbringing, she is determined to make something of herself and finds solace in nature and her own creativity. When Chase Andrews, a local celebrity, is found dead in the marshes, Kya becomes the prime suspect. As the townspeople turn against her, Kya must find a way to fight for her innocence and prove her worth to society. Along the way,

she discovers what it truly means to be alive and be loved.

This book takes you from the beginning to the end of a life so different and sometimes so surreal that it is hard to put it down and not read it in one go.

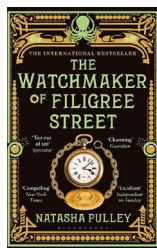


Richard Powers
Bewilderment

E23-13
2021 | 288 pages
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Young Robin is brilliant, but cannot cope with day-to-day life. He is diagnosed with an anxiety disorder and is scared to go to school. Doctors demand that he should take medication. The loss of his mother is running deep and drives him to extremes. His father's stories about his search for life on other planets as well as their joint trips into the wilderness calm him down. When he is offered a way into his mother's mind, he changes dramatically and is able to explore his original creativity. However, he does not expect good things to last. His father, the astrobiologist Theo Byrne, cannot change that as he himself is dealing with the dramatic consequences of his wife's death, which make him feel helpless and fill him with sorrow and guilt.

Imagine a story with many layers: the love of a man for his deceased wife, and his difficult, original son. This book will leave a deep impression.



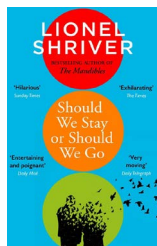
Natasha Pulley
The Watchman of Filigree Street

E23-14
2016 | 318 pages



Natasha Pulley's first novel is an intriguing, magical story set in the 19th century and containing elements of magic realism. When a bomb explodes at Scotland Yard, a mysterious gold pocket watch saves the life of Thaniel Steepleton, who works at the Whitehall telegraphy department in London. In his search for the watchmaker, Thaniel meets the eccentric Keito Mora, a lonely Japanese immigrant. Nothing in this book is as it seems. The various themes dance lightly through the story like the golden fireflies lighting up Mora's garden.

This story of friendship and love takes you from Japan to Victorian London, where everything comes together in an exciting finale. Read it and let yourself be led through this labyrinth of wonders.



Lionel Shriver
Should We Stay or Should We Go

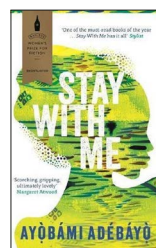
E23-15
2021 | 288 pages



After 10 years of Alzheimer's Kate Wilkinson's father dies. The period prior to his death makes the Wilkinsons come to a decision. They know all about the cost of caring for "veggie patients". Now in their early fifties they decide they don't want their three children to have to live through possibly the same ordeal they experienced when caring for Kate's father. Together they decide to fix a date to take their own lives on their eightieth birthday. The reader is taken through various scenarios,

with lots of failed attempts by the couple to commit suicide. Although the subject of this novel is often sad, the author also presents the reader with hilarious situations, ruthlessly describing the circumstances of the residents ('inmates') in a nursing home.

This story may remind readers of similar experiences in their own lives.



Ayòbámi Adébáyò
Stay with me

E19-01
2017 | 298 pages



Yejide and her husband Akin met and fell in love at university. After a few years of marriage, the couple have not yet been able to conceive the child they want so much. Although both of them are opposed to polygamy, Akin feels forced by the absence of a baby to consider another wife. And while Yejide decides to try everything in her power to get pregnant and not to lose her husband, the drastic risks she's willing to take may prove too high a cost.

This heartbreaking story is Nigerian author Ayòbámi Adébáyò's debut novel. Unravelling against the social and political turbulence of the 1980s, 'Stay With Me' is a story about the desperate measures we sometimes take to save ourselves and our relationships.



Molly Aitken
The Island Child

E21-01
2020 | 310 pages



Oona grew up on the island of Inis. An island that was a gift for some, but a prison for others, such as Oona. Barely more than a child, she flees the island. *The Island Child* goes back and forth between Oona's youth on the island and her adult life in Canada. Will she ever fully be able to escape the island? This is a gripping tale with identity, motherhood and freedom as its main themes. *The Island Child* is Molly Aitken's debut novel. It is atmospheric and full of Irish folklore.

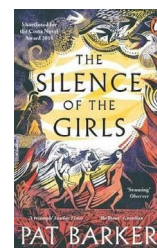


Jenn Ashworth
Ghosted

E22-01
2021 | 304 pages



One morning, Laurie's husband, Mark, just disappears. She doesn't tell anyone, not even Mark's mother who lives in Portugal. Finally, after five weeks, she calls the police, who find her behaviour rather suspicious. Laurie addresses the reader directly, seemingly taking us into us her confidence. We learn about her complicated relationship with her father, who suffers from dementia and accuses his late wife of having had numerous affairs, and with Olenka, his cleaner-cum-housekeeper. We also see how Laurie drinks too much and doesn't sleep well, having nightmares in which she is being accused of something very bad. And, together with Laurie, we also discover the secrets Mark kept from his wife. Gradually the events are revealed that caused the couple to drift apart. Ghosted is a moving story about love, sadness and anger, but also about new beginnings, told in a dark but humorous way.

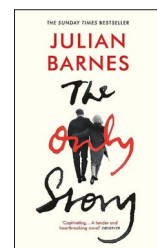


Pat Barker
The Silence of the Girls

E20-01
2018 | 291 pages



This book comprises a retelling of the Trojan War, this time from the point of view of a young woman. A Greek army led by Achilles attacks a small city, killing the men and abducting the women, including Briseis, the childless wife of the king. When the women are given to the leaders, Briseis is awarded to the nearly-invincible Achilles. Serving unveiled at Achilles' table, Briseis eventually realises why he wants her to be seen by his comrades. The following events - Achilles' refusal to join the fighting and the deaths of Patroclus, Hector and, finally, Achilles himself - lead to the fall of Troy and are told from the perspective of a woman's experience of war and its lack of glamour. This memorable book presents a different view on the way stories about the brutality of the war are usually told, both in the past and in the present. In *The Iliad*, Briseis plays a minor role, but in this book she tells her own story.



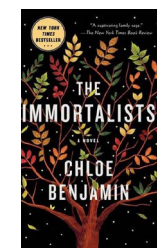
Julian Barnes
The Only Story

E18-02
2018, 213 pages



This is a novel about a complicated love affair. It is narrated by Paul, who is looking back on his life. Paul was 19 when he first met Susan, a woman more than twice his age. They met at a tennis club and fell in love. It is set in the London suburbs in the 1960s. The novel is divided in three parts, written in three different narrative

voices: the first, second and third person. With each change, Paul moves on to a new phase in their affair, describing the demands that are placed on him by the lifelong consequences of his first love. Barnes explores - once again - what we forget and remember, the reliability of our memories. 'The Only Story' is a beautifully written, deeply moving novel.



Chloe Benjamin
The Immortalists

E20-02
2018 | 352 pages



The book is set in New York in 1969, when four siblings in the Jewish Gold family are given a fortune teller's predictions of their dates of death. The next forty years of each of the children's lives are consecutively followed as "the day" comes nearer. They all lead full lives: Simon escapes, searching for love, to the West Coast, while Klara becomes a Las Vegas magician, Daniel seeks security as an army doctor, and Varya dedicates herself to science. Do the predictions come true for one or all of them? How did the predictions work out? Did the fortune teller have a special gift? Was it just coincidence? Or were the outcomes caused by the children themselves? *The Immortalists* is a very entertaining, well-written family novel, occasionally mysterious and occasionally thrilling. It is about the bonds between siblings, but also about religion and science, destiny and free choice, and reality and illusion. A very good read.

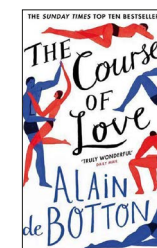


Brit Bennett
The Vanishing Half

E21-02
2020 | 343 pages



The Vanishing Half follows the lives of two twin girls Desiree and Stella, both light-skinned, who run away from home at the age of sixteen. They live in Mallard, a fictional small town in Louisiana in the 1950s and are remote descendants of a slave owner and a slave. They want to create opportunities for a better life for themselves. Desiree marries a dark-skinned man and gives birth to a very dark-skinned girl named Jude. Stella takes on a new identity, that of a white woman. She marries a well-to-do white man and gives birth to a white girl named Kennedy. Stella's husband and child will never know that she is from a black family. One day the nieces meet by chance. They become friends and gradually the family secrets are revealed but family ties prove to be unbreakable. This story shows that once you start telling lies, to fake your identity, there is no escape. *The Vanishing Half* was long listed for the National Book Award.



Alain de Botton
The Course of Love

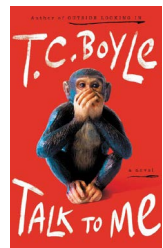
E17-03
2016 | 240 pages



The long-awaited follow-on from Alain de Botton's first novel "On Love" finds the Lebanese-German Rabih Khan grown into a young man of thirty-one. In his capacity as an architect, he meets a client Kirsten McClelland and they fall deeply in love. What follows is a captivating description of their

relationship over a period of thirteen years where marriage and the birth of a son and daughter set the back-drop for an in-depth examination of the emotions and behaviours that draw the couple together and almost drive them apart. Ideals are put to the test by the pressures of an average existence with humdrum routines.

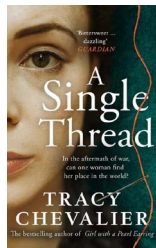
Alain de Botton manages to combine a story of a relationship with philosophical insights interspersed in the narrative that invites us to question how we relate to another human being on a profound level.



T.C. Boyle
Talk to me

E22-02
2021 | 292 pages
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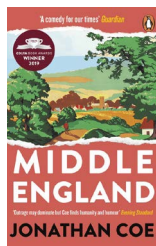
Guy Schermerhorn is a professor of psychology involved in researching language acquisition in primates. Thanks to Guy's careful training, the chimp Sam has learned to communicate through sign language. Sam lives in Guy's apartment, but this is wreaking havoc on Guy's personal life. Guy is lucky to find the undergraduate student Aimee Villard, who volunteers to babysit. Aimee and Sam have an immediate connection, and before Guy knows it, she's moved in, proudly devoting herself to Sam's care and Guy's project. Dr Moncrieff, the head of the department, is not so optimistic about the project and decides that it has to stop. However, Aimee is not willing to give Sam up and so runs away with him. This book is about Aimee's love for Sam. How far will she go, while she is also hiding from Dr Moncrieff?



Tracy Chevalier
A Single Thread

E21-05
2019 | 346 pages
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Violet Speedwell suffered the loss of her fiancé and beloved brother in the First World War. In 1932, now in her late thirties, she is deemed a "surplus woman", single and without prospects of marriage, and expected to care for her aging, impossible mother. Her job as a typist at an insurance firm is poorly paid and she struggles to cover the bare necessities of her sober existence. *A Single Thread* takes the reader through Violet's trials, tribulations and successes in establishing her independence through striking out on her own, learning to embroider in a group dedicated to producing kneelers for her beloved Winchester Cathedral. The friendships she forms along the way broaden Violet's horizons, opening her heart and giving unexpected turns to her life story. A richly detailed portrayal of an independent single woman in a world that does its best to ignore their existence.

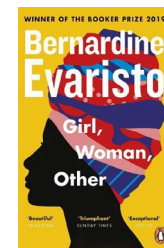


Jonathan Coe
Middle England

E20-03
2018 | 432 pages
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In this State of the Nation novel we meet characters from Coe's earlier books *The Rotters' Club* and *The Closed Circle*. Working around main character Benjamin Trotter Coe presents the reader with a sometimes harsh, sometimes kind description of people from different background during the period in which the British had to cope with the outcome

of the referendum on leaving, or staying in the EU, causing deep rifts between all kinds of Britons, also between families. Nostalgic memories of what England once was and will never be again, along with downright racism, opportunism and ruthless politicians rushing forward to a break from Europe of which no one really understands the political and especially the economical impact. Coe is a sublime creator of "Brex-Lit". While exposing the various bewildering situations around Brexit and people's feelings and reactions he maintains a benign attitude towards the "Middle Englanders".



Bernardine Evaristo
Girl, Woman, Other

E20-04
2019 | 452 pages
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It is the opening night of *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*, a play written by Amma, a black woman in her fifties, who is a free spirit, a lesbian and a feminist. In the audience is Shirley, Amma's oldest friend, a school teacher who has become disappointed in a school system that no longer takes children's fluctuating needs into account. Shirley is surprised to see Carole again, one of her former pupils, who is now an investment banker and whose mother, Bummi, feels that her daughter has rejected her Nigerian culture by marrying a white English man. Meanwhile, Morgan, who used to be Megan, is there to review the play for the one million followers on her Twitter account, which was initially set up to describe her journey to a gender-free identity. Evaristo, winner of the Man Booker Prize 2019, describes the lives of twelve very different (black) women, who are all trying

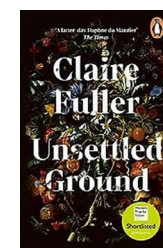
to become their true selves in spite of society's gender- and race-based expectations.



Jonathan Franzen
Crossroads

E22-03
2021 | 580 pages
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It is 1971 and almost Christmas in New Prospect, USA. Russ Hildebrandt is the second pastor of the First Reform Church. Marion, his wife, has a past that Russ does not know about. Both are struggling to prevent their marriage from collapsing. Their children, in turn, have problems of their own. Clem, the eldest son, is coming home from college, having taken a difficult decision. Becky, their daughter, is very popular, attractive and falling in love. Fifteen-year-old Perry is bright, but addicted and selling drugs to eighth-graders. Meanwhile, Judson, the youngest child, is loved by everyone. Events from the past and present come to a head on a single winter day, described from intertwined perspectives and with sustained suspense. Franzen's long-anticipated book about a "normal" American family offers a fascinating insight into their searching for identity and wrestling with morality. This first volume of a trilogy stands on its own, but may well leave you longing for the next.



Claire Fuller
Unsettled Ground

E22-04
2021 | 289 pages
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The 51-year-old twins Jeanie and Julius live with their mother in a small cottage. The three of them lead an isolated life, growing everything they need for sustenance in the garden and making music together inside the house. But when their mother, Dot, suddenly dies, the only way of life they've ever known comes tumbling down. How did Dot keep the family afloat financially? How will Jeanie and Julius adapt to their new world? *Unsettled Ground* author Claire Fuller has written a captivating novel giving an intriguing insight into poverty in present-day England.



Damon Galgut
The Promise

E22-05
2021 | 293 pages
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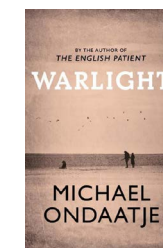
The story is about a white South African family, living on a farm outside Pretoria. Mother Rachel on her deathbed, extracts the promise from her husband Manie that Salome, the family's black maid, will be given a house and a plot of land of her own. The youngest daughter, Amor, overhearing her mother's request, chooses her own way in life. When she meets up with her family at funeral gatherings, she reminds them of the promise. In the end she herself can fulfil the promise, but by then the political situation in South Africa has changed considerably and the promise has taken on a different dimension. As the story unfolds, the narrator takes the reader into the depths of the various characters' hearts. The novel contains beautiful metaphors that are a treat to the imagination. Damon Galgut won the Booker Prize 2021.



Jane Gardam
Old Filth

E18-06
2006 | 289 pages
🐱🐱🐱🐱

Sir Edward Feathers, also called *Old Filth* (FILTH is an acronym for "Failed in London, Try Hong Kong") finds himself bereft of his beloved Betty in a beautiful house in Dorset at the age of 82. His next-door neighbour is a widower as well as a former colleague. There is no love lost between them. But compelled by need they get in touch again and this seems the beginning of an 'opening of shutters on the past that he (Edward) had kept clamped down.' He was a Raj orphan brought up by foster parents in Wales. This period in particular left scars on his soul and had a huge impact on the rest of his life. What this impact was, is for the reader to find out. *Old Filth* is the first of a trilogy and can be read independently. But the following two books might reveal the answers to some unresolved questions.

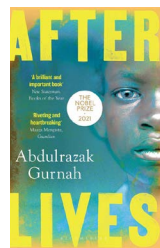


Anne Griffin
When All is Said

E21-07
2019 | 326 pages
🐱🐱🐱🐱

Maurice Hannigan was a poor young farmhand working for a bullying boss, Hugh Dollard, and his sadistic son, Thomas, in County Meath, Ireland. One day Maurice picked up a precious gold sovereign that had been thrown out of a window during an argument between Thomas and his father and hid it. From then onwards, Maurice's fortunes started rising while those of the Dollards began

to dwindle. The story starts in a hotel bar, with 84-year-old Maurice looking back on his life. He thinks about the five people who have been most important to him during his long and eventful life and proposes a toast to each of them in turn while reminiscing about what they meant to him. A touching story of a person who thinks he is coming to the end of his life and wants to make a clean breast of everything he has lived through.



Abdulrazak Gurnah
Afterlives

E22-06
2020 | 275 pages
🐾🐾🐾🐾

In a town on the Tanzanian coast, against the background of German colonial rule in East Africa (Deutsch-Ostafrika) in the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, Hamza, Afiya and Ilyas try to cope with everything life throws at them. After working as a servant for a German officer, Hamza returns to his home village, where he falls in love with Afiya. She was raised by an "uncle" and "aunt" who treated her badly and is finally offered the chance of a better life by her brother Ilyas, who ran away from home as a child before his sister was born. The man who connects them all is Khalifa, grumpy but full of good gossip as well. Gurnah, the winner of the 2021 Nobel Prize for Literature, has very successfully combined big world events such as colonialism and war with the small pleasures and setbacks in private lives.



Gail Honeyman
Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine

E18-08
2017 | 327 pages
🐾🐾🐾🐾

Eleanor Oliphant's life is built around routine and she does not live up to social expectations. She works as a finance clerk and keeps mostly to herself. When she coincidentally gets involved with Raymond, an IT guy at the office, she gradually discovers friendship and compassion. The book is divided into three parts: Good Days, Bad Days and Better Days. The first part depicts Eleanor's weekly routine, providing an overview of who she is. Later on, it is revealed how things from the past have shaped her. Honeyman was discovered through a writing competition. Her debut novel is a very intriguing and heart-warming read. Although the book is at times hilarious, there is a darker undertone that makes the character of Eleanor feel very real.



Kazuo Ishiguro
Never Let Me Go

E18-09
2006 | 276 pages
🐾🐾🐾🐾

Never Let Me Go is the story of Kathy and Tommy and Ruth, and of the love-triangle they begin at the seemingly idyllic Hailsham School. Ruth is the controlling one, Tommy is the one who used to find it hard to keep his temper, and Kathy is a carer by nature as well as profession. They have heard that love - or art, or both - will get you a deferral. Kathy, now 31, is the narrator of the story, in which she tries to come to terms with her childhood, and with the fate that has always awaited her

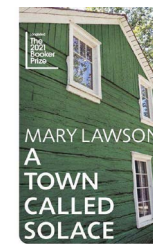
and her closest friends. A story of love, friendship and memory, 'Never Let Me Go' is charged throughout with a sense of the fragility of life. Ishiguro, winner of the Nobel prize in literature 2017, was praised by the Swedish Academy for novels which were driven by 'great emotional force'.



Laila Lalami
The Other Americans

E21-08
2019 | 301 pages
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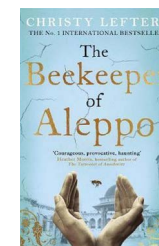
Moroccan immigrant Driss Guerroui is killed in a hit and run accident. The subsequent investigation turns the lives of several characters, divided by race, religion and class, upside down: Nora, the daughter, who is in an unhappy relationship and is trying to make a career as a composer; Salma, Nora's sister, who is frustrated by always having had to do her duty; Maryam, Driss's wife, who still longs for her homeland; Jeremy Gorecki, the sheriff's deputy and an Iraq veteran, who is in a difficult relationship with Nora; Erica Coleman, the detective, who is worried about her thirteen-year-old son; Anderson Baker and his son A.J., who own the bowling alley next to Driss's restaurant, and Efraim Acaves, who witnessed the accident but doesn't want to come forward out of fear of deportation. As each character is given his or her own voice, an interesting picture emerges of both a family and a town full of secrets and prejudice.



Mary Lawson
A Town called Solace

E22-07
2021 | 288 pages
🐾🐾🐾🐾

The story is set in the fictional town of Solace in Northern Ontario (Canada) in 1972. Three people are at the heart of the novel. Seven-year-old Clara, whose rebellious sister Rose has run away from home. Mrs Orchard, a widowed elderly neighbour, who asks Clara to feed the cat while she is in hospital. Liam, a recently divorced man in his late thirties who comes to live in Mrs Orchard's house. And there is Moses, Mrs Orchard's cat, unaware of how he connects the three characters. From three different points of view the story unfolds and tells the reader how the characters come to terms with the past and find possibilities for a new beginning. Mary Lawson tells a quiet, timeless story about people whose characters are drawn with great empathy. All storylines centre on loss, longing and love. The book was longlisted for the Booker Prize 2021.

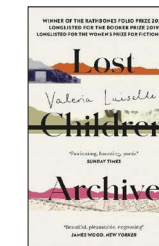


Christy Lefteri
The Beekeeper of Aleppo

E22-08
2019 | 317 pages
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Nuri tends his bees as they tend him. His organised bee colonies seem like paradise, just like the world of Nuri, his wife Afra and their son Sami. Then war destroys both paradises and Nuri and Afra are torn between staying in Syria, waiting for death, or trying to join his cousin Mustafa in England. They embark on a journey full of agony and anxiety, during which

they meet many other refugees from very different backgrounds. A story of lost dreams, lots of suffering and anxiety against a background of enduring love between a husband and wife.



Valeria Luiselli
Lost Children Archive

E20-08
2019 | 350 pages
🐾🐾🐾🐾

A woman and her husband, both audio documentary makers, are driving from New York to Arizona with her five-year-old daughter and his ten-year-old son. The man is interested in the Apache leaders who were the last to surrender and wants to make "an inventory of echoes", while the woman is planning to work on an audio project about the many refugee children who go missing when trying to enter America. During the road trip, presented through the eyes of the woman and the boy, it becomes clear the family is slowly drifting apart. The two children then decide to run away in the hope of making things better for them all because "If we too were lost children, we would have to be found again." To the main story line, the author has added another layer addressing the various ways of telling a story. The use of references and quotes from a variety of books, documents, films and poems results in a clever and interesting novel.



Jon McGregor
Lean Fall Stand

E22-09
2021 | 288 pages
🐾🐾🐾🐾

Robert "Doc" Wright is a General Technical Assistant, leading two young assistants on a geographical research expedition in Antarctica. During the trip, unnecessary risks are taken, and when a sudden storm strengthens and the radios fail, the three become isolated. The story continues with Doc's return home to the UK, seen through the eyes of his wife, Anna. Having been at opposite ends of the globe for 30 years, the two have become estranged. Anna has struggled to find a balance between raising their children and her career as a climate expert, and now suddenly has to take on a new role as Doc's full-time carer. An investigation into the Antarctic tragedy is launched and Doc, who suffers from aphasia following a stroke, has to find a way to account for his actions. McGregor has written an emotional novel about a relationship and communications after a stroke that is both captivating and deeply sad.



Benjamin Myers
The Offing

E21-10
2019 | 260 pages
🐾🐾🐾🐾

In wonderful prose *The Offing* tells the story of a young man venturing out into the Big Wide World, shortly after the Second World War. Tired of the gloomy mining town where he was raised, he arrives at the North Sea coast, where he is invited to spend some of his young days with a mysterious woman with a poetic secret. While he does odd jobs, she cooks, using the harvest from the garden to create the most wonderful dishes. Such delicacies were previously unknown to him. There is more for the reader to experience, the secret of the sea and this song

of summer. And, in this coming-of-age novel, the body of a boy is growing into a man just as his mind learns about literature and the power of words. *The Offing* is a poetically written, jubilant song of young life. Discover how a secret is revealed and life sings through the summer haze.



Louise Nealon
Snowflake

E22-10
2021 | 304 pages



When Debbie goes to university, she stands out because of living on a farm with her family, who can best be described as weird and extremely uncomfortable with their existence. The struggle to cope with life is what makes them loveable. Her mother is plagued by dreams, and Debbie is scared to end up the same way. Her saviour is her Uncle Billy. Together, they gaze at stars from the roof of his caravan and tell each other stories. And all the while Debbie must find a way through life, both as a country girl and a bright student. Luckily she finds a true friend at university. There are many coming-of-age books on the passage into adulthood and this one hurts as much as it entertains. The story makes you love Debbie and her crazy family and friends. Somehow you know she will find peace with herself, some day.



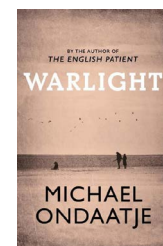
Edna O'Brien
The Little Red Chairs

E17-09
2016 | 299 pages



This story is set in an Irish village, where one day a mysterious foreigner walks into town and opens an alternative healing clinic. He manipulates the local women by providing hot stone massages and poetry. The beautiful Fidelma, who is unhappy about being childless, falls under his spell and becomes pregnant. When his true identity as a Balkan war criminal is revealed, shocking and harrowing events follow. To come to terms with the past Fidelma moves to London, where she lives among the homeless and hears stories told by refugees and victims of horrors. After attending the war criminal's trial in The Hague, Fidelma finds a way to give her life a new direction.

O'Brien's novel is breathtaking and astonishing. It addresses some of today's moral problems and will stick with you for a long time to come.



Michael Ondaatje
Warlight

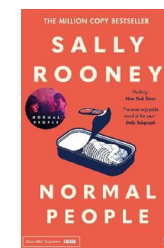
E19-07
2018 | 304 pages



In 1945, fourteen-year-old Nathaniel and his older sister Rachel are unexpectedly abandoned by their parents, who are moving from London to Singapore for a year. Nathaniel and Rachel are left in the care of two strangers, an enigmatic figure called the Moth, and Pimlico Darter, a former boxer and dog-racing fixer. Shortly after their parents leave, the children find out that their mother has left her trunk of clothes in the basement. So something mysterious must have happened.

The novel, set in post-Second World War London, is Nathaniel's reconstruction of what happened in the past and also a quest to find his parents. It contains

a number of layers, including Nathaniel's coming of age and the work of the secret services after the end of the war. Michael Ondaatje is a Canadian writer, well known for his novel *The English Patient*. The same subtle, dream-like style of writing is also found in *Warlight*. It is great literature and a beautifully written spy thriller.



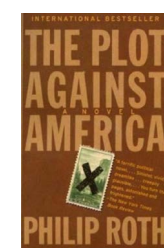
Sally Rooney
Normal People

E19-09
2018 | 266 pages



This novel follows the lives of Marianne and Connell, who grow up in a small town in Ireland. Marianne lives with her mother and brother in a large mansion, where Connell's single mother works as a cleaner. Marianne is a social outcast, while Connell is popular at school. They begin a secret relationship that stops during their final year at high school when Connell treats her badly. A year later, they are both studying at Trinity College in Dublin and now it is the other way around: Marianne feels comfortable at university, and Connell doesn't seem to fit in. Over the following years, they repeatedly find themselves drawn to each other, on and off.

This is a book about a fragile love affair, written in a witty and warm way. It is one of those rare books you can't put down because the characters are so endearing.

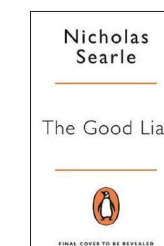


Philip Roth
The Plot against America

E21-12
2004 | 391 pages



What if the well-known pilot Charles Lindbergh, instead of F.D. Roosevelt, had won the American elections in 1940? In what way would his anti-Semitic ideas have influenced American citizens and their way of life? Philip Roth rewrites a few years in American history and their impact on his own Jewish family and the Jewish community in Newark, where he grew up. What is it like to be a seven-year-old boy, to see and hear things you do not understand, to feel your safe daily life being threatened? How do large political issues affect the small family world? In a sublime way Roth combines true and fictional events, thus creating a convincing alternate history.



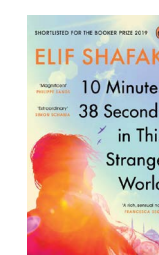
Nicholas Searle
The Good Liar

E17-10
2016 | 360 pages



Roy Courtney is in his eighties and cons people for a living. For his final grand scam he has his eye on Betty, a wealthy widow whom he met through an online dating site. Flashbacks show us the stunts Roy has had to pull in the past in order to save his own skin, but this time things end very differently from what he - and the reader - expects. It turns out that Betty is not the dithering scatterbrain that she seems and that she has her own reasons for getting involved with this swindler.

Nicholas Searle's debut novel keeps you engaged right to the end. It is also very refreshing to read about two elderly people who, contrary to what might be expected, are not taking things easy, but who are instead fighting to achieve what they have set out to do."



Elif Shafak
10 Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World

E20-10
2019 | 312 pages



After Tequila Leila's death her mind continues working: for 10 minutes and 38 seconds to be precise, during which time she remembers the important events in her life that shaped her into the woman she has become. In these memories, the reader is introduced, in turn, to Leila's five best friends, all of whom are desperately trying to find her. This is a unique novel, which tells not only the story of Leila's life, but also that of her friends. It is about being different in an unforgiving world, while also providing interesting insight into civil turmoil in 1970s Istanbul and growing up in a mostly Muslim environment.



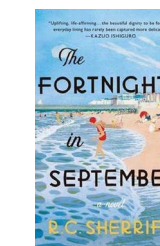
Elif Shafak
The Island of Missing Trees

E22-12
2021 | 320 pages



It is 1974 and the island of Cyprus and its capital Nicosia are divided into a Turkish and a Greek part. The situation is tense. And in these circumstances a Greek Christian boy and a Turkish, Muslim girl meet and fall in love. Romeo and Juliet revisited? It is an impossible situation, people watch each other all the time. But there is one place in Nicosia which is an oasis in this hostile environment. In The Happy Fig inn they find stolen moments of sanctuary, guarded by its owners and by the fig tree in the centre of the restaurant which has stood there for over 80 years. It is a place where they can share their dreams

of a better world, until war breaks out, causing them to flee. Decades later, in London, their teenage daughter struggles to find out where she belongs. And gradually we learn what happened all those years ago. A story of infinite tenderness between lovers and towards their daughter.



R.C. Sherriff
The Fortnight in September

E22-13
1931 | 326 pages



Every year the suburban Stevens family goes to Bognor in West Sussex for their fortnight's holiday. This offers Mr Stevens, a chief invoice clerk disappointed at having been passed over for promotion, an opportunity to dream about a future in which something could happen to reward his striving in the past. Mrs Stevens dreads the train journey and does her utmost to hide her fear of the sea. Most of all she enjoys the quiet hour after supper when Ernie, their youngest, is in bed, and the others have gone out. Their seventeen-year-old son Dick tries to understand why he is unhappy in his job as a clerk and comes to an important decision about his future, while his sister Mary, who is nearly twenty, finds romance. This story, written in 1931, about hard-working people doing normal things draws you in and makes you wish there was a sequel showing how their plans and dreams worked out.

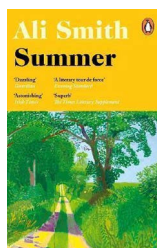


Maggie Shipstead
Great Circle

E22-14
2021 | 589 pages



After the baby twins Marian and Jamie Graves have been rescued from a burning ship, their Uncle Wallace, a painter who drinks too much and has no idea how to raise children, takes them in. Marian has always wanted to be a pilot, but when Barclay Macqueen, a shady businessman, makes her dream come true, she has to pay a very high price. Jamie leads a very different kind of life and becomes a well-known artist. In 1950, Marian disappears while flying around the world from north to south. At regular intervals, the story switches to Hadley Baxter, a disgraced Hollywood movie star, who, more than 50 years later, is preparing for her role as Marian in a movie about the latter's life. The novel is set against the background of Prohibition, the Great Depression and the Second World War and includes the histories of various real-life women pilots. This results in a very interesting read.



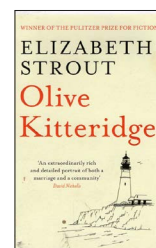
Ali Smith
Summer

E21-13
2020 | 378 pages



At centre stage in this novel is Sacha Greenlaw, a 16-year-old girl living with her brother and divorced mother, a former actress. Together the three of them take us through the summer months, sharing stories of the past and future. Words tumble out on top of each other, not always leading to the three living together better. But there are also new friends to meet. These new friends come

from Smith's earlier work because *Summer* is the closing part of the Four Seasons project that she has been working on over the past four years. Making a statement on the world today, but also spinning a fine thread through the lives of her main characters, running from the outbreak of the Second World War and how foreigners were expelled from society and locked away in camps to a refugee seeking asylum today and also touching on Covid 19 and other recent events. *Summer* is not about a plot, and not even about the plot covering the sequence of her Four Seasons book. It is about prose and about understanding a world we all share. It is about letting in the lightness of the summer season. Making wonderful prose and wondering about the meaning of it all.



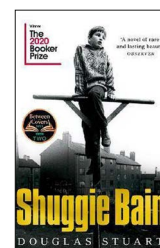
Elizabeth Strout
Olive Kitteridge

E16-11
2008 | 270 pages



Olive Kitteridge, the Pulitzer prize-winning 'novel in stories' by Elizabeth Strout, describes a small coastal community in Maine. We read about a young man contemplating suicide, a girl who is dumped on her wedding day, an elderly couple who have stayed together despite the husband's infidelity and a girl who has to cope with the fact that her mother ran away to become an actress. All of these people know Olive Kitteridge, a retired maths teacher, who is very outspoken in her opinions and who is the link between these thirteen stories. Sometimes she is mentioned only briefly, but several stories centre on her and describe her rather complicated relationship with her only son and her life with her quiet and gentle husband.

Elizabeth Strout shows us how ordinary people can become extraordinary because of the way in which they cope with whatever life throws at them.

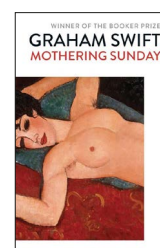


Douglas Stuart
Shuggie Bain

E21-14
2020 | 430 pages



This novel is about a young boy and his mother Agnes, who live together with Catherine and Leek, his siblings, in a tenement building in a former mining district in Glasgow in the 1980s. Agnes's partner, Hugh, is Shuggie's father. Agnes's life is dominated by alcohol. However little money there is, she spends it all on cheap beer and vodka. At the start of the novel Shuggie is five years old and not so aware of the struggles in the family. As he grows older he notices what is going on and he is increasingly concerned about his mother, whom he loves dearly. He doesn't give up hoping that one day she will stop drinking. On top of all this, Shuggie is not like most boys. He behaves differently and is being bullied because of it. In this story a laugh and a tear are never far away. The boy Shuggie will find an enduring place in your heart. Douglas Stewart won the Booker Prize 2020.



Graham Swift
Mothering Sunday

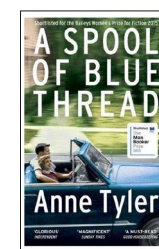
E17-11
2016 | 177 pages



The novella follows Jane Fairchild, a maidservant at Beechwood House, during one day in March 1924. The day was Mothering Sunday, when servants were

traditionally given the day off to visit their mother. Jane, being an orphan, spends the morning with Paul, her secret lover, who is the sole remaining son and heir of the neighboring estate. After he leaves her for a lunch date with the girl he is to marry in two weeks' time, Jane wanders through the house trying to memorize everything. As the narrative moves back and forth from 1924 to the end of the century, going back and forth between tragedy and romance, we learn more about Jane's life and how this special day influenced the rest of her life.

This is a wonderful and memorable story, in which Swift shows the defining effect that certain experiences can have on a person's life.



Anne Tyler
A Spool of Blue Thread

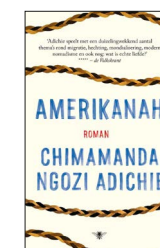
E16-13
2015 | 358 pages



This novel covers several generations of the Whit shank family. The mother Abby, a social worker, is at the heart of the story. She is married to Red, who works in construction. Red and Abby have two daughters and two sons. They are generally a happy family, although the older boy, Denny, never really seems to fit in. Now in her 70s, Abby is getting forgetful, while Red is going deaf, and there are concerns about whether they can continue to live independently. The family house in Baltimore is a character in itself. It was built by Red's father, Junior, for his wife, Linnie Mae. It is through the house that the reader learns about Abby's youth and her history.

Anne Tyler masterly evokes the atmosphere of family relationships and all the happiness, pressures,

expectations and secrets that go with them, making this book a pleasure to read.

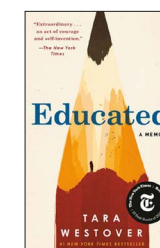


Edmund de Waal
The Hare with Amber Eyes

E22-15
2011 | 351 pages



During a stay in Japan, Edmund de Waal, the author of the book, admires the netsuke (miniature ivory sculptures from Japan) of his great-uncle Ignace von Ephrussi, who lives in Tokyo. The inheritance of the 264 netsuke arouses Edmund's curiosity about the collection's origins. He discovers that they were bought by Edmund's great-grandfather, Charles Ephrussi, in Paris in the 1870s. The story of the netsuke is related to the history of the Ephrussi family, a Jewish family of wheat traders, originally from Odessa and who, over time, became bankers, with offices in all the major European capitals. Edmund's quest leads him through the Paris of Proust and Monet, and a time of growing anti-Semitism and the Dreyfus affair, right up to the present day. This book gives insight into the lives of a rich Jewish family around 1900 and beyond, at both a personal and broader level.



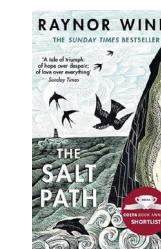
Tara Westover
Educated

E21-15
2018 | 377 pages



This is Westover's memoir of her childhood in Idaho, where Washington is far away and God very close. She was born into a family

of Mormon fundamentalists. Her father is the family prophet who lives strictly by the Bible. Dairy products, medicine and hospital treatment are forbidden. Anything official is shunned. Her father does not believe in sending his children to school; the younger ones aren't even officially registered. From a very early age, each child has to help father Gene in his scrap metal business, involving long hours of dangerous work. It is from this environment that Tara gradually disentangles herself and, without any formal education, struggles her way to college. A moving story of an almost unbelievable accomplishment, told without sentiment.



Raynor Winn
The Salt Path

E20-12
2018 | 288 pages



The Salt Path is the story of author Raynor Winn's remarkable journey walking the South-West Coast Path with her husband Moth. Just as their home and livelihood are taken away from them, the couple find out that Moth is suffering from an incurable illness. Against all advice, and with all their belongings in their backpacks, they start their journey from Somerset to Cornwall, trying to survive with barely any money. Even though this book is non-fiction, it is written in a way that reads like a novel. Knowing that these are real-life events makes the story intriguing and heart-breaking, and at the same time inspirational and empowering. It gives a beautiful insight into the way every person deals differently with hardships they encounter.



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