

BOOKS TO GO FOR BOOK GROUPS

Minaret

Leila Aboulela

Twenty years ago, Najwa, then at university in Khartoum, would never have imagined that one day she would be a maid. An upper-class, westernised Sudanese, her dreams were to marry well and raise a family. But Najwa's days of innocence ended when a military coup forced the young woman and her family into political exile in London.

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

Douglas Adams

One Thursday lunchtime, the Earth gets unexpectedly demolished to make way for a new hyperspace bypass. For Arthur Dent, who has only just had his house demolished that morning, this seems already to be more than he can cope with. Sadly, however, the weekend has only just begun and the galaxy is a very strange and startling place.

Harbor

Lorraine Adams

After 52 days in the hold of a tanker from Algeria, a young stowaway jumps into the icy waters of Boston Harbor and swims to shore. Frozen and hungry, Aziz scrabbles to make contact with the one person he knows in America and manages to find shelter within a small enclave of fellow immigrants, where he quickly learns that the normal rules don't apply to those who have no legal existence and the best way to survive sometimes means turning a blind eye.

Purple Hibiscus

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

When Nigeria begins to fall apart under a military coup, Kambili's father, involved in mysterious ways with the unfolding political crisis, sends Kambili and her brother away to their aunt's. Here she discovers love and a life – dangerous and heathen – beyond the confines of her father's authority.

The Five People you Meet in Heaven

Mitch Albom

On his eighty-third birthday, Eddie, a lonely war veteran, dies in a tragic accident trying to save a little girl from a falling cart. With his final breath, he feels two small hands in his - and then nothing. He awakens in the afterlife, where he learns that

heaven is not a lush Garden of Eden but a place where your earthly life is explained to you by five people who were in it. These people may have been loved ones or distant strangers. Yet each one of them changed your path forever.

Disobedience

Naomi Alderman

In suburban North-West London, where leafy avenues wind into the countryside beyond, the Orthodox Jewish community of Hendon quietly conducts its daily life. Hidden from the gaze of outsiders, the faithful live, work, love and pray, with little concern for the sprawling metropolis outside. But then a beloved Rabbi dies and his passing brings his wayward daughter home. For the past ten years, Ronit has been living the life of a modern New York woman; returning home, she's looking forward to catching up with old friends, perhaps settling old scores. But it soon becomes clear that Hendon and Ronit don't fit.

Brick Lane

Monica Ali

At the tender age of 18, Nazneen's life is turned upside down. After an arranged marriage to a man 20 years her elder, she exchanges her Bangladeshi village for a block of flats in London's East End. In this new world, where poor people can be fat and even dogs go on diets, she struggles to make sense of her existence – and to do her duty to her husband. A man of inflated ideas (and stomach), he sorely tests her compliance.

Lucky Jim

Kingsley Amis

Jim Dixon has a lousy job at a second-rate university. His life is full of things he could happily do without: a tedious and ridiculous professor, a neurotic semi-detached girlfriend, burnt sheets, medieval recorder music and over-enthusiastic students. The solution seems to be fairly straightforward: pull faces behind people's backs, copy others' work and make sure the pretty girls choose his course. But without luck, life is never simple...

Maps for Lost Lovers

Nadeem Aslam

In an unnamed town in England, Jugnu and Chanda have disappeared. Rumours abound in the close-knit Pakistani community. Then, on a snow-covered January morning, Chanda's brothers are arrested for murder. Maps for Lost Lovers tells the story of the next twelve months.

Case Histories

Kate Atkinson

Cambridge is sweltering during an unusually hot summer. To Jackson Brodie, former police inspector turned private investigator, the world consists of one accounting sheet – Lost on the left, Found on the right – and the two never seem to balance.

Oryx and Crake

Margaret Atwood

The narrator of *Oryx and Crake* calls himself Snowman. When the story opens, he's sleeping in a tree, wearing an old bedsheet, mourning the loss of his beloved Oryx and his best friend Crake and slowly starving to death. As he tries to piece together what has taken place, the narrative shifts to decades earlier. How did everything fall apart so quickly? Why is he left with nothing but his haunting memories? Alone except for the green-eyed Children of Crake, who think of him as a kind of monster, he explores the answers to these questions in the double journey he takes – into his own past, and back to Crake's high-tech bubble dome, where the Paradise Project unfolded and the world came to grief.

The Harmony Silk Factory

Tash Aw

This is the story of four people. Johnny is an infamous Chinaman who uses his shophouse as a front for illegal businesses. Snow Soong is the beautiful daughter of a prominent family who dies giving birth. Kunichika is a Japanese officer who loves Snow and Peter Wormwood is an Englishman who loved Snow to the end of his life.

The Hiding Place

Trezza Azzopardi

Set in the Maltese community of Tiger Bay and peopled with sharp-edged luminously drawn characters, *The Hiding Place* is the story of Frank Gauci, his wife Mary and their six daughters. Through the eyes of Dolores, the youngest daughter, we see the underworld of 1960s Cardiff – a life of gaming rooms and cafes, of crumbling houses and burning secrets which tear this family apart. Thirty years on, a reunion with her estranged sisters brings Dolores face to face with the betrayals which have haunted her past, where the truth is finally and tragically played out.

The Sari Shop

Rupa Bajwa

It is another working day in Amritsar and Ramchand is late again. He runs through the narrow streets to Sevak Sari House in the heart of one of the city's old bazaars. There, amongst the Bangladeshi cottons and Benaras silks, Ramchand and his fellow shop assistants will sit all day patiently rolling and unrolling yards of coloured fabric for wives and daughters of 'status families' and for the giggling girls who dream of dressing up in silk but can only afford cotton. But one afternoon Ramchand is sent to a new part of the city and is jolted out of the rhythm of his narrow daily life. His glimpse into this different work charges him with an urgent sense of possibility. And so, armed with two battered English grammar books, a fresh pair of socks and a bar of Lifebuoy soap he attempts to recapture the hope that his childhood had promised. But soon these efforts turn his life upside down, bringing him face to face with the cruelties on which his very existence depends.

The L-Shaped Room

Lynne Reid Banks

Jane Graham has left the theatre after a scandal and returned to the home of her narrow-minded father. Always disapproving, he throws her out when he learns she is pregnant. Almost as a punishment to herself, Jane finds a squalid room - an L-shaped room - in a house in Fulham. Beset by bed-bugs, dirt and morning sickness, Jane nevertheless finds great comfort in the humanity of her neighbours.

The Sea

John Banville

When Max Morden returns to the coastal town where he spent a holiday in his youth, he is both escaping from a recent loss and confronting a distant trauma. From the Booker-shortlisted author of *Shroud* and *The Book of Evidence*.

Clear: a transparent novel

Nicola Barker

On 5th September 2003, David Blaine entered a perspex box next to the River Thames and starved for 44 days. He left the box four stones lighter. That much is clear. And the rest? What of the crowds, chaos, hype, rage, rows, lust, filth and hypocrisy? Award-winning novelist, Nicola Barker, lays bare the heart of our contemporary world.

Arthur & George

Julian Barnes

Arthur and George grow up worlds and miles apart in late 19th century Britain – Arthur in shabby-genteel Edinburgh, George in the vicarage of a small Staffordshire village. As the new century begins, they are brought together by events which make sensational headlines at the time as *The Great Wyrley Outrages*.

A Long Long Way

Sebastian Barry

Set at the outset of World War One, *A Long Long Way* evokes the camaraderie and humour of Willie Dunne and his regiment, the Royal Dublin Fusiliers and the divided loyalties that many Irish soldiers felt. It also explores and dramatises the events of the Easter Rising.

The Island Walkers

John Bemrose

For generations, the Walkers have lived in the Island, a small working-class mill-town beside Ontario's Attawan River. In the summer of 1965, their peace is shattered when a union organiser comes to town and Alf Walker is forced to choose between loyalty to his friends and advancement up the company ranks.

Havoc, in its Third Year

Ronan Bennett

This novel is one of intrigue, murder and mayhem set in the 17th century. It is the story of a coroner unfolding against a backdrop of barely restrained social tension and political treachery.

The Year's Midnight

Alex Benzie

In the late eighteenth century, in the Scottish village of Aberlevin, a man is unjustly hanged. Enraged, the townsfolk vent their anger on the clocktower, destroying the clock and calling a halt to time. A century later, shy, gifted watchmaker William "Watchie" Leckie is commissioned to repair the now accursed clock. Driven by his growing obsession with the timepiece, Watchie unwittingly unleashes a tidal wave of hypocrisy and hostility that threatens to engulf them all.

These are Only Words

Simon R. Biggam

Is he your neighbour? Is he your colleague? Does he have a file on you? Let him tell you his story. He is a city-centre shopworker who cultivates a facade of blandness to hide a secret life. For him, surveillance is an artform at which he can excel.

Room at the Top

John Braine

Ruthlessly ambitious Joe Lampton rises swiftly from the petty bureaucracy of local government into the unfamiliar world of inherited wealth, fast cars and glamorous women. But the price of success is high and betrayal and tragedy strike as Joe Lampton pursues his goals.

The Sixth Lamentation

William Brodrick

What should you do if the world is turning against you? When Father Anselm is asked this question by an old man in the nave at Larkwood Priory, his response is simple: claim sanctuary. Then, the old man demands just that: his name is Edward Schwerrmann and he is wanted by the police as a suspected war criminal.

March

Geraldine Brooks

1861, the first year of the American Civil War: March leaves his beloved wife and daughters to fight for the Northern forces. Alone in a country ripped apart by violence and hatred, he sees things that shake his very soul. He also encounters the woman who had changed his life nearly twenty years earlier – Grace. She is beautiful, educated and a slave. From Louisa May Alcott's classic *Little Women*, Geraldine Brooks takes March, the absent father gone to war and conjures the story of a passionate man struggling not just to return to the heart of his family, but also to keep his faith – in himself, in his fellow man and in love itself.

The Family Tree

Carole Cadwalladr

On the day of Charles and Diana's wedding, Rebecca Monroe's mother locked herself in the bathroom and never came out. Was it because her squidgy chocolate log collapsed? Or because Rebecca's grandmother married her first cousin? Can we ever know why we do what we do?

The Food of Love

Anthony Capella

Laura Patterson is studying art history in Rome. She's decided that from now on she'll only go out with a man who can cook. Tommaso Massi, handsome and silver-tongued, tells Laura that he's a chef at one of Italy's best restaurants. In fact, he's just a humble waiter. His best friend Bruno, who really is a chef – a brilliant one – is called upon to help.

The Promise of Happiness

Justin Cartwright

Charles Judd meanders round his local Cornish beach, contemplating the turns his life has taken. At home, his wife Daphne struggles hopelessly with the latest fish recipe. Two of their children are keeping it all together – just. The third, Charles and Daphne’s prodigal daughter Juliet, is being released from prison in New York after a sentence for art theft.

The Great Stink

Clare Clark

It is 1855 and William May has returned to London from the battlefields of the Crimea, devastated by the horrors he has suffered on the front line. Back home with his wife and young son, disoriented by the chaos and clamour of the burgeoning city, May tries to rebuild his life. When he secures a job with Bazalgette to transform the city’s sewer system, he believes it will prove his salvation. But this subterranean world hides its own terrible secrets and, when a violent murder is committed, a parallel world unfolds beneath London’s streets that will bring May ever closer to the edge of his own destruction.

Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell

Susanna Clarke

The year is 1806. England is beleaguered by the long war with Napoleon and centuries have passed since practical magicians faded into the nation’s past. But scholars of this glorious history discover that one remains: the reclusive Mr Norrell, whose displays of magic send a thrill through the country.

A Year in the Merde

Stephen Clarke

Paul West arrives in Paris to start a new job – and finds out what the French are really like. They do eat a lot of cheese, some of which smells like pigs’ droppings. They don’t wash their armpits with garlic soap. Going on strike really is the second national participation sport after petanque. And, yes, they do use suppositories.

Slow Man

J. M. Coetzee

On the threshold of a comfortable old age, Paul Rayment turns away from his friends when an accident results in the amputation of a leg. But with the arrival of his personal nurse, as well as that of a celebrated novelist, Paul’s life once more takes on an unpredictable course.

Escape Routes For Beginners

Kira Cochrane

Trapped on the tiny prison island where her father works as a correctional officer, 13-year-old Rita Mae Jones longs to escape. Entranced by the stories of her grandmother's glamorous Hollywood past and convinced of her own glittering future as an internationally acclaimed actress, the unhappy teenager longs to break free from her humdrum existence. Rita Mae cannot understand why her alarmingly mismatched parents chose to come to this claustrophobic, brooding place ten years before.

Always the Sun

Neil Cross

Jamie is thirteen years old and an only child. His mother has recently died and he and his father Sam have moved to Sam's home town. A fresh start – a new job for Sam and a new school for Jamie but one day Jamie comes home bearing the scars of every parent's nightmare. Something must be done.

In the Fold

Rachel Cusk

The Hanburys of Egypt Hill are the last word in bohemian living – or so they think. Michael, a young student who first encounters the family at a party for Caris Hanbury's 18th birthday, is irresistibly attracted to their unfolding exuberance.

Bitter Fruit

Achmat Dangor

Bitter Fruit is set in a changing South Africa at the end of the nineties, as the Truth Commission is finishing its work. It prises open the remnants of a painful political history and fearlessly explores the myths of sexual and racial identity.

English Correspondence

Janet Davey

Sylvie is half French and half English. Since the death of her mother, she has written weekly letters to her father in London. When he too dies unexpectedly, she waits for the letter she knows he must have posted before his death. And, as she waits, her carefully ordered and controlled life finally begins to unravel.

Kith & Kin

Stevie Davies

Mara and Frankie are cousins and best friends, growing up in the stifling atmosphere of Swansea in the Fifties, within the tight knot of an extended family that thrives on gossip, petty feuds and innuendo. Mara is a difficult but loved child whilst Frankie is rebellious, fired by an intense and demanding emotional hunger. The two develop a strange mutual dependence in which love, jealousy, hate and rivalry intermingle. They come of age in the heady atmosphere of the Sixties – a decade in which notions of family and kinship are being overturned in favour of 'free love', sexual experimentation and social revolution. But that dream turns sour and a bitter battle of wills results. Years later, Mara sees a nostalgic film clip of Frankie in her youth and this serves as a springboard to her past, forcing her to confront unanswered questions about Frankie's life and death.

Becoming Strangers

Louise Dean

Separately, two couples go on their last holidays together and together discover what's been keeping them apart.

Birds Without Wings

Louis de Bernieres

Set against the backdrop of the collapsing Ottoman Empire, the Gallipoli campaign and the subsequent bitter struggle between Greeks and Turks, *Birds Without Wings* traces the fortunes of one small community in south-west Anatolia – a town in which Christian and Muslim lives and traditions have co-existed peacefully for centuries.

Billie Morgan

Joolz Denby

"My name is Billie Morgan. And I am a murderer."

Billie is in her forties, running a little jewellery shop in Bradford, watching over her godson Natty, trying to live a quiet life, trying to forget the past. Because Billie has a lot of past to forget. She was a biker chick, one of the Devil's Own, real hardcore seventies Angels, speed and acid-fuelled road demons. She lived a life that was hurtling out of control and it ended in murder. Now, years later, she has to face the consequences.

A Blade of Grass

Lewis DeSoto

A young woman of British descent, recently orphaned and newly wed, comes to live with her husband Ben on a farm on the South African border. When guerrilla violence and tragedy visit their lives, she finds herself torn between the local Afrikaaners and the black workers on the farm.

The Zigzag Way

Anita Desai

Eric is an uncertain, awkward young man, a would-be writer, and a traveller in spite of himself. Happy to follow his more confident girlfriend to Mexico, he is overwhelmed with sensory overload but gradually seduced by the strangeness, the colour, the mysteries of an older world. He finds himself on a curious quest for his own family in a 'ghost' mining town, now barely inhabited, where almost a hundred years earlier young Cornish miners worked the rich seams in the earth.

Watch Me Disappear

Jill Dawson

Will the past yield its secrets if we search our memories hard enough? And where does the line fall between ordinary lust and something altogether murkier? For Tina Humber, a marine biologist returning for her brother's wedding from America to the Fenland village where she grew up, these questions have become pressing. A moment of panic about her ten-year-old daughter has triggered a vision of her best friend, Mandy Baker, who went missing without trace at the same age three decades ago. The more Tina replays events and relives her tempestuous upbringing, the more she believes she knows what happened to Mandy – and who was responsible.

A Christmas Carol

Charles Dickens

This story of solitary miser Ebenezer Scrooge, who is taught the true meaning of Christmas by a series of ghostly visitors, has proved one of Dickens most well-loved works.

A Gathering Light

Jennifer Donnelly

Based on a real murder at the turn of the century, this outstanding debut novel is a powerful and moving coming-of-age book. Mattie is torn between her familial responsibilities, her desire to be a writer and the excitement of a first romance. Her dilemmas and choices are quietly reflected in the life of a young woman found drowned in a lake, a woman that Mattie gets to know only through reading her letters.

Buddha Da

Anne Donovan

Anne Marie's Da, a Glaswegian painter and decorator, has always been game for a laugh. So when he first takes up meditation at the Buddhist Centre, no one takes him seriously, especially when his pursuit of the new lama ends in a trip round the Carmunnock bypass. But as Jimmy becomes more involved in a search for the spiritual, his beliefs start to come into conflict with the needs of his wife.

State of Happiness

Stella Duffy

When Jake and Cindy meet at a friend's party they are immediately attracted to one another. Cindy, a celebrated mapmaker, traces the contours of their relationship, from New York to LA, from first passion to real love. After five years together, Cindy and Jack think they have tested their love to its limits. But then Cindy falls dangerously ill, and the couple must face the hardest test of all.

House of Orphans

Helen Dunmore

Finland 1901: Eeva, the young orphaned daughter of a revolutionary, is sent from the orphanage to work as a housekeeper for Thomas, a widowed country doctor. Her challenging, independent, enigmatic presence disturbs Thomas as much as it fascinates him. Their relationship will shatter all the certainties of his life. Meanwhile, Eeva is drawn back to Helsinki, to the comrades of her childhood.

The Siege

Helen Dunmore

Leningrad, September 1941. German forces surround the city, imprisoning those who live there. The besieged people of Leningrad face shells, starvation and the Russian winter. Interweaving two love affairs in two generations, The Siege draws us deep into the Levin family's struggle to stay alive during this terrible winter.

Tatty

Christine Dwyer Hickey

This is the story of Tatty, growing up in 1960s and 70s inner-city Dublin, with her large extended family. She goes with Dad to work and the races, gets lost and found, sneaks into her parents' parties, hearing things she shouldn't, saying things she's not supposed to (which is how she comes to be known as Tatty: her real name's Caroline). A harrowing portrait of a disintegrating family and lost childhood.

Snobs

Julian Fellowes

Edith Laverty, the attractive only child of a middle-class accountant, leaves behind her dull job in a Chelsea estate agents when she manages to bag one of the most eligible bachelors of the day – Charles, Earl Broughton, heir to the Marquess of Uckfield. But is life amongst the aristocracy really all it seems?

It So Happens

Patricia Ferguson

Long ago, a man digging at midnight, his shirtfront wet with blood, hides the terrible secret that will shape the future for Valerie and her unlikely nemesis, Betty Potts, who longs to return the great house in her care to its former grandeur. With Valerie in her power, Betty can throw out the 60s Formica and the nasty nylon carpets. But how far is she prepared to go? Annie knows all the answers, but can she use them? She also knows she must hide her flashes of insight, especially from Alethea, her new friend with the glamorous past. A gothic tale of crime, blackmail and redemption.

Away From You

Melanie Finn

When Helen's daughter Ellie returns to her childhood home in Kenya on her father's death after twenty-five years away, it means facing the past. Her upbringing in colonial Africa – stiff whiskies, keeping up appearances and English gardens amidst the African Bush – was marked by a violent father she didn't really know. Yet Ellie is determined to find out the truths about her family ghosts – what was her father's dark secret and will the truth finally free her from the past?

Eve Green

Susan Fletcher

Following the loss of her mother, eight-year-old Evie is sent to a new life in rural Wales – a dripping place, where flowers appear mysteriously on doorsteps and people look at her twice. With a sense of being lied to, she sets out to discover her family's dark secret – unaware that when a local girl vanishes, there is yet more darkness to come.

Everything is Illuminated

Jonathan Safran Foer

A young man arrives in the Ukraine, clutching in his hand a tattered photograph. He is searching for the woman who fifty years ago saved his grandfather from the Nazis. Unfortunately, however, he is aided in his quest by Alex, a translator with an uncanny ability to mangle English into bizarre new forms, a blind old man haunted by memories of the war and an undersexed guide dog named Sammy Davis Jr, Jr. What they are looking for seems elusive – a truth hidden behind veils of time, language and the horrors of war. What they find turns all their worlds upside down.

The Jane Austen Book Club

Karen Joy Fowler

In California's Sacramento Valley, six people meet once a month to discuss Jane Austen's novels. They are ordinary people, neither happy or unhappy, but all wounded in different ways, all mixed up about their lives and their relationships.

Homeland

Claire Francis

It is 1946 and the eve of the harshest winter for a hundred years. Servicemen are pouring home from the war to a Britain beset by stringent shortages and a desperate housing crisis. Anxieties are heightened by the unexpected arrival of the soldiers of the Second Polish Corps, whose refusal to go back to Poland is regarded with impatience and suspicion.

Old Filth

Jane Gardam

Filth, in his heyday, was an international lawyer with a practice in the Far East. Now, only the oldest QCs and Silks can remember that his nickname stood for Failed In London Try Hong Kong. Long ago, Old Filth was a Raj Orphan – one of the many young children sent 'Home' from the East to be fostered and educated in England.

Death of an Ancient King

Laurent Gaude

King Tsongor is getting old. Having governed his immense empire peacefully for many years, he prepares to give his lovely daughter Samilia away to her official suitor. The streets outside the palace are filled with rose petals and gold cloth hangs from every window. But, on the eve of the wedding, a lone mysterious rider appears to claim Samilia's hand. Within days, two great nations prepare for a senseless conflict over a beautiful woman; and an old sad king looks on as his world and his family fall apart.

The Flood

Maggie Gee

The President, Mr Bliss, is handling a tricky situation with customary brio, but after months of ceaseless rain, the city is definitely sinking under the floods. The rich are safe on high ground, but the poor are getting damper in their packed tower blocks, and the fanatical 'Last Days' sect is recruiting thousands. When at last the sun breaks through the clouds, the city rejoices. Spoiled, sexy Lottie heads off to the opera, husband Harold listens to jazz and their ditsy teenage daughter Lola fights capitalism by bunking off school. Shirley takes her twin boys to the zoo. The Government declares the floods are over and announces a spectacular City Gala complete with tigers, fireworks, hip-hop stars and even a guest spot by the ever-smiling President himself. But not even TV astrologer Davey Lucas can predict the extraordinary climax that follows ...

The Mysteries of Glass

Sue Gee

In the winter of 1860 Richard Allen, a young curate, takes up his first position in a rural position near the cathedral city of Hereford. Grief-stricken at his beloved father's sudden death, Richard has ideals of service to God and to his fellow man. But he is also vulnerable and lonely and unable to contain the love he feels for a married woman. Meanwhile, a little girl, Alice, is a constant, shadowy presence: the daughter of the railway crossing-keeper, she presses her face to the window and sees too much.

When I Lived in Modern Times

Linda Grant

It is April 1946. Evelyn Sert, 20 years old, a hairdresser from Soho, sails for Palestine, where Jewish refugees and idealists are gathering from across Europe to start a new life in a brand new country. In the glittering, cosmopolitan, Bauhaus city of Tel Aviv, anything seems possible.

White Ghost Girls

Alice Greenway

Two sisters grow together and apart into their emerging selves, one pulsing with curiosity and risk, the other watchful, all eyes and ears. Immersed in the heat and colour of a 1960s Hong Kong that shimmers between sea and sky, theirs is a world of fishermen and insurgents, temple gods and ghosts, of blinding light and dark, dark waters.

The Constant Princess

Philippa Gregory

Katherine of Aragon is betrothed at the age of three to Prince Arthur, son and heir of Henry VII of England. She is raised to be Princess of Wales and knows it is her destiny to rule that far-off, wet, cold land. Her faith is tested when her prospective father-in-law greets her arrival with a great insult; Arthur seems little better than a boy; the food is strange and the customs coarse.

The Virgin Lover

Philippa Gregory

In the summer of 1538, church bells across England ring out the news - Elizabeth is Queen. One woman hears them with dread; Amy Dudley, wife of Sir Robert, knows that with Elizabeth on the throne he will return to the glamorous Tudor court. Amy's hopes that the ambitions of the Dudley family had died when Robert's father was beheaded are ended. The triumphant peal of bells summons her husband once more to power – and to a passionate young queen.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

Mark Haddon

A murder mystery like no other. The detective and narrator, is Christopher Boone. Christopher is fifteen and has Asperger's Syndrome. He knows a very great deal about maths and very little about human beings. He loves lists, patterns and the truth. He hates the colours yellow and brown and being touched. He has never gone further than the end of the road on his own, but when he finds a neighbour's dog murdered he sets out on a terrifying journey which will turn his whole world upside down.

The Last Family in England

Matt Haig

Meet the Hunter family: Adam, Kate and their children Hal and Charlotte and Prince their black Labrador. Prince is an earnest young dog, striving hard to live up to the tenets of the Labrador Pact (Remain Loyal to Your Human Masters, Serve and Protect Your Family at Any Cost). Other dogs, led by the Springer Spaniels, have revolted. Their slogans are "Dogs for Dogs, not for Humans" and "Pleasure not Duty". Mentored by an elderly Labrador called Henry, Prince takes his responsibilities seriously and, as things in the Hunter family begin to go badly awry – marital breakdown, rowdy teenage parties, attempted suicide – his responsibilities threaten to overwhelm him.

The Electric Michelangelo

Sarah Hall

Beginning as a humble apprentice in Morecambe Bay, Cy flees to America where he sets up his own tattoo business on the Coney Island Boardwalk. In this carnival environment of roller-coasters and freak shows, Cy becomes enamoured with Grace, a mysterious circus performer.

Cooking with Fernet Branca

James Hamilton-Paterson

Gerald Samper, an effete Englishman and ghostwriter for celebrities, lives on a hilltop in Tuscany. His idyll is shattered by the arrival of Marta, a vulgar woman from the Soviet Republic. The neighbours' lives disastrously intertwine as the English obsession with Tuscany is satirised.

Pompeii

Robert Harris

As Rome's richest citizens relax in their villas around Pompeii and Herculaneum, there are ominous warnings that something is going wrong. Wells and springs are failing, a man has disappeared and now the greatest aqueduct in the world – the mighty Aqua Augusta – has suddenly ceased to flow.

The Honeymoon

Justin Haythe

Over the course of a year in London, Gordon and Annie construct for themselves an idea of married life, until finally their long delayed honeymoon takes them to Venice – yet the brilliance of Venice seems to distort rather than illuminate.

The Great Fire

Shirley Hazzard

In war-torn Asia and stricken Europe, men and women, still young but veterans of harsh experience, must reinvent their lives and expectations and learn from their past to dream again. Some will fulfill their destinies, others will falter.

Nelson's Daughter

Miranda Hearn

In 1814, in a farmhouse near Calais, a lonely English girl struggles to live with an embittered woman and the ghosts of the past. She is Horatia, Nelson's only child, and her companion is Emma Hamilton, once the toast of Europe but now reduced to poverty and the oblivion of drink.

As Horatia relives her memories of the man she discovered was her father only after his death, an intimate portrait emerges of Nelson and of his passionate affair with Emma – the vivacious strong-minded beauty who rose from humble beginnings to marry a titled diplomat and mingle with royalty – and of the complex relationship between Horatia and the woman she believed was only her godmother.

Notes on a Scandal

Zoe Heller

When Sheba Hart joins St George's as the new pottery teacher, lonely Barbara Covett senses that she has found a kindred spirit. But Barbara is not the only one drawn to Sheba. Before long Sheba is involved in an illicit affair with a pupil. Barbara is powerless to stop Sheba from pursuing her foolhardy course of action. But when the liaison is found out and Sheba's marriage falls apart, Barbara is loyally standing by, ready to provide succour.

Steppenwolf

Hermann Hesse

A Faust-like and magical story of the humanisation of a middle-aged misanthrope.

Ursula Under

Ingrid Hill

In Michigan's Upper Peninsula, a dangerous rescue effort draws the ears and eyes of the entire country. A two-year-old girl has fallen down a mineshaft. Little Ursula Wong is the first and only child of a young woman of Finnish extraction and her Chinese-American husband. The Wongs live in a decrepit mobile home and their child is designated by one member of the TV audience as 'half-breed trailer trash', not worth all the attention and expense. What does it mean to be 'half-breed trailer trash?'

The Island

Victoria Hislop

On the brink of a life-changing decision, Alexis Fielding longs to find out about her mother's past. But Sofia has never spoken of it. All she admits to is growing up in a small Cretan village before moving to London. When Alexis decides to visit Crete, however, Sofia gives her daughter a letter to take to an old friend and promises that through her she will learn more

The Line of Beauty

Alan Hollinghurst

Picking up at the point in time where "The Swimming Pool Library" left off, The Line of Beauty traces the further history of a decade of change and tragedy.

The Mammoth Cheese

Sheri Holman

When Manda Frank gives birth to an astonishing eleven babies, the world descends on her home town of Three Chimneys, Virginia. Beneath the intense media spotlight the town begins to give up its long-held secrets: from unrequited love to more dangerous and subversive passions. Meanwhile, cheesemaker Margaret Prickett decides to highlight the plight of the rural community by creating “The mammoth Cheese” – a 1,235-pound wheel of Cheshire which she plans to parade all the way to Washington – while failing to notice the plight of her own teenage daughter Polly, who is caught up in the dangerous romance of rebellion and veering precariously towards tragedy.

A Long Way Down

Nick Hornby

Disgraced TV presenter Martin Sharp is going to end it all...but not alone, because first single mum Maureen, then eighteen-year-old Jess and lastly American rock-god JJ turn up and crash Martin’s private party. They’ve stolen his idea – but brought their own reasons. Yet it’s hard to jump when you’ve got an audience queuing impatiently behind you. A few heated words and some slices of cold pizza later and these four strangers are suddenly allies. But is their unlikely friendship a good enough reason to carry on living?

What I Loved

Siri Hustvedt

In 1975, art historian Leo Hertzberg discovers an extraordinary painting by an unknown artist in a New York gallery. He buys the work, tracks down its creator, Bill Weschler and the two men embark on a life-long friendship. Leo’s story, which spans twenty-five years, traces the growing involvement between his family and Bill’s – through the birth of their sons, the breakdown of Bill’s first marriage and the happy years of his second, when the two families live in the same building in SoHo and share a house in Vermont in the summer. But the bonds between them and their wives become strained, first by tragedy and then by a monstrous duplicity, which comes slowly and corrosively to the surface.

Never Let Me Go

Kazuo Ishiguro

Kathy, Ruth and Tommy were pupils at Hailsham – an idyllic establishment situated deep in the English countryside. The children there were tenderly sheltered from the outside world, brought up to believe they were special and that their personal welfare was crucial. But why were they really there?

All for Love

Dan Jacobson

Set during the last days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, this is a story of assassinations, adultery, imprisonment, bankruptcy and morphine – and of a heroine who is ready to risk all in the name of love.

The Turn of the Screw

Henry James

A young, inexperienced governess is charged with the care of Miles and Flora, two small children abandoned by their uncle at his grand country house. She sees the figure of an unknown man on the tower and his face at the window. It is Peter Quint, the master's dissolute valet and he has come for little Miles. But Peter Quint is dead.

The Murder Room

PD James

Commander Adam Dalgliesh is already acquainted with the Dupayne Museum in Hampstead and with its sinister murder room celebrating notorious crimes committed in the interwar years when he is called to investigate the killing of one of the trustees. He soon discovers that the victim was seeking to close the museum against the wishes of both staff and fellow trustees. Everyone, it seems, has something to gain from the crime. When it becomes clear that the killer is prepared to kill again, inspired by the real-life crimes from the murder room, Dalgliesh knows that to solve this case he has to get into the mind of a ruthless killer.

Moses, Citizen & Me

Delia Jarrett-Macauley

The civil war in Sierra Leone is the backdrop for this story of boy soldier Moses.

Sixty Lights

Gail Jones

This is the story of Lucy Strange, a photographer in the 1870s, while the art is still in its infancy. It tracks her life: from childhood in Australia to her stormy adolescence in England and India and finally to her death in London at the age of 23. She is a remarkable character: forthright, gifted, passionate and canny.

A Special Relationship

Douglas Kennedy

Sally Goodchild is a woman whose entire life is turned upside down in a very foreign place where they speak her language – London. A 37-year-old American journalist, she suddenly finds herself pregnant and married to an English foreign correspondent, Tony Hobbs, whom she met while they were both on assignment in Cairo. From the

outset, Sally's relationship with both Tony and London is an uneasy one – as she finds her husband and his city to be far more foreign than imagined. Her problems soon turn to nightmares when she discovers that everything can be taken down and used against you.

State of the Union

Douglas Kennedy

America in the Sixties was an era of radical upheaval – of civil rights protests and anti-war marches; of sexual liberation and hallucinogenic drugs. More tellingly, it was a time when you weren't supposed to trust anyone over the age of thirty; when, if you were young, you rebelled against your parents and their conservative values. But not Harriet Buchan.

The Secret Life of Bees

Kidd, Sue Monk

Lily has grown up believing she accidentally killed her mother. Lily, just four at the time, not only has her own memory of holding the gun, but her father's account of the event. Now, at fourteen, she yearns for her mother and for forgiveness. Living on a peach farm in South Carolina with her father, she has just one friend, Rosaleen, a black servant of uncertain age, whose sharp exterior hides a tender heart.

The Solace of Leaving Early

Haven Kimmel

Langston Braveman finds herself back home ten years after leaving Haddington to pursue a career as an academic. Romantic literature qualifications and philosophical digressions don't hold much weight in Haddington though and Langston's mother forces her into the role of carer for two suddenly orphaned little girls, daughters of her childhood friend Alice.

Out

Natsuo Kirino

In the Tokyo suburbs four women work the draining graveyard shift at a boxed-lunch factory. Burdened with chores and heavy debts and isolated from husbands and children, they all secretly dream of a way out of their dead-end lives. A young mother among them finally cracks and strangles her philandering, gambling husband then confesses her crime to Masako, the closest of her colleagues.

The Historian

Elizabeth Kostova

Late one night, exploring her father's library, a young woman finds an ancient book and a cache of yellowing letters addressed ominously to "My dear and unfortunate successor". Her discovery plunges her into a world she never dreamed of – a labyrinth where the secrets of her father's past and her mother's mysterious fate connect to an evil hidden in the depths of history.

The History of Love

Nicole Krauss

Fourteen-year-old Alma Singer is trying to find a cure for her mother's loneliness. Believing she might discover it in an old book her mother is lovingly translating, she sets out in search of its author. Across New York an old man called Leo Gursky is trying to survive a little bit longer. He spends his days dreaming of the lost love that sixty years ago in Poland inspired him to write a book. And although he doesn't know it yet, that book also survived: crossing oceans and generations, and changing lives.

The Namesake

Jhumpa Lahiri

The label on his hospital cot reads simply BABY BOY GANGULI but as time passes bureaucracy takes over and demands that the boy be given a name. In a panic, his father decides to nickname him 'Gogol' – after his favourite writer. Brought up as an Indian in suburban America, Gogol Ganguli soon finds himself itching to cast off his awkward name, just as he longs to leave behind the inherited values of his Bengali parents. And so he sets off on his own path through life, a path strewn with conflicting loyalties, love and loss ...

The Constant Gardener

John le Carre

Frightening, heartbreaking and exquisitely calibrated, *The Constant Gardener* is a profoundly moving story of a man ennobled by his wife's tragic murder and a magnificent exploration of the dark side of unbridled capitalism.

Absolute Friends

John le Carre

Ted Mundy, British soldier's son born 1947 in a shining new independent Pakistan and Sasha, refugee son of an East German Lutheran pastor, first become friends as students in riot-torn West Berlin of the late sixties. They meet again in the grimy looking-glass of cold-war espionage and, most terribly, in today's world of terror and counter-terror.

A Visit From Voltaire

Dinah Lee Kung

When an ordinary American reporter and mother of three, recently arrived in a small village in Switzerland, finds herself with a loony claiming to be the Greatest Mind of the Eighteenth Century, she pleads herself unworthy and begs him to go home. But he doesn't, and over the next nine months her stubborn visitor will become her warmest friend, unfailing mentor and most frustrating intellectual foil. V. turns out to be a man of sparkling intelligence with a boundless interest in politics, philosophy, drama, and good gossip. He's an excellent raconteur, boasting knowledge of every subject under the sun, including his hostess' new neighborhood outside Geneva.

Small Island

Andrea Levy

It is 1948 and England is recovering from a war, but at 21 Nevern Street, London, the conflict has only just begun. Queenie Bligh's neighbours do not approve when she agrees to take in Jamaican lodgers, but with her husband Bernard not back from the war, what else can she do? Gilbert Joseph was one of the several thousand Jamaican men who joined the RAF to fight Hitler. Returning to England as a civilian he finds himself treated very differently. Gilbert's wife Hortense too has longed to leave Jamaica and start a better life in England, but when she joins him, she is shocked to find London shabby, decrepit and far from the city of her dreams. Even Gilbert is not the man she thought he was.

A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian

Marina Lewycka

For years, Nadezhda and Vera have had as little as possible to do with each other. Now they find they'd better learn how to get along because since their mother's death their ageing father has been sliding into his second childhood and an alarming new woman has just entered his life.

Black Dirt

Nell Leyshon

Frank's house on the Somerset Levels is surrounded by floodwater and filled with the guilty silences that bind family members together – and sometimes keep them apart. Frank's inner world is full of his sister Iris and their hot childhood summer, when they lay at night in the grass and listened to local legends of Kings Arthur and Alfred, Glastonbury Abbey, the last bloody battle on English soil, of Jesus and Joseph of Arimathea. Gradually, the boundaries between past and present begin to blur and, beyond the humour and warmth, we realise the stories that are told – and those that are not – cover deeply buried memories.

Gilgamesh

Joan London

When Edith realizes that she is pregnant, she knows that there is nothing left for her in Australia. Although her mother and sister are resigned to life in the rural backwater of Nunderup, Edith is troubled and restless. She longs to find Aram, the father of her child – a handsome Armenian who stayed briefly with the family – and to set foot in the magical places that he described. It is 1939, and the world, it is said, is about to explode into war. Unruffled by these rumours, Edith sets out with her baby son on the long journey to London and then on to Aram's homeland. Her quest takes her to the Middle East, into the ancient land where Gilgamesh, the fabled king of Mesopotamia, once travelled in search of enlightenment. Edith is also looking for an answer – to the heart-rending question of how to live when love meets war.

The Bad Mother's Handbook

Kate Long

1997, the year Blair was elected and Diana died and the year that changed everything for Charlotte, Karen and Nan. Charlotte is doing her A-levels and she is pregnant. Karen, her mother, is thirty-three; now she is about to be a grandmother. How chuffed is she with that? Then there is Nan, who isn't so bothered about her granddaughter's pregnancy – she has other things on her mind. Where is she again?

Swallowing Grandma

Kate Long

Katherine Miller is eighteen and desperate to be less fat and swotty and to have cooler friends. But most of all she wishes she had two parents, instead of one grandma, Poll. Poll is pushing seventy, half blind and utterly poisonous. She has looked after Katherine since she was a baby, when her father was killed in a car crash and her mother vanished. Poll's ambition is for things to stay exactly the same for ever and for Katherine never to leave their pit village of Bank Top.

The Remedy

Michelle Lovric

During an unforgettable night in 1785, in a theatre in Drury Lane, love and murder fuse the lives of a Venetian actress and the prince of London's medical underworld. Dangerous secrets and elaborate spinning lies soon send the lovers in different directions, desperate for the truth not just about each other, but also about their own pasts.

Beyond Black

Hilary Mantel

Alison is a medium, but what she hears is sometimes too dark to pass on. She mostly tells her clients what they want to hear. Colette, her manager and side-kick, makes the bookings and gets Alison on stage – and then there's Morris, Alison's foul-mouthed and obscene spirit guide.

Life of Pi

Jann Martel

After the tragic sinking of a cargo ship, one solitary lifeboat remains bobbing on the wild, blue Pacific. The crew of the surviving vessel consists of a hyena, a zebra (with a broken leg), a female orang-utan, a 450-pound Royal Bengal tiger and Pi – a 16-year-old Indian boy.

Us

Richard Mason

Julian, Jake and Adrienne met at Oxford. It was Julian's charismatic sister Maggie who brought them together – and her sense of right and wrong that led to tragedy and the breaking of their circle. Years later, Jake's become accidentally famous and is now the celebrity artist du jour; Adrienne's got a life everyone wants – except her; and Julian's stuck in the rut Maggie always feared he'd find. But she haunts them still.

Stuart: A Life Backwards

Alexander Masters

This is the story of Stuart Shorter: thief, hostage-taker, psycho and street raconteur. It is a story told backwards, as he wanted, from the man he was when Alexander Masters met him to a 'happy-go-lucky little boy' of twelve.

The Internationals

Sarah May

Set in and around a Macedonian refugee camp during the 1999 Kosovo crisis, Sarah May's brilliantly satirical third novel spans seventy-eight tense days from the commencement of NATO airstrikes on Yugoslavia to the withdrawal of Serb forces from northern Kosovo. As the spotlight of the world's media is turned on a small, landlocked country struggling to turn itself into a capitalist state, an extraordinary cast of aid workers, journalists and diplomats finds itself becoming inextricably involved with refugees, arms smugglers, Macedonian advertising executives and an Albanian mayor in ways none of them expected.

All the Pretty Horses

Cormac McCarthy

John Grady Cole is the last bewildered survivor of long generations of Texas ranchers. As his grandfather dies and his parents succumb to their own worries and desires, John is cut off from the only life he has ever wanted. He runs off to Mexico with his friend Lacey Rawlins. Befriending a third boy on the way, they enter a

country beyond their imagining: barren and beautiful, rugged yet cruelly civilised, a place where dreams are paid for in blood.

Saturday

Ian McEwan

Saturday is set within a single day in February 2003. Henry Perowne is a contented man, though troubled by the state of the world. Following a minor car accident, Henry comes into contact with a small-time thug called Miller – with savage consequences.

The Barracks

John McGahern

Elizabeth Reegan, after years of freedom - and loneliness - marries into the enclosed Irish village of her upbringing. The children are not her own; her husband is straining to break free from the servile security of the police force; and her own life, threatened by illness, seems to be losing the last vestiges of its purpose.

The People's Act of Love

James Meek

Siberia, 1919. In the outer reaches of a country recently torn apart by civil war, lives a small Christian sect. Stationed nearby is a regiment of Czech soldiers. Into this isolated community trudges Samarin, an escapee from Russia's northernmost prison.

Liars and Saints

Maile Melloy

Yvette Santerre met the photographer on the beach as her children played, and he offered to take their picture for her husband, away at war. When he arrived at her house with his camera, the last thing she expected was that he would try to kiss her. But that kiss will haunt her family for generations.

Empress Orchid

Anchee Min

To rescue her family from poverty and avoid marrying her slope-shouldered cousin, seventeen-year-old Orchid competes to be one of the Emperor's wives. When she is chosen as a lower-ranking concubine she enters the erotically charged and ritualised forbidden city. But beneath its immaculate façade lie whispers of murders and ghosts and the thousands of concubines will stoop to any lengths to bear the Emperor's son.

Cloud Atlas

David Mitchell

Six interlocking lives – one amazing adventure. In a narrative that circles the globe and reaches from the 19th century to a post-apocalyptic future, David Mitchell erases the boundaries of time, genre and language.

These Foolish Things

Deborah Moggach

When Ravi Kapoor, an over-worked London doctor is driven beyond endurance by his obnoxious father-in-law, he asks his wife: "Can't we just send him away somewhere? Somewhere far far away." His prayer seems to have been answered when his entrepreneurial cousin, Sonny, sets up a retirement home, recreating a lost corner of England in a converted guesthouse in Bangalore. Travel and set-up are inexpensive, staff willing and plentiful – and the British pensioners can enjoy the hot weather and take mango juice with their gin.

Fleshmarket

Nicola Morgan

It is Edinburgh 1828 and Robbie is haunted by the horror of his mother's death at the hands of the famous surgeon Dr Robert Knox. The operation was intended to save her life, instead it brought her intolerable pain before it killed her. Now her family is torn apart and living in appalling poverty. A desperate Robbie is intent on revenge on Knox. But how far is he prepared to go – and what will he lose in the process?

Love

Toni Morrison

May, Christine, Heed, Junior, Vida – even L – all are women obsessed by Bill Cosey. More than the wealthy owner of the famous Cosey Hotel and Resort, he shapes their yearnings for father, husband, lover, guardian, friend, yearnings that dominate the lives of these women long after his death. Yet while Cosey is both the void in, and the centre of, their stories, powerful, charismatic, shadowy, monstrous, he is himself driven by secret forces – a troubled past and a spellbinding woman, 'a sporting woman', named Celestial. Forty years on, the hotel is boarded up and the resort half under water, but Christine and Heed, old women now, bound together by a lifetime of jealousy and pain, are still the Cosey girls, 'as different as honey from soot'. And then Junior comes walking down the street in her short skirts and high boots with a look in her eye ...

Labyrinth

Kate Mosse

July 1209: In Carcassonne a seventeen-year-old girl is given a mysterious book by her father, which he claims contains the secret of the true Grail. Although Alais cannot understand the strange words and symbols hidden within, she knows that her destiny

lies in keeping the secret of the labyrinth safe...July 2005: Alice Tanner discovers two skeletons in a forgotten cave in the French Pyrenees. Puzzled by the labyrinth symbol carved into the rock, she realises she's disturbed something that was meant to remain hidden.

Runaway

Alice Munro

A collection of short stories set in the acclaimed writer's native Canada.

A Severed Head

Iris Murdoch

Martin Lynch-Gibbon believes he can possess both a beautiful wife and a delightful lover. But when his wife Antonia suddenly leaves him for her psychoanalyst, Martin is plunged into an intensive emotional re-education. He attempts to behave beautifully and sensibly. Then he meets a woman whose demonic splendour at first repels him and later arouses a consuming and monstrous passion.

The Time Traveler's Wife

Audrey Niffenegger

This is the extraordinary story of Clare and Henry who met when Clare was six and Henry was thirty-six and were married when Clare was twenty-two and Henry thirty. Impossible but true, because Henry suffers from a rare condition where his genetic clock periodically resets and he finds himself pulled suddenly into his past or future.

The Unnumbered

Sam North

The setting is London, present-day London. A familiar scene you may think, but the people who inhabit this London are not the office workers, the shoppers, the families, the couples, the single men and women, the moneyed night life who form the lifeblood of the city – they are the dispossessed.

The Falls

Joyce Carol Oates

A man climbs over the railings and plunges into Niagara Falls. He's newly-married, and his bride, Ariaah, has been left behind in the honeymoon suite the morning after their wedding. For two weeks she waits by the Falls for news of her husband's recovered body. During her vigil, an unlikely new love story begins to unfold when she meets a wealthy lawyer who is transfixed by her strange, otherworldly gaze.

The Distance Between Us

Maggie O' Farrell

On a cold London afternoon, Stella encounters a man she has not seen for many years, whose face she instantly recognises – or thinks she does. At exactly the same moment, in Hong Kong, Jake is realising that the crowd around him, celebrating Chinese New Year, is about to turn dangerous. They know nothing of each other's existence, but both flee their lives: Jake in search of a place so remote it doesn't appear on any map and Stella for a destination in Scotland, the significance of which only her sister, Nina, will understand.

Be Near Me

Andrew O'Hagan

When an English priest takes over a small Scottish parish, not everyone is ready to accept him. He makes friends with two local youths, Mark and Lisa and clashes with a world he can barely understand. The town seems to grow darker each night. Fate comes calling and before the summer is out his quiet life is the focus of public hysteria.

The Family Way

Tony Parsons

Paulo loves Jessica. He thinks that they are complete – a family of two. But Jessica can't be happy until she has a baby and the baby stubbornly refuses to come. Can a man and a woman ever really be a family?

Stories We Could Tell

Tony Parsons

On a hot summer night in 1977, London rages around three young men who are about to learn the true meaning of friendship. Hip young gunslinger Terry is basking in his scoop on rock star Dag Wood. But Dag has set his sights on a photographer called Misty – Terry's girlfriend. Who gets the girl?

My Sister's Keeper

Jodi Picoult

Anna is not sick, but she might as well be. By age thirteen she has undergone countless surgeries, transfusions and injections to help her sister Kate fight leukaemia. Anna was born for this purpose, her parents tell her, which is why they love her even more. But now she can't help but wonder what her life would be like if it weren't tied to her sister's...and so she makes a decision that for most, at any age, would be too difficult to bear and sues her parents for the rights to her own body.

The Pact

Jodi Picoult

The Hartes and the Golds have lived next door to each other for eighteen years. They have shared everything from family picnics to chicken pox – so it's no surprise that in high school Chris and Emily's friendship blossoms into something more. When the midnight calls come in from the hospital no one is prepared: Emily is dead at seventeen from a gunshot wound to the head, inflicted by Chris as part of an apparent suicide pact.

Perfect Match

Jodi Picoult

As an assistant district attorney, Nina Frost prosecutes the sort of crimes that tear families apart. But when Nina and her husband discover that their five-year-old son Nathaniel has been sexually abused, it is her own family that is devastated.

Salem Falls

Jodi Picoult

Jack St Bride was once a beloved teacher at a private girl's school – until a student's crush sparked a powder keg of accusation and robbed him of his career and reputation. After a devastatingly public ordeal that left him with an eight-month jail sentence and no job, Jack resolves to pick up the pieces of his life. He takes a job washing dishes at Addie Peabody's diner in the quiet New England village of Salem Falls and slowly starts to form a relationship with her.

Vanishing Acts

Jodi Picoult

Delia Hopkins has led a charmed life. Raised in rural New Hampshire by her widowed father Andrew, she now has a young daughter, a handsome fiance and a job she loves finding missing persons. But as Delia plans her wedding, she is plagued by flashbacks of a life she can't recall. And then a policeman knocks at her door and her world fractures into something unrecognisable.

Wide Sargasso Sea

Jean Rhys

Set against the lush backdrop of 1830s Jamaica, Jean Rhys's powerful, haunting story was inspired by her fascination with the first Mrs Rochester, the mad wife in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*.

The Lost Art of Keeping Secrets

Eva Rice

Set in the 1950s, in an England still recovering from the Second World War, this is the story of Penelope Wallace and her eccentric family at the start of the rock 'n' roll era. Penelope longs to be grown-up and to fall in love, but various rather inconvenient things keep getting in her way.

Reader, I Married Him

Michele Roberts

Aurora, given the chance to be true to herself, rather than to her trio of husbands, turns out to be a world-class minx. After Hugh's funeral, she goes to Italy to visit her old radical-feminist friend Leonora, now the abbess of the Brigandine convent in Padenza.

Gilead

Marilynne Robinson

In 1956, towards the end of Reverend John Ames life, he begins a letter to his young son: "I told you last night that I might be gone sometime...you reached up and put your fingers on my lips and gave me that look I never in my life saw on any other face besides your mother's. It's a kind of furious pride, very passionate and stern. I'm always a little surprised to find my eyebrows unsinged after I've suffered one of those looks. I will miss them."

Shalimar the Clown

Salman Rushdie

Los Angeles, 1991. Ambassador Max Ophuls is murdered, in broad daylight, on his illegitimate daughter India's doorstep - slaughtered by a knife wielded by his Kashmiri Muslim driver - a mysterious figure who calls himself Shalimar the clown.

The Catcher in the Rye

J. D. Salinger

Holden Caulfield is a troubled teenager in 1950s America.

The Lovely Bones

Alice Sebold

My name was Salmon, like the fish; first name, Susie. I was fourteen when I was murdered on December 6, 1973. My murderer was a man from our neighbourhood. My mother liked his border flowers and my father talked to him once about fertilizer. This is Susie Salmon, speaking from heaven – which looks a lot like her school playground, with the good kind of swing sets, counsellors to help newcomers adjust and friends to room with. Everything Susie wants appears as soon as she thinks of it – except the one thing she wants most: to be back with the people she loved on earth.

Snowleg

Nicholas Shakespeare

From the author of *The Dancer Upstairs*, *Snowleg* is a gripping tale of a guilty conscience, a family secret and a young man's quest for reconciliation.

Frankenstein

Mary Shelley

Victor Frankenstein is obsessed with the secret of resurrecting the dead. But when he makes a new 'man' out of plundered corpses, his hideous creation fills him with disgust. Rejected by all humanity, the creature sets out to destroy Frankenstein and everyone he loves and as the monster gets even closer to his maker, hunter becomes prey in a lethal chase that carries them to the very end of the earth.

The Death and Life of Charlie St. Cloud

Ben Sherwood

When he was a boy, Charlie St. Cloud almost perished in a car crash that killed his little brother. Years later, Charlie is still trying to atone for his loss. It is only when he meets Tess Carroll, a captivating, adventurous yachtswoman, that he is faced with a choice – between death and life, the past and the present, holding on and letting go.

Light on Snow

Anita Shreve

Walking through new-fallen snow in the forest near their home, twelve-year-old Nicky Dillon and her father come upon something unconceivable: there, in the pristine winter scene, an abandoned infant wails, its survival made possible only by the coincidence of their having chosen this path for their evening stroll.

A Wedding in December

Anita Shreve

At an inn in the Berkshire Mountains of West Massachusetts, seven former schoolmates gather for a wedding. Nora, the owner of the inn, has recently had to reinvent her life following the death of her husband. Harrison, who still hears echoes from a horrific event at Kidd Academy twenty-six years ago, has made a life for himself in Toronto with his wife and two sons. Agnes, now a history teacher at Kidd and still single, longs to tell a secret she cannot reveal. Bridget, the mother of a fifteen-year-old boy, has agreed to marry Bill, an old high-school lover, despite uncertainties about her health and future. It is Bill who passionately wants this wedding and who has brought everyone together for an astonishing weekend of revelation and recrimination, forgiveness and redemption.

We Need to Talk About Kevin

Lionel Shriver

Kevin Katchadourian killed seven of his fellow high-school students, a cafeteria worker and a teacher, shortly before his sixteenth birthday. He is visited in prison by his mother, Eva, who narrates in a series of letters to her estranged husband Franklin, the story of Kevin's upbringing. A successful career woman, Eva is reluctant to forgo her independence and the life she shares with Franklin to become a mother. Once Kevin is born, she experiences extreme alienation and dislike of Kevin as he grows up to become a spiteful and cruel child. When Kevin commits murder, Eva fears that her own shortcomings may have shaped what her son has become.

The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner

Alan Sillitoe

Smith is an incorrigible and defiant young rebel, inhabiting a no-man's land of institutionalised Borstal. Watched over by a phlegmy sunlight, as his steady jog-trot rhythm transports him over an unrelenting, frost-bitten earth, he wonders why, for whom and for what he is running.

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning

Alan Sillitoe

Working all day at a lathe leaves Arthur Seaton with energy to spare in the evenings. A hard-drinking, hard-fighting young rebel of a man, he knows what he wants and he's sharp enough to get it. And before long, his carryings-on with a couple of married women are part of local gossip. But then one evening he meets a young girl in a pub and Arthur's life begins to look less simple.

Ice Road

Gillian Slovo

Irina Davydovna, survivor of the ice ship Chelyuskin, which sank in the Arctic circle, is back in her beloved home city of Leningrad. She thinks her troubles are over. But this is Leningrad in 1933. As Stalin begins to turn against the city and his old favourite Sergei Kirov, Irina finds herself caught up in forces beyond anyone's control. Loyalties, belief, love and family ties: all are about to be tested to the limit in one of the most devastating moments of human history.

A Thousand Acres

Jane Smiley

Larry Cook's farm is the largest in his county in Iowa and a tribute to his hard work and single-mindedness. Proud and possessive, his sudden decision to retire and hand over the farm to his three daughters is disarmingly uncharacteristic. Ginny and Rose, the two eldest, are startled yet eager to accept, but Caroline, the youngest daughter, has misgivings. Immediately, her father cuts her out. It is a decision that causes chaos.

The No.1 Ladies Detective Agency

Alexander McCall Smith

Wayward daughters. Missing husbands. Philandering partners. Curious conmen. If you've got a problem and no one can help you, then pay a visit to Precious Ramotswe, Botswana's only – and finest – female private detective.

The Full Cupboard of Life

Alexander McCall Smith

Mma Ramotswe, who became engaged to Mr J.L.B. Matekoni at the end of *The No.1 Ladies Detective Agency*, remains unmarried. She wonders when a day for the wedding will be named, but is anxious to avoid putting too much pressure on her fiancé. For indeed he has other things on his mind.

Morality for Beautiful Girls

Alexander McCall Smith

In this third volume of *The No.1 Ladies Detective Agency* series, the irrepressible Precious Ramotswe faces supreme problems at home and at work. With her detective agency in financial difficulty. Mma Ramotswe takes the hard decision to share offices with her husband-to-be, Mr J.L.B. Matekoni.

In the Company of Cheerful Ladies

Alexander McCall Smith

Precious Ramotswe, that cheerful Botswana private investigator of "traditional build",

is finally married to Mr J.L.B. Matekoni of Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors, her detective agency is busy and life could not be better... Well...it could actually.

44 Scotland Street

Alexander McCall Smith

Alexander McCall Smith's Scotland Street occupies a busy, bohemian corner of Edinburgh's New Town, where the old haute bourgeoisie finds itself having to rub shoulders with students, poets and portraitists. And number 44 has more than its fair share of the street's eccentrics and failures.

Espresso Tales

Alexander McCall Smith

In Espresso Tales, Alexander McCall Smith returns to Edinburgh and the glorious cast of his own tales of the city, the residents of 44 Scotland Street, with a new set of challenges for each of them.

The Sunday Philosophy Club

Alexander McCall Smith

Behind Edinburgh's regimented Georgian facades, its moral compasses are spinning with greed, dishonesty, lust and murderous intent. Isabel Dalhousie knows this. Isabel, in fact, rather relishes it. An accomplished philosopher and editor of the Review of Applied Ethics, she knows all about the difference between good and bad. Which is probably why, by instinct, she is an amateur sleuth. And instinct tells her the man who tumbled to his death in front of her eyes after a concert in the Usher Hall didn't fall. He was pushed.

The Accidental

Ali Smith

A family is taking a holiday in Norfolk when Amber arrives on their doorstep. Michael, an adulterous English lecturer, assumes Amber is his wife's friend. Eve, his wife, assumes she's one of Michael's students. The two children, Astrid, who is 12, and Magnus, who is 17, are just happy for the company.

Moondust

Andrew Smith

The Apollo Moon Programme has been called the last optimistic act of the twentieth century. Over a strange three year period between 1969 and 1972, twelve men made

the longest and most eccentric of all journeys and all were indelibly marked by it. Of those astronauts who walked on the moon only nine are still alive. One day in the near future there will be none: no one on earth will have known the giddy thrill of gazing back at us from another world. In *Moondust*, Andrew Smith sets out to find and interview the remaining moonwalkers in order to learn how their lives, and ours, were changed by this surreal adventure.

On Beauty

Zadie Smith

When Howard Belsey's oldest son Jerome falls for Victoria, the stunning daughter of the right-wing Monty Kipps, both families find themselves thrown together engaged in personal and cultural warfare.

The Autograph Man

Zadie Smith

Alex-Li Tandem sells autographs – a small blip in a huge worldwide network of desire. It is his business to hunt for names on paper, collect them, sell them, occasionally fake them and all to give the people what they want: a little piece of fame. But what does Alex want?

White Teeth

Zadie Smith

The story spans twenty-five years of two families living in North-West London and begins with the attempted suicide of Archibald Alfred Jones in a Cavalier Musketeer Estate parked on Cricklewood Broadway.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Robert Louis Stevenson

Dr Jekyll has discovered the ultimate drug. A chemical that can turn him into someone else. Suddenly he can unleash his deepest cruelties in the guise of the sinister Hyde. Transforming himself at will, he roams the streets of fog-bound London as his monstrous alter ego. It seems he is master of his fate.

The Little Friend

Donna Tartt

Although the Cleves generally revelled in every detail of their family history, the events of the terrible Mother's Day were never ever discussed. On that day, nine-year-old Robin, loved by all for his whims and peculiarities, was found hanging by the neck from a black-tupelo tree in his own garden. Twelve years later, the mystery –

with its taunting traces of foul play – was no nearer a solution than it had been on the day it happened.

The American Boy

Andrew Taylor

England 1819: Thomas Shield, a new master at a school just outside London, is tutor to a young American boy and the boy's sensitive best friend, Charles Frant. Drawn to Frant's beautiful unhappy mother, Thomas becomes caught up in her family's twisted intrigues. Then a brutal crime is committed, with consequences that threaten to destroy Thomas and all that he has come to hold dear.

This Thing of Darkness

Harry Thompson

This is an epic novel of sea-faring adventure set in the 19th century. It charts the life of Robert Fitzroy the captain of the Beagle and his passenger Charles Darwin. It combines adventure, emotion, ideas, humour and tragedy as well as illuminating the history of the 19th century.

Cherry: a novel

Matt Thorne

Who or what is Cherry? Steve Ellis doesn't know and he's beginning not to care. All he knows is that as soon as his perfect woman came into his life, all the flatness and misery went away. But happiness comes with a price. Some people will do anything for love, or what they think is love. Anything.

Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living

Carrie Tiffany

It is 1934: the Great War is long over and the next is yet to come. It is a brief time of optimism and advancement. Amid billowing clouds of dust and information, the government "Better Farming Train" slides through the wheat fields and small towns of Australia, bringing expert advice to those living on the land. The train is on a crusade to persuade the country that science is the key to successful farming and that productivity is patriotic.

The Master

Colm Toibin

The Master is a portrait of Henry James, a man who was elusive to both friends and family, even as he remained astonishingly vibrant in his art – a searching exploration of the mind before affairs of the heart.

Frankie & Stankie

Barbara Trapido

Dinah and Lisa are growing up in 1950s South Africa, where racial laws are tightening. They are two little girls from a liberal family – big sister Lisa is strong and sensible, while Dinah is weedy and arty. At school, the sadistic Mrs Vaughan-Jones provides instruction in mental arithmetic and racial prejudice.

The Colour

Rose Tremain

Joseph and Harriet Blackstone emigrate from Norfolk to New Zealand in search of new beginnings and prosperity. But the harsh land near Christchurch threatens to destroy them almost before they begin. When Joseph finds gold in the creek he is seized by a rapturous obsession with the voluptuous riches awaiting him deep in the earth.

Brother & Sister

Joanna Trollope

Nathalie and David have been good and dutiful children to their parents. Now that they are both settled, with partners and children of their own, they are still close. Good friends. Brother and sister. Except that they aren't – brother and sister, that is. Each of them has been adopted when their loving parents, Lynne and Ralph, found that they couldn't have children of their own. And Nathalie and David have always sworn to each other and to their families that it didn't matter. But it did matter of course, and when Nathalie discovers a deep need to trace her birth parents, she insists that David makes the same journey.

The Amateur Marriage

Anne Tyler

Michael and Pauline seemed like the perfect couple – young, good looking, made for each other. The moment she walked into his mother's grocery store in Baltimore, he was smitten, and in the heat of World War II fervour, they marry in haste.

Frangipani

Celestine Hitiura Vaite

Materena Mahi, champion professional cleaner and best listener in all of Tahiti, is usually the one solving the problems. But right now she's that close to throwing her daughter Leilani into the street. "It doesn't matter what I do", she confides to Mama Teta, to Cousin Rita, to Mama Loana and to the Virgin Mary Understanding Woman, "It's always the wrong thing. I'm going taravana!". And if that wasn't enough, now there's a boy on the horizon. Or so the relatives are saying.

This is the Country

William Wall

In an Ireland far removed from the popular images in travel brochures, a bright teenager is heading for trouble – skipping school and taking drugs. His life changes when his girlfriend tells him she's pregnant but as he tries to make the transition to being a father, his past catches up with him once more.

The River

Tricia Wastvedt

In the summer of 1958 two children are drowned while they play in a boat on a Devon river. Their parents, Isabel and Robert, are bound together in guilt and anger and as years pass the tragedy becomes part of the invisible fabric of village life. Thirty years later Anna comes to the village, escaping city life and her own disappointments. She doesn't tell anyone that she's pregnant. She goes to live with Isabel and, for a time, the women find comfort in each other, but the baby's arrival opens old wounds. As Anna uncovers the secrets of the past, she is inexorably drawn into the conflict in which Isabel and Robert have been locked for three decades.

Fingersmith

Sarah Waters

London 1862. Sue Trinder, orphaned at birth, grows up among petty thieves – fingersmiths – under the rough but loving care of Mrs Sucksby and her 'family'. But from the moment she draws breath, Sue's fate is linked to that of another orphan growing up in a gloomy mansion not too many miles away.

Billy Liar

Keith Waterhouse

To Billy Fisher, Stradhoughton is one long subtopian cliché - a bad Yorkshire joke. The dimmer his surroundings, the more fantastic are his compensatory day-dreams. Neither his family nor his undertaker employers take kindly to his fantasies. Nor do his three girl-friends, at least two of whom he is engaged to!

The Nightwatch

Sarah Waters

This is the story of four Londoners – three women and a young man with a past. Kay, who drove an ambulance during the war and lived life at full throttle, now dresses in mannish clothes and wanders the streets with a restless hunger, searching...Helen,

clever, sweet, much loved, harbours a painful secret... Viv, glamour girl, is stubbornly, even foolishly loyal to her soldier lover... Duncan, an apparent innocent, has had his own demons to fight during the war. Their lives and their secrets connect in sometimes startling ways. War leads to strange alliances.

The War of the Worlds

H. G. Wells

The night after a shooting star is seen streaking through the sky from Mars, a cylinder is discovered on Horsell Common near London. At first, naive locals approach the cylinder armed just with a white flag – only to be killed quickly by an all-destroying heat-ray as terrifying tentacled invaders emerge.

Water Street

Crystal Wilkinson

On Water Street, every person has at least two stories to tell. One story that the light of day shines on and the other that lives only in the pitch black of night, the kind of story that a person carries beneath their breastbones for safekeeping.

The Position

Meg Wolitzer

Everything changes for the Mellow children the day they read the book that their liberal parents have written, a book that features tasteful pastel illustrations of their parents' lovemaking – and that has become a runaway bestseller. Thirty years later, when the children who grew up in the shadow of these erotically charged parents are adults and it looks as though the book may be reissued, we catch up with the twists and turns of their complicated 21st century lives - and those of the iconic couple whose marriage has not run as smoothly as it seemed set to do...

I'll Go to Bed at Noon

Gerard Woodward

A follow-up to Gerard Woodward's previous novel August, this charts the disintegration of Colette Jones' entire immediate family through alcohol abuse. As the story lurches from tragedy to farce and back again, it presents a stark portrait of the years leading up to the Thatcher revolution.

The Shadow of the Wind

Carlos Ruiz Zafon

Hidden in the heart of the old city of Barcelona is the “Cemetery of Broken Books”, a labyrinthine library of obscure and forgotten titles. To this library, a man brings his ten-year-old son, Daniel, one cold morning in 1945. Daniel is allowed to choose one book and from the dusty shelves pulls *The Shadow of the Wind* by Julian Carax. But as Daniel grows up, several people seem inordinately interested in his find. What begins as a case of literary curiosity turns into a race to find out the truth behind the life and death of Julian Carax and to save those he left behind.