Eva Luna
Isabel Allende

Set in Latin America, Eva works as a servant, who through improbable coincidences as a series of adventures that lead her to Rolf, a German filmmaker. “Meet Eva Luna, lover, writer, revolutionary, and storyteller.” 1987.

Bless Me, Ultima
Rudolfo Anaya

Antonio Marez is six years old when Ultima comes to stay with his family in New Mexico. She is a curandera, one who cures with herbs and magic. “Full of sensual dreams, superstitions, unexplained phenomena and the dark might of Latin American theology.” 1972

Jane Eyre
Charlotte Bronte

Classic gothic romance of a governess and the master of the house but there is more here than a simple romance. Makes a great discussion about women’s roles and contemporary expectations. 1847

March
Geraldine Brooks

Imagines the Civil War experiences of Mr. March, the absent father in Louisa May Alcott's Little Women. An idealistic Concord cleric, March becomes a Union chaplain and later finds himself assigned to be a teacher on a cotton plantation that employs freed slaves, or "contraband." His narrative begins with cheerful letters home, but March gradually reveals to the reader what he does not to his family: the cruelty and racism of Northern and Southern soldiers, the violence and suffering he is powerless to prevent. Pulitzer Prize, 2006

Power of Myth
Joseph Campbell

Based on interviews conducted by Bill Moyers, this is the last book with Campbell sharing his views of mythology, religion and heroes. These universal myths are exposed as part of our everyday lives. Thought-provoking and interesting book for discussion. 1988

My Antonia
Willa Cather

Set in Nebraska in the late 19th century, this tale of the spirited daughter of a Bohemian immigrant family planning to farm on the untamed land ("not a country at all but the material out of which countries are made") comes to us through the romantic eyes of Jim Burden. He is, at the time of their meeting, newly orphaned and arriving at his grandparents' neighboring farm on the same night her family strikes out to make good in their new country. 1918

Middlesex
Jeffrey Eugenides

"I was born twice: first, as a baby girl...in January of 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy...in August of 1974." Thus starts the epic tale of how Calliope Stephanides is transformed into Cal. Spanning three generations and two continents, the story winds from the small Greek village of Smyrna to the smoggy, crime-riddled streets of Detroit, past historical events, and through family secrets. The author's eloquent writing captures the essence of Cal, a hermaphrodite, who sets out to discover himself by tracing the story of his family back to his grandparents. Pulitzer prize, 2003

Plainsong
Kent Haruf

Tom Guthrie is a high school teacher whose wife can't--or won't--get out of bed; the McPherons are two bachelor brothers who know little about the world beyond their farm gate; Victoria Roubideaux is a

pregnant 17-year-old with no place to turn. Their lives parallel each other in much the same way any small-town lives would--until Maggie Jones, another teacher, makes them intersect. Even as she tries to draw Guthrie out of his black cloud, she sends Victoria to live with the two elderly McPheron brothers, who know far more about cattle than about teenage girls. 1999

Ursula, Under
Ingrid Hill

Annie and Justin Wong, who live in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, are on a day trip exploring the area where Annie's Finnish great-grandfather died in a mine collapse in 1926. Suddenly their only child, Ursula, disappears down an abandoned shaft, setting off a monumental rescue attempt and accompanying media frenzy. The author leaves that predictable plot behind, focusing instead on the young girl's many ancestors--those with the most interest in her safe return. A second-century B.C.E. Chinese alchemist, a deaf Finnish peasant living in 700 C.E., the child born to a crippled Chinese girl in the 1600s, and more--"a crowd of all the people whose blood and lives went into this little girl," brought vividly to life. 2004

Sanctuary
Faye Kellerman

Orthodox Jewish housewife Rina Lazarus and her husband-and convert to Judaism-LAPD Detective Sergeant Peter Decker have their hands full in their seventh adventure. While Peter and his partner, Det. Marge Dunn, investigate the disappearance of prosperous diamond dealer Arik Yalom, his wife and their teenage sons, Rina plays hostess to Honey Klein, visiting from New York with her children and obviously escaping problems with her Hasidic diamond-dealer husband, Gershon. When the bodies of the older Yaloms are found buried on a local mountainside, their sons are seen as possible suspects or potential victims fleeing for their lives. 1994

Wicked
Gregory Maguire

Elphaba, the future Wicked Witch of the West, has gotten a bum rap. Her mother is embarrassed and repulsed by her bright-green baby with shark's teeth and an aversion to water. At college, the coed experiences disapproval and rejection by her roommate, Glinda, a silly girl interested only in clothes, money, and popularity. Elphaba is a serious and inquisitive student. When she learns that the Wizard of Oz is politically corrupt and causing economic ruin, Elphaba finds a sense of purpose to her life to stop him and to restore harmony and prosperity to the land. 1995

The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency
Alexander McCall Smith

Tells the story of the delightfully cunning and enormously engaging Precious Ramotswe, who is drawn to her profession to “help people with problems in their lives.” Immediately upon setting up shop in a small storefront in Gaborone, she is hired to track down a missing husband, uncover a con man, and follow a wayward daughter. But the case that tugs at her heart, and lands her in danger, is a missing eleven-year-old boy, who may have been snatched by witchdoctors. 2001

Buffalo Girls
Larry McMurtry

McMurtry, a prolific mythologizer/demythologizer of the Old West, here takes on Calamity Jane (Martha Jane Canary, 1852?-1903)--who confesses in a series of letters to being a drunken hell-raiser but never an outlaw--and sundry larger-than-life cohorts. The author's talent for characterizations and storytelling shines as he depicts gritty events and relationships in the life of fur trappers and Indians who, along with Calamity Jane, must resort to performing in Bill Cody's Wild West show in order to survive. They exploit and are exploited by their frontier lifestyle before being defeated by it in the end. A spellbinding saga with a surprise ending. 1990

Speed of Dark
Elizabeth Moon

Corporate life in early 21st-century America is even more ruthless than it was at the turn of the millennium. Lou Arrendale, well compensated for his remarkable pattern-recognition skills, enjoys his job

and expects never to lose it. But he has a new boss, a man who thinks Lou and the others in his building are a liability. Lou and his coworkers are autistic. And the new boss is going to fire Lou and all his coworkers--unless they agree to undergo an experimental new procedure to "cure" them. 2004

Sula
Toni Morrison

Tells the story of two women--friends since childhood, separated in young adulthood, and reunited as grown women. Nel Wright grows up to become a wife and mother, happy to remain in her hometown of Medallion, Ohio. Sula Peace leaves Medallion to experience college, men, and life in the big city, an exceptional choice for a black woman to make in the late 1920s. As girls, Nel and Sula are the best of friends, only children who find in each other a kindred spirit to share in each girl's loneliness and imagination. When they meet again as adults, it's clear that Nel has chosen a life of acceptance and accommodation, while Sula must fight to defend her seemingly unconventional choices and beliefs. 1973

Mrs. Dalloway
Virginia Woolf

As Clarissa Dalloway walks through London on a fine June morning, a sky-writing plane captures her attention. Crowds stare upwards to decipher the message while the plane turns and loops, leaving off one letter, picking up another. Like the airplane's swooping path, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* follows Clarissa and those whose lives brush hers--from Peter Walsh, whom she spurned years ago, to her daughter Elizabeth, the girl's angry teacher, Doris Kilman, and war-shocked Septimus Warren Smith, who is sinking into madness. 1925

The Red Tent
Anita Diamant

Told in the voice of Jacob's daughter Dinah (who only received a glimpse of recognition in the Book of Genesis), we are privy to the fascinating feminine characters who bled within the red tent. In a confiding and poetic voice, Dinah whispers stories of her four mothers, Rachel, Leah, Zilpah, and Bilhah--all wives to Jacob, and each one embodying unique feminine traits. As she reveals these sensual and emotionally charged stories we learn of birthing miracles, slaves, artisans, household gods, and sisterhood secrets. Eventually Dinah delves into her own saga of betrayals, grief, and a call to midwifery. 1997

Arranged Marriage
Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

In this collection of emotionally fraught short stories, poet Divakaruni relates the travails of Indian women trying to adapt to the often alienating culture of middle-class America. Her mostly young characters-students or brides-are negotiating the schism between Indian values and new possibilities here. She places her characters at the volatile confluence of two conflicting pressures: the obligation to please traditional husbands and families, and the desire to live modern, independent lives. 1995

The Great Gatsby
F. Scott Fitzgerald

A portrait of the Jazz Age in all of its decadence and excess, *Gatsby* captured the spirit of the author's generation and earned itself a permanent place in American mythology. Self-made, self-invented millionaire Jay Gatsby embodies some of Fitzgerald's--and his country's--most abiding obsessions: money, ambition, greed, and the promise of new beginnings. A kind of cautionary tale about the American Dream. 1925

My Brilliant Career
Miles Franklin

Alternately hilarious and heartwarming, this beloved coming-of-age novel from the Australian outback brings together unforgettable characters with clarity and truth, all told in a unique young woman's voice. 1901

Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime
Mark Haddon

Fifteen-year-old Christopher John Francis Boone is mathematically gifted and socially hopeless, raised in a working-class home by parents who can barely cope with their child's quirks. He takes everything that he sees (or is told) at face value, and is unable to sort out the strange behavior of his elders and peers. But when his neighbor's dog is murdered, Christopher begins a journey of growth, shattering his insulated world. 2002

The Kite Runner
Khaled Hosseini

Follows the story of Amir, the privileged son of a wealthy businessman in Kabul, and Hassan, the son of Amir's father's servant. As children in the relatively stable Afghanistan of the early 1970s, the boys are inseparable. They spend idyllic days running kites and telling stories of mystical places and powerful warriors until an unspeakable event changes the nature of their relationship forever, and eventually cements their bond in ways neither boy could have ever predicted. 2003

A Prayer for Owen Meany
John Irving

The narrator tells the life story of Owen, an undersized, brilliant son of a granite quarry man, who foresees his own end. Along the way, the reader experiences growing up in a typical small town and attending prep school during the 50's and 60's. The escalating Vietnamese conflict wreaks havoc for the boys, the school, the town and the world. 1989

The Secret Life of Bees
Sue Monk Kidd

It's 1964, the year of the Civil Rights Act, in Sylvan, S.C. Fourteen-year-old Lily is on the lam with motherly servant Rosaleen, fleeing both Lily's abusive father T. Ray and the police who battered Rosaleen for defending her new right to vote. Lily is also fleeing memories, particularly her jumbled recollection of how, as a frightened four-year-old, she accidentally shot and killed her mother during a fight with T. Ray. Among her mother's possessions, Lily finds a picture of a black Virgin Mary with "Tiburon, S.C." on the back so, blindly, she and Rosaleen head there. 2002

Woman Warrior: memoirs of a girlhood among ghosts
Maxine Hong Kingston

A pungent, bitter, but beautifully written memoir of growing up Chinese American in Stockton, California. Kingston distills the dire lessons of her mother's mesmerizing "talk-story" tales of a China where girls are worthless, tradition is exalted and only a strong, wily woman can scratch her way upward. The author's America is a landscape of confounding white "ghosts"--the policeman ghost, the social worker ghost--with equally rigid, but very different rules. Like the woman warrior of the title, Kingston carries the crimes against her family carved into her back by her parents in testimony to and defiance of the pain. 1976

Women in Love
D.H. Lawrence

The Brangwen sisters, Ursula and Gudrun, fall in love with two very different men, Birkin and Gerald, in a rural mining village in England. Lawrence examines English society and morality through his characters, loosely based on personal friends. Considered shocking at the time of publication, the story is an introspective and psychological inquiry of love, relationships and happiness. 1920

To Kill a Mockingbird
Harper Lee

Scout's father is the town lawyer defending Tom, on a rape charge. We learn about a small Southern town, Scout learns about her wonderful father and racism is exposed for what it is. 1960

Life of Pi
Yann Martel

Pi has a happy life in India, exploring the tenets of the three major religions while enjoying his father's zoo. The family decides to transfer the zoo to Canada via a Japanese freighter, after an explosion, Pi finds himself in a lifeboat with four animal companions, two herbivores and two carnivores. No fairy tale, Pi must live with the surviving tiger, and learn how to eat, drink and survive isolation. 2001

The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency
Alexander McCall Smith

Tells the story of the delightfully cunning and enormously engaging Precious Ramotswe, who is drawn to her profession to "help people with problems in their lives." Immediately upon setting up shop in a small storefront in Gaborone, Botswana, she is hired to track down a missing husband, uncover a con man, and follow a wayward daughter. But the case that tugs at her heart, and lands her in danger, is a missing eleven-year-old boy, who may have been snatched by witchdoctors. 1999

Thousand Pieces of Gold
Ruthann Lum McCunn

Fictionalized story of Polly Bemis, a Chinese woman sold into slavery by her parents, brought to the US and sold as a bride. The Chinese immigrant experience of the late 1800s is explored through a remarkable woman who eventually helped settle Idaho. 1981

The Bluest Eye
Toni Morrison

This tragic study of a black adolescent girl's struggle to achieve white ideals of beauty and her consequent descent into madness was acclaimed as an eloquent indictment of some of the more subtle forms of racism in American society. Pecola Breedlove longs to have "the bluest eye" and thus to be acceptable to her family, schoolmates, and neighbors, all of whom have convinced her that she is ugly. 1970

Catcher in the Rye
J.D. Salinger

Holden Caulfield, the typical adolescent raging against authority and the phony adult world. Thrown out of prep school, he wanders New York City at Christmas time trying to make a connection with someone who is real. This journey is the essential coming-of-age story still read in high school and resonates differently with those of us beyond our teens. 1951

Princess
Jean Sasson

Non-fiction memoir of a Saudi Arabian woman exposing the male dominant culture of today, women are considered inferior and incapable of making decisions. She quietly rebels and is lucky enough to marry a more liberal man. A fascinating and frustrating look at women's plight in Saudi Arabia. 1992

The Stone Diaries
Carol Shields

This fictionalized autobiography of Daisy Goodwill Flett, is captured in Daisy's vivacious yet reflective voice. After a youth marked by sudden death and loss, Daisy escapes into conventionality as a middle-class wife and mother. Years later she becomes a successful garden columnist and experiences the kind of awakening that thousands of her contemporaries in mid-century yearned for but missed in alcoholism, marital infidelity and bridge clubs. The events of Daisy's life, however, are less compelling than her rich, vividly described inner life--from her memories of her adoptive mother to her awareness of impending death. Pulitzer prize, 1995

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn
Betty Smith

Francie is the daughter of immigrants, her mother cleans houses, her father is a singing waiter and a drunk. She longs for education and the love of her parents. Strong females dominate her upbringing and make her a street-smart, hard-working young woman making her own decisions. A glimpse of New York City at the turn of the 20th century with the hardship, joy and quirks of human nature fully realized. 1943

A Confederacy of Dunces
John Kennedy Toole

This 30-year-old medievalist lives at home with his mother in New Orleans, pens his magnum opus on Big Chief writing pads he keeps hidden under his bed, and relays to anyone who will listen the traumatic experience he once had on a Greyhound Scenicruiser bound for Baton Rouge. ("Speeding along in that bus was like hurtling into the abyss.") But Ignatius's quiet life of tyrannizing his mother and writing his endless comparative history screeches to a halt when he is almost arrested by the overeager Patrolman Mancuso--who mistakes him for a vagrant--and then involved in a car accident with his tipsy mother behind the wheel. One thing leads to another, and before he knows it, Ignatius is out pounding the pavement in search of a job. Quirky humor and a tragic end for the author. Pulizer prize, 1980

The House of Mirth
Edith Wharton

"The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth," warns Ecclesiastes 7:4, and so does the novel by Edith Wharton that takes its title from this call to heed. New York at the turn of the century was a time of opulence and frivolity for those who could afford it. But for those who couldn't and yet wanted desperately to keep up with the whirlwind, like Wharton's charming Lily Bart, it was something else altogether: a gilded cage rather than the Gilded Age. From her start as a beautiful woman at the height of her powers to her sad finale as a recently fired milliner's assistant addicted to sleeping drugs, Lily Bart is heroic, not least for her final admission of her own role in her downfall. 1905

Angels and Demons
Dan Brown

A classic race against time to find a hidden bomb and hunt down a serial killer in Rome. As its backdrop, the book debates the question about which is to be trusted - science or religion. It purports to show how the Vatican works as the plot to blow it up is uncovered during the conclave, revealing hidden secrets and mysteries as the story unfolds. 2000

The Virgin of Small Plains
Nancy Pickard

In the midst of a deadly blizzard, eighteen-year-old Rex Shellenberger scours his father's pasture, looking for helpless newborn calves. Then he makes a shocking discovery: the naked, frozen body of a teenage girl, her skin as white as the snow around her. Even dead, she is the most beautiful girl he's ever seen. It is a moment that will forever change his life and the lives of everyone around him. But what really happened in that snow-covered field? Three families and three friends, their worlds inexorably altered in the course of one night, must confront the ever-unfolding consequences of murder. 2006

The History of Love
Nicole Krauss

Leo Gursky is just about surviving, tapping his radiator each evening to let his upstairs neighbor know he's still alive. But life wasn't always like this: sixty years ago, in the Polish village where he was born, Leo fell in love and wrote a book. And though Leo doesn't know it, that book survived, inspiring fabulous circumstances, even love. Fourteen-year-old Alma was named after a character in that very book. And although she has her hands full — keeping track of her brother, Bird (who thinks he might be the Messiah), and taking copious notes on How to Survive in the Wild — she undertakes an adventure to find her namesake and save her family. 2005

Snow Flower and the Secret Fan
Lisa See

Takes place in 19th century China when girls had their feet bound, then spent the rest of their lives in seclusion with only a single window from which to see. Illiterate and isolated, they were not expected to think, be creative, or have emotions. But in one remote county, women developed their own secret code, *nu shu* – "women's writing" – the only gender-based written language to have been found in the world. Some girls were paired as "old-sames" in emotional matches that lasted throughout their lives. They painted letters on

fans, embroidered messages on handkerchiefs, and composed stories, thereby reaching out of their windows to share their hopes, dreams, and accomplishments. 2005

Kindred
Octavia Butler

Dana, a modern black woman, is celebrating her twenty-sixth birthday with her new husband when she is snatched abruptly from her home in California and transported to the antebellum South. Rufus, the white son of a plantation owner, is drowning, and Dana has been summoned across the years to save him. After this first summons, Dana is drawn back, again and again, to the plantation to protect Rufus and ensure that he will grow to manhood and father the daughter who will become Dana's ancestor. Yet each time Dana's sojourns become longer and more dangerous until it is uncertain whether or not her life will end, long before it has even begun. 1979

Field of Darkness
Cornelia Read

Madeline Dare would be the first to tell you her money is so old there's none left. A former socialite from an aristocratic family in decline, Maddie is a tough-talking, would-be journalist exiled to the rust belt of upstate New York. Her prospects for changing her dreary lifestyle seem dim--until a set of dog tags found at a decades-old murder site is linked to her family. Shocked into action, Maddie embarks on a search that takes her from the derelict smokestacks of Syracuse to the posh mansions of Long Island's Gold Coast. But instead of the warm refuge of home, this prodigal daughter soon uncovers dark, sinister secrets that will violently challenge everything she believes in and holds dear. 2006

Jamaica Inn
Daphne Du Maurier

After the death of her mother, Mary Yellan travels to Jamaica Inn on the wild British moors to live with her Aunt Patience. The coachman warns her of the strange happenings there, but Mary is committed to remain at Jamaica Inn. Suddenly, her life is in the hands of strangers: her uncle, Joss Merlyn, whose crude ways repel her; Aunt Patience, who seems mentally unstable and perpetually frightened; and the enigmatic Francis Davey. But most importantly, Mary meets Jem Merlyn, Joss's younger brother, whose kisses make her heart race. Caught up in the danger at this inn of evil repute, Mary must survive murder, mystery, storms, and smugglers before she can build a life with Jem. 1936

Into the Wild
Jon Krakauer

Chris McCandless walked into the deep woods of Alaska in April 1992 and was never again seen alive. Through diaries, interviews with family and acquaintances, and accounts of witnesses, John Krakauer traces the young man's fatal adventure and the life journey that led him to his death in an abandoned bus. 1996

Three Cups of Tea
Greg Mortenson

Anyone who despairs of the individual's power to change lives has to read the story of Greg Mortenson, a homeless mountaineer who, following a 1993 climb of Pakistan's treacherous K2, was inspired by a chance encounter with impoverished mountain villagers and promised to build them a school. Over the next decade he built fifty-five schools—especially for girls—that offer a balanced education in one of the most isolated and dangerous regions on earth. As it chronicles Mortenson's quest, which has brought him into conflict with both enraged Islamists and uncomprehending Americans, *Three Cups of Tea* combines adventure with a celebration of the humanitarian spirit. 2007

Luncheon of the Boating Party
Susan Vreeland

Imagining the banks of the Seine in the thick of *la vie moderne*, Vreeland tracks Auguste Renoir as he conceives, plans and paints the 1880 masterpiece that gives her vivid fourth novel its title. Renoir, then 39, pays the rent on his Montmartre garret by painting "overbred society women in their fussy parlors," but, goaded by negative criticism from Émile Zola, he dreams of doing a breakout work. On July 20, the daughter

of a resort innkeeper close to Paris suggests that Auguste paint from the restaurant's terrace. The party of 13 subjects Renoir puts together (with difficulty) eventually spends several Sundays drinking and flirting under the spell of the painter's brush. Vreeland achieves a detailed and surprising group portrait, individualized and immediate. 2007

Loving Frank
Nancy Horan

It's a rare treasure to find a historically imagined novel that is at once fully versed in the facts and unafraid of weaving those truths into a story that dares to explore the unanswered questions. Frank Lloyd Wright and Mamah Cheney's love story is little-known and often dismissed as scandal. In Nancy Horan's skillful hands, however, what you get is two fully realized people, entirely, irrepressibly, in love. Together, Frank and Mamah are a wholly modern portrait, and while you can easily imagine them in the here and now, it's their presence in the world of early 20th century America that shades how authentic and, ultimately, tragic their story is. Mamah's bright, earnest spirit is particularly tender in the context of her time and place, which afforded her little opportunity to realize the intellectual life for which she yearned. 2007

Reluctant Fundamentalist
Mohsin Hamid

At a café table in Lahore, a bearded Pakistani man converses with an uneasy American stranger. As dusk deepens to night, he begins the tale that has brought them to this fateful encounter ...Changez is living an immigrant's dream of America. At the top of his class at Princeton, he is snapped up by an elite valuation firm. He thrives on the energy of New York, and his budding romance with elegant, beautiful Erica promises entry into Manhattan society at the same exalted level once occupied by his own family back in Lahore. But in the wake of September 11, Changez finds his position in his adopted city suddenly overturned, and his relationship with Erica eclipsed by the reawakened ghosts of her past. And Changez's own identity is in seismic shift as well, unearthing allegiances more fundamental than money, power, and maybe even love. A riveting, brilliantly unsettling exploration of the shadowy, unexpected connections between the political and the personal. 2007

Gertrude Bell: queen of the desert, shaper of nations
Georgina Howell

Explorer, travel writer, translator of Sufi verse, intelligent, devoid of fear, Gertrude Bell was a scholar and a spy whose extraordinary career spanned the heyday of the British Empire and culminated in the creation of Iraq. She seems to have excelled at everything she tried -- except finding someone to fall in love with her. From the outset she was something of a phenomenon. She came from a supremely rich industrialist family in Yorkshire; the Bells were liberal and well-connected. Her perceptive stepmother allowed Gertrude first to attend school, and then go up to Oxford, where her formidable intellect and self-confidence made her the first woman to take a first in Modern History, in 1888. She was later to be the first woman to receive a prize from the Royal Geographical Society and the first woman officer to work for British military intelligence. She was not a feminist, however; she was a leading light in the campaign to deny women the vote. A very interesting life. 2007

Sense and Sensibility
Jane Austen

The Dashwoods, impoverished when their father dies, are forced to live in a small house in the country on 500 pounds a year. With this unfortunate situation, it will be difficult for the elder two, Elinor and Marianne, to find good marriage prospects. Marianne finds herself falling in love with the dashing Willoughby, who might not be all that he appears. Elinor, the more sensible of the two, falls for Edward Ferrars, a match that seems much more suitable. But again, things are not what they seem, in this delicious tale of love. 1811

Atonement
Ian McEwan

It's 1935, and England is experiencing a heat wave, while chaos rules at the Tallis country estate. Mr. Tallis is always at the office; his lovely wife, suffering from migraines, is usually in her darkened bedroom. Their youngest, 13-year-old Briony, a budding writer, keeps busy composing silly romances while waiting for her visiting older siblings and displaced cousins. Brother Leon, a bank clerk, arrives with an unattractive but wealthy friend. Sister Cecilia is home after finishing up at Cambridge, as is the sharp and ambitious Robbie Turner, their cleaning lady's son. The cousins, freckly twin boys and the newly nubile and wholly untrustworthy Lola, are unhappy victims of an impending divorce. All are hoping for a soothing holiday, but things quickly turn bizarrely catastrophic thanks to the highly imaginative but utterly naive and histrionic Briony, who sees something sinister occur between Cecilia and Robbie and wildly overreacts. 2002

A Thousand Splendid Suns
Khalid Hosseini

Mariam is the illegitimate daughter of a maid and a businessman, who is given away in marriage at 15 to Rasheed, a man three times her age; their union is not a loving one. Laila is born to educated, liberal parents in Kabul the night the Communists take over Afghanistan. Adored by her father but neglected in favor of her older brothers by her mother, Laila finds her true love early on in Tariq, a thoughtful, chivalrous boy who lost a leg in an explosion. But when tensions between the Communists and the *mujahideen* make the city unsafe, Tariq and his family flee to Pakistan. A devastating tragedy brings Laila to the house of Rasheed and Mariam, where she is forced to make a horrific choice to secure her future. At the heart of the novel is the bond between Mariam and Laila, two very different women brought together by dire circumstances.
2007

Art of Mending
Elizabeth Berg

Fifty-four-year-old Laura Bartone, the happily married mother of two, is looking forward to her annual family reunion in Minnesota. But her vacation plans are marred when her father is felled by a stroke, and her sister, Caroline, at the urging of a therapist, confronts Laura and her brother with disturbing information about her relationship with their mother. As she details the verbal and physical abuse she was subjected to, Laura and her brother are tempted to write Caroline's confidences off as just another example of her histrionics. Because if what she says is true, what would that mean about their complicity in the family dynamics? 2004

Light on Snow
Anita Shreve

Robert Dillon and his 12-year-old daughter, Nicky, discover a newborn baby abandoned in the snowy woods. As they rush the baby to the hospital, Nicky senses that the vulnerable infant has somehow unleashed her and her father's private demons. Nicky lost her mother and baby sister in an automobile accident more than a year earlier; her father's response to his overwhelming grief was to uproot them from their life in New York and move to rural New Hampshire. He has purposefully isolated himself from the outside world, keeping contact with other people to a minimum. But now the abandoned baby has forced them to act, and the two are suddenly plunged into dealing with the world-weary detective who catches the case and, later, with the distraught mother of the baby, who ends up snowbound in their house for days. Her presence forces Nicky and her father to move beyond their personal tragedy. 2004