

Fiction for Spring

at

THE PORTLAND LIBRARY



"The world is mud-luscious and puddle-wonderful."

~E.E. Cummings

2016.

FIC BEN Benjamin, Melanie. *The Swans of Fifth Avenue.*

The dazzling world of the elite in 1950s and 1960s New York is the setting for this historical fiction. Riding high on his early literary successes, Truman Capote delights in the company of his "swans," a circle of wealthy married women attracted to both his impish charisma and his love of good gossip. Chief among these women is Barbara "Babe" Paley, the always immaculately dressed and groomed wife of CBS president William S. Paley. When a desperate Capote betrays his swans by publishing their darkest secrets, friendships crumble and hearts break.

FIC CHE Chee, Alexander. *The Queen of the Night.*

This is Chee's triumphant return to fiction, set in the glitz and grime of the 19th century Paris Opera. Lilliet Berne is a sensation of the Paris Opera, a legendary soprano with every accolade except an original role, every singer's chance at immortality. When one is finally offered to her, she realizes with alarm that the libretto is based on a hidden piece of her past. Only four could have betrayed her: one is dead, one loves her, one wants to own her. And one, she hopes, never thinks of her at all. Chock full of romance, intrigue, and sprinklings of real history, this is the first truly epic novel of the year.

FIC JAC Jackson, Joshilyn. *The Opposite of Everyone.*

Placed in foster care in the wake of criminal allegations, Paula Vauss grows up to become a tough divorce attorney only to have her life thrown into chaos by an astonishing revelation and a cryptic message from the Hindu storyteller mother she has not seen in 15 years.

FIC MYS JAN Jance, J.A. *Clawback.*

Ali Reynolds faces her most controversial mystery yet, solving the murder of a man whose Ponzi scheme bankrupted hundreds of people, and left them seeking justice...or revenge. When Ali's parents lose their life savings to a Ponzi scheme, her father goes to confront his long-time friend and financial advisor, only to stumble into the scene of a bloody double homicide. With her father suddenly a prime suspect, Ali and her husband work to clear her father's name, while at the same time seeking justice for her parents as well as the scheme's other suddenly impoverished victims, one of whom is a stone cold killer.

FIC JOH Johnson, Julia. *Be Frank with Me.*

Reluctantly hired into the home of a famed reclusive writer who would recapture her lost fortunes by completing a new manuscript, Alice Whitley becomes obsessed with identifying the paternity of her employer's precocious young son, Frank, an eccentric nine-year-old, a boy with the wit of Noel Coward, the wardrobe of a 1930s movie star, and very little in common with his fellow fourth-graders.

FIC MYS LEO Leon, Donna. *The Waters of Eternal Youth.*

Commissario Guido Brunetti, the Venetian inspector, has been called on to investigate many things, from shocking to petty crimes. Brunetti finds himself drawn into a case that may not be a case at all. Fifteen years ago, a teenage girl fell into a canal late at night. Unable to swim, she went under and started to drown, only surviving thanks to a nearby man, an alcoholic, who heard her splashes and pulled her out, though not before she suffered irreparable brain damage. Now, at a fundraising dinner for a Venetian charity, a wealthy and aristocratic patroness—the girl's grandmother—asks Brunetti if he will investigate. Brunetti's not sure what to do. If a crime was committed, it would surely have passed the statute of limitations. But out of a mixture of curiosity,

pity, and a willingness to fulfill the wishes of a guilt-wracked older woman, who happens to be his mother-in-law's best friend, he agrees. Brunetti soon finds himself unable to let the case rest.

FIC MCK McKenzie, Elizabeth. *The Portable Veblen.*

This original novel is as big-hearted as it is laugh-out-loud funny. Set in and around Palo Alto, amid the culture clash of new money and old (antiestablishment) values, and with the specter of our current wars looming across its pages, *The Portable Veblen* is an unforgettable look at the way we live now. A young couple on the brink of marriage, the charming Veblen and her fiancé Paul, a brilliant neurologist, find their engagement in danger of collapse. Along the way they weather everything from each other's dysfunctional families, to the attentions of a seductive pharmaceutical heiress, to an intimate conversation with a very charismatic squirrel.

FIC MIL Millet, Lydia. *Mermaids in Paradise.*

Absurdity and paranoia permeate the latest novel from Millet, which follows a newlywed couple on their honeymoon at a resort in the Caribbean. Deb and Chip embody the modern American dream: they float above life, buoyed by career success, good looks, and booze. A couple of days into their vacation, a marine biologist, Nancy, disrupts their getaway when she chances upon a group of mermaids in the resort's coral reef. After dispelling initial doubts, Nancy insists that the small crew that found the mermaids proceed with caution. She fears that if the information is leaked, hordes of reporters will descend on the island, endangering the mermaids and their reef home. Panic ensues when Nancy dies the following day in a suspicious drowning incident. The crew brainstorms how to save the mythical creatures—namely with videos, social media, and celebrity connections. With equal parts calculated wryness and pleading earnestness, Millet delivers a thrilling piece of fabulist fiction.

FIC NIC Nicholls, David. *US.*

In his picaresque fourth novel, Nicholls artfully unveils 25 years of a couple's relationship. Shortly before Douglas Petersen, his wife, Connie, and their 17-year-old son, Albie, are to take a "Grand Tour" of Europe, Connie makes a surprising announcement: She thinks their marriage "has run its course" and is thinking about leaving. Connie is panicked at the thought of Albie going to college at the end of summer, leaving her and Douglas alone in the house. Douglas, a straight-laced biochemist came along at a time when Connie, artistic and free-spirited but directionless, needed someone sensible. Despite the announcement, Connie still wants to take this holiday together, and as their journey begins, so does Douglas' examination of his marriage. Part travelogue, part personal history, Douglas' first-person narration intersperses humorous observations of their travels with his wistful recounting of their back story, from his unlikely courtship to his recent positioning as a misfit in his family of three.

FIC STR Straub, Emma. *The Vacationers.*

Celebrating their thirty-fifth anniversary and their daughter's high-school graduation during a two-week vacation in Mallorca, Franny and Jim Post confront old secrets, hurts, and rivalries that reveal sides of themselves they try to conceal. Straub refreshes a conventional plot through droll humor and depth of character. She has all the predictable elements in place: family and close friends gathering at an exotic remove from their daily lives, reveal secrets (and articulate unacknowledged truths), learn how well they know each other and how well they don't, discover which relationships will endure—even strengthen—and which will dissolve. At the end of the idyll—in this case two weeks on the Spanish island of Mallorca—all will return transformed.

FIC MYS ROS Rosenfelt, David. *Blackout.*

New Jersey state police officer Doug Brock has been after infamous criminal Nicholas Bennett for years. When Bennett kills someone close to Doug, however, Doug's investigation--and his life--start spiraling out of control. He's placed on indefinite suspension from the police force but he can't let the case go, and he continues an off-the-books investigation on his own. When Doug's former partner on the force, Nate Alvarez, receives a call from Doug saying he's discovered something big, something terrifying, something they need to call in the FBI to handle, Nate is furious that Doug has still been working the case.

FIC STR Strout, Elizabeth. *My Name is Lucy Barton*

Lucy Barton is recovering slowly from what should have been a simple operation. Her mother, to whom she hasn't spoken for many years, comes to see her. Gentle gossip about people from Lucy's childhood in Amgash, Illinois, seems to reconnect them, but just below the surface lay the tension and longing that have informed every aspect of Lucy's life: her escape from her troubled family, her desire to become a writer, her marriage, her love for her two daughters. Knitting this powerful narrative together is the brilliant storytelling voice of Lucy herself: keenly observant, deeply human, and truly unforgettable.

FIC WEI Weir, Andy. *The Martian.*

Weir combines the heart-stopping with the humorous in this brilliant debut novel about an astronaut stranded on Mars. An edge-of-your seat debut thriller with laugh-out-loud dialogue mixed in. After a bad storm cuts his team's Mars mission short, injured astronaut Mark Watley is stranded. Now he's got to figure out how to survive without air, shelter, food, or water on the harsh Martian landscape until the next manned mission in four years. It's Science Fiction with a capital S, but Weir does a fabulous job of making it accessible to non-science geeks. Sharp, funny and thrilling, with just the right amount of geekery.

*** Annotations acquired from Novelist
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