Fiction

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Books



Speak
by Laurie Halse Anderson
Melinda Sordino busted an end-of-summer party by calling the cops. Now her old friends won't talk to her, and people she doesn't even know hate her from a distance. The safest place to be is alone, inside her own head. But even that's not safe. Because there's something she's trying not to think about, something about the night of the party that, if she let it in, would blow her carefully constructed disguise to smithereens. And then she would have to speak the truth. This extraordinary first novel has captured the imaginations of teenagers and adults across the country.



The Elegance of the Hedgehog
by Muriel Barbery
An enchanting New York Times and international bestseller about life, art, literature, philosophy, culture, class, privilege, and power, seen through the eyes of a 54-year old French concierge and a precocious but troubled 12-year-old girl. A moving, funny, triumphant novel that exalts the quiet victories of the inconspicuous among us.



The Virgin Suicides: A Novel
by Jeffrey Eugenides
Eugenides's tantalizing, macabre first novel begins with a suicide, the first of the five bizarre deaths of the teenage daughters in the Lisbon family; the rest of the work, set in the author's native Michigan in the early 1970s, is a backward-looking quest as the male narrator and his nosy, horny pals describe how they strove to understand the odd clan of this first chapter, which appeared in the Paris Review , where it won the 1991 Aga Khan Prize for fiction. The sensationalism of the subject matter (based loosely on a factual account) may be off-putting to some readers, but Eugenides's voice is so fresh and compelling, his powers of observation so startling and acute, that most will be mesmerized. The title derives from a song by the fictional rock band Cruel Crux, a favorite of the Lisbon daughter Lux--who, unlike her sisters Therese, Mary, Bonnie and Cecilia, is anything but a virgin by the tale's end. Her mother forces Lux to burn the album along with others she considers dangerously provocative. Mr. Lisbon, a mild-mannered high school math teacher, is driven to resign by parents who believe his control of their children may be as deficient as his control of his own brood. Eugenides risks sounding sophomoric in his attempt to convey the immaturity of high-school boys; while initially somewhat discomfiting, the narrator's voice (representing the collective memories of the group) acquires the ring of authenticity. The author is equally convincing when he describes the older locals' reactions to the suicide attempts. Under the narrator's goofy, posturing banter are some hard truths: mortality is a fact of life; teenage girls are more attracted to brawn than to brains (contrary to the testimony of the narrator's male relatives). This is an auspicious debut from an imaginative and talented writer.



Faces in the Water
by Janet Frame
Miss Frame shows an insight into the minds and lives of other patients which brings them back into the scope of art. And her skill at penetrating the feelings of the staff unites patients and staff in such a way as to make them all, however whirling, members of the same tragic microcosm.



So Much to Tell You
by Janet Frame
Marina, a 14 year old living at a boarding school in Australia, has been facially disfigured under circumstances which are gradually revealed. Since that terrible event, she has not spoken. An English teacher makes diary writing a class assignment; the diary, this novel, becomes Marina's "voice." Still, she remains withdrawn and nurses a great bitterness toward the world. Initially, she rejects the overtures of her dorm mates. With time, she shares in group responsibilities and discovers that her dorm mates--even the "golden" ones--have problems. Eventually, Marina is able to accept affection, friendship, and her own growing interest in school and social life. As the novel's pace quickens, she confronts her feelings toward her father, who had intended to attack his unfaithful wife with acid; Marina was the mistaken victim. Marina realizes that, despite everything, she feels forgiveness and compassion for her father. Marsden is a master storyteller. His characterizations--especially of young people--are interesting and believable. The descriptions of the girls' relationships are humorous and moving. There are faint echoes here of Richard D'Ambrosio's No Language But a Cry. (Dell , 1971), a popular nonfiction YA title. This is an intelligent work of literature which is satisfying both intellectually and emotionally.



I Never Promised You a Rose Garden
by Joanne Greenberg
Enveloped in the dark inner kingdom of her schizophrenia, sixteen-year-old Deborah is haunted by private tormentors that isolate her from the outside world. With the reluctant and fearful consent of her parents, she enters a mental hospital where she will spend the next three years battling to regain her sanity with the help of a gifted psychiatrist. As Deborah struggles toward the possibility of the "normal" life she and her family hope for, the reader is inexorably drawn into her private suffering and deep determination to confront her demons. A modern classic, I Never Promised You a Rose Garden remains every bit as poignant, gripping, and relevant today as when it was first published.



Ordinary People
by Judith Guest
The Jarrets are a typical American family. Calvin is a determined, successful provider and Beth an organized, efficient wife. They had two sons, Conrad and Buck, but now they have one. In this memorable, moving novel, Judith Guest takes the reader into their lives to share their misunderstandings, pain... and ultimate healing.



A Long Way Down
by Nick Hornby
At its heart, A Long Way Down isn't really about suicide itself anyway. All four principal characters come down from the rooftop together and alive -- at least on that first evening. It's more about what happens when you don't kill yourself, and the tale Hornby subsequently tells is an unusual and unpredictable one. The book begins with an epigraph from the novelist Elizabeth McCracken -- "The cure for unhappiness is happiness, I don't care what anyone says" -- but in what follows Hornby doesn't confuse the simplicity of this thought with the impossibility of sometimes living it. For all his light touches, he is never superficial enough to suggest that these lives that have fallen apart, in four of the millions of ways lives may do so, can easily be patched up and renewed. Whatever limited consolations the book's survivors find in each other, Hornby resists melodramatic resolutions or glorious moments of redemption, and he doesn't smuggle away or refute all the reasons his characters took with them to the rooftop where they met, the ones that urged them toward the edge rather than down to the ground the slow way, back into the world.



One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
by Ken Kesey
Boisterous, ribald, and ultimately shattering, Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is the seminal novel of the 1960s that has left an indelible mark on the literature of our time. Here is the unforgettable story of a mental ward and its inhabitants, especially the tyrannical Big Nurse Ratched and Randle Patrick McMurphy, the brawling, fun-loving new inmate who resolves to oppose her. We see the struggle through the eyes of Chief Bromden, the seemingly mute half-Indian patient who witnesses and understands McMurphy's heroic attempt to do battle with the awesome powers that keep them all imprisoned.



I Know This Much is True
by Wally Lamb
I Know This Much is True never grapples with anything less than life's biggest questions....a modern-day Dostoyevsky with a pop sensibility. In his view, it's not just the present that's the pits...it's also the ghosts of dysfunctional family members and your non-relationship with a mocking, sadistic God, whom you still turn to in times of trouble -- which is all the time.



The Hour I First Believed
by Wally Lamb
Wally Lamb's two previous novels, She's Come Undone and I Know This Much Is True, struck a chord with readers. They responded to the intensely introspective nature of the books, and to their lively narrative styles and biting humor. One critic called Wally Lamb a "modern-day Dostoyevsky," whose characters struggle not only with their respective pasts, but with a "mocking, sadistic God" in whom they don't believe but to whom they turn, nevertheless, in times of trouble (New York Times).
In The Hour I First Believed, Lamb travels well beyond his earlier work and embodies in his fiction myth, psychology, family history stretching back many generations, and the questions of faith that lie at the heart of everyday life. The result is an extraordinary tour de force, at once a meditation on the human condition and an unflinching yet compassionate evocation of character.



She's Come Undone
by Wally Lamb
"Mine is a story of craving: an unreliable account of lusts and troubles that began, somehow, in 1956 on the day our free television was delivered...."
Meet Dolores Price. She's 13, wise-mouthed but wounded, having bid her childhood goodbye. Beached like a whale in front of her bedroom TV, she spends the next few years nourishing herself with the Mallomars, potato chips, and Pepsi her anxious mother supplies. When she finally rolls into young womanhood at 257 pounds, Dolores is no stronger and life is no kinder. But this time she's determined to rise to the occasion and give herself one more chance before really going belly-up.
In this extraordinary coming-of-age odyssey, Wally Lamb invites us to hitch a wild ride on a journey of love, pain, renewal with the most heartbreakingly comical heroine to come along in years. At once a fragile girl and a hard-edged cynic, so tough to love yet so inimitably lovable, Dolores is as poignantly real as our own imperfections.



Cut
by Patricia McCormick
Fifteen-year-old Callie isn't speaking to anybody, not even to her therapist at Sea Pines, the "residential treatment facility" where her parents and doctor sent her after discovering that she cuts herself. As her story unfolds, Callie reluctantly become involved with the other "guests" at Sea Pines -- finding her voice and confronting the trauma that triggered her behavior.



Lisa, Bright and Dark
by John Neufeld
Hailed as a "work of art" by the New York Times, this bestselling classic brings a deft touch and understanding spirit to the story of a teenage girl's descent into madness-and the three friends who are determined to walk with her where adults fear to tread.



The Pact: A Love Story
by Jodi Picoult
From Jodi Picoult, one of the most powerful writers in contemporary fiction, comes a riveting, timely, heartbreaking, and terrifying novel of families in anguish—and friendships ripped apart by inconceivable violence. Until the phone calls came at 3:00 a.m. on a November morning, the Golds and their neighbors, the Hartes, had been inseparable. It was no surprise to anyone when their teenage children, Chris and Emily, began showing signs that their relationship was moving beyond that of lifelong friends. But now seventeen-year-old Emily has been shot to death by her beloved and devoted Chris as part of an apparent suicide pact—leaving two devastated families stranded in the dark and dense predawn, desperate for answers about an unthinkable act and the children they never really knew.



The Bell Jar
by Sylvia Plath
The Bell Jar is a classic of American literature, with over two million copies sold in this country. This extraordinary work chronicles the crack-up of Esther Greenwood: brilliant, beautiful, enormously talented, successful - but slowly going under, and maybe for the last time. Step by careful step, Sylvia Plath takes us with Esther through a painful month in New York as a contest-winning junior editor on a magazine, her increasingly strained relationships with her mother and the boy she dated in college, and eventually, devastatingly, into the madness itself. The reader is drawn into her breakdown with such intensity that her insanity becomes completely real and even rational, as probable and accessible an experience as going to the movies. Such deep penetration into the dark and harrowing corners of the psyche is rare in any novel. It points to the fact that The Bell Jar is a largely autobiographical work about Plath's own summer of 1953, when she was a guest editor at Mademoiselle and went through a breakdown. It reveals so much about the sources of Sylvia Plath's own tragedy that its publication was considered a landmark in literature.



Drowning Ruth
by Christina Schwartz
Deftly written and emotionally powerful, Drowning Ruth is a stunning portrait of the ties that bind sisters together and the forces that tear them apart, of the dangers of keeping secrets and the explosive repercussions when they are exposed. A mesmerizing and achingly beautiful debut.
Winter, 1919. Amanda Starkey spends her days nursing soldiers wounded in the Great War. Finding herself suddenly overwhelmed, she flees Milwaukee and retreats to her family's farm on Nagawaukee Lake, seeking comfort with her younger sister, Mathilda, and three-year-old niece, Ruth. But very soon, Amanda comes to see that her old home is no refuge--she has carried her troubles with her. On one terrible night almost a year later, Amanda loses nearly everything that is dearest to her when her sister mysteriously disappears and is later found drowned beneath the ice that covers the lake. When Mathilda's husband comes home from the war, wounded and troubled himself, he finds that Amanda has taken charge of Ruth and the farm, assuming her responsibility with a frightening intensity. Wry and guarded, Amanda tells the story of her family in careful doses, as anxious to hide from herself as from us the secrets of her own past and of that night.
Ruth, haunted by her own memory of that fateful night, grows up under the watchful eye of her prickly and possessive aunt and gradually becomes aware of the odd events of her childhood. As she tells her own story with increasing clarity, she reveals the mounting toll that her aunt's secrets exact from her family and everyone around her, until the heartrending truth is uncovered. Guiding us through the lives of the Starkey women, Christina Schwarz's first novel shows her compassion and a unique understanding of the American landscape and the people who live on it.



Lie Down in Darkness
by William Styron
William Styron traces the betrayals and infidelities—the heritage of spite and endlessly disappointed love—that afflict the members of a Southern family and that culminate in the suicide of the beautiful Peyton Loftis.



The Glass Menagerie
by Tennessee Williams
No play in the modern theatre has so captured the imagination and heart of the American public as Tennessee Williams's The Glass Menagerie. Menagerie was Williams's first popular success and launched the brilliant, if somewhat controversial, career of our pre-eminent lyric playwright. Since its premiere in Chicago in 1944, with the legendary Laurette Taylor in the role of Amanda, the play has been the bravura piece for great actresses from Jessica Tandy to Joanne Woodward, and is studied and performed in classrooms and theatres around the world. The Glass Menagerie (in the reading text the author preferred) is now available only in its New Directions Paperbook edition. A new introduction by prominent Williams scholar Robert Bray, editor of The Tennessee Williams Annual Review, reappraises the play more than half a century after it won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award: "More than fifty years after telling his story of a family whose lives form a triangle of quiet desperation, Williams's mellifluous voice still resonates deeply and universally." This edition of The Glass Menagerie also includes Williams's essay on the impact of sudden fame on a struggling writer, "The Catastrophe of Success," as well as a short section of Williams's own "Production Notes." The cover features the classic line drawing by Alvin Lustig, originally done for the 1949 New Directions edition.



Revolutionary Road
by Richard Yates
In the hopeful 1950s, Frank and April Wheeler appear to be a model couple: bright, beautiful, talented, with two young children and a starter home in the suburbs. Perhaps they married too young and started a family too early. Maybe Frank's job is dull. And April never saw herself as a housewife. Yet they have always lived on the assumption that greatness is only just around the corner. But now that certainty is about to crumble.
With heartbreaking compassion and remorseless clarity, Richard Yates shows how Frank and April mortgage their spiritual birthright, betraying not only each other, but their best selves.

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