

ROMANTIC READS

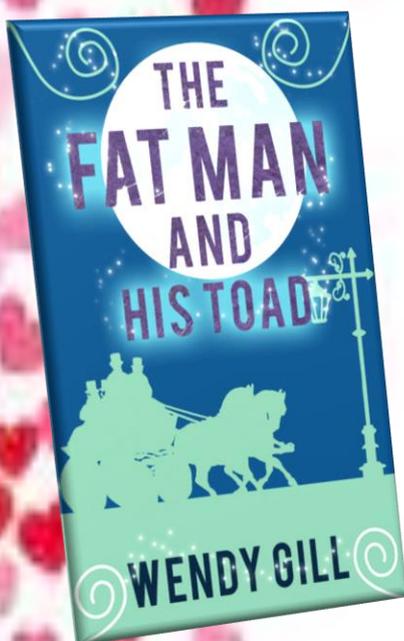


Whatever your relationship status — "it's complicated," partnered, or just pining for that special someone — the Learning Curve have scoured the romance section of our fiction shelves and picked out the best books to read this February for Valentines Day.

There are epic love stories for the old-school romantics, modern tales of finding romance, and books about why it's totally fine just to be single.

All of these books can be borrowed from the library, using our Click & Collect Service, once the current lockdown has finished.

Grab some chocolates, a glass of your favourite wine, and enjoy!



The Fat Man and His Toad by Wendy Gill

Harriett's marriage to Lord Planter does not have an auspicious start. Planter is tricked into marriage by Harriett's stepfather and Harriett is beaten into submission by her stepfather and stepbrother – or 'The Fat Man and His Toad' as she calls them. The bullying pair hope this marriage will reap them financial rewards at the expense of Planter.

However, Harriett is determined and will not give in to either the bullying from them or the indifference from her new husband. Her independence comes through when she gets involved in the affairs of the farm that forms part of her husband's estate and later, more dramatically, the dangerous rescue of a young man.

Gradually the barriers between Harriett and her husband break down. Grudging respect becomes affection, and although both are still wary of the other's feelings, they realise affection has become something more – something they cannot reveal as love because of the fears of rejection.

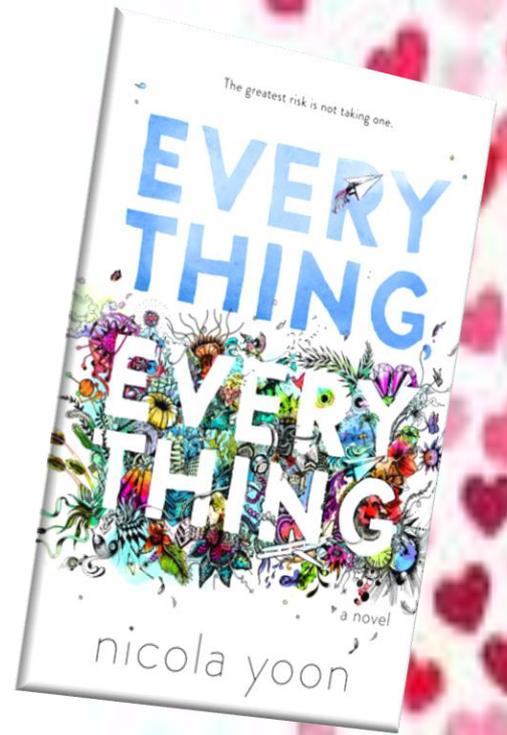
There are still difficulties to overcome before, finally, their love for each other can be declared.

Everything, Everything by Nicola Yoon

My disease is as rare as it is famous. It's a form of Severe Combined Immunodeficiency, but basically, I'm allergic to the world. I don't leave my house, have not left my house in fifteen years. The only people I ever see are my mom and my nurse, Carla.

But then one day, a moving truck arrives. New next door neighbours. I look out the window, and I see him. He's tall, lean and wearing all black—black t-shirt, black jeans, black sneakers and a black knit cap that covers his hair completely. He catches me looking and stares at me. I stare right back. His name is Olly. I want to learn everything about him, and I do. I learn that he is funny and fierce. I learn that his eyes are Atlantic Ocean-blue and that his vice is stealing silverware. I learn that when I talk to him, my whole world opens up, and I feel myself starting to change—starting to want things. To want out of my bubble. To want everything, everything the world has to offer.

Maybe we can't predict the future, but we can predict some things. For example, I am certainly going to fall in love with Olly. It's almost certainly going to be a disaster.



After by Anna Todd

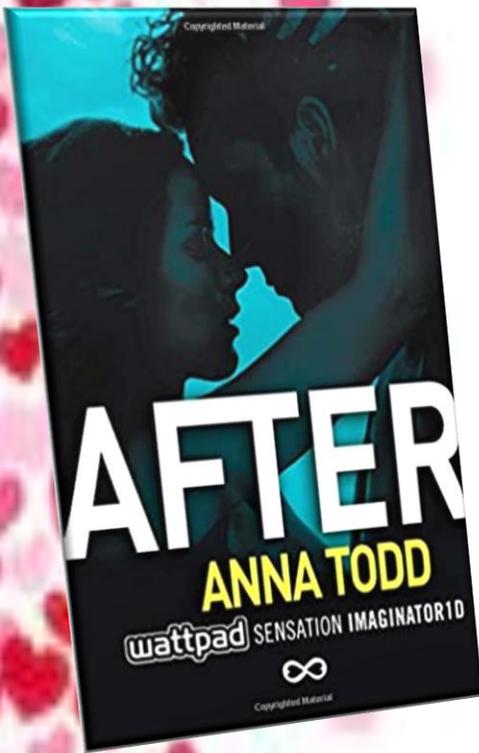
Tessa is a good girl with a sweet, reliable boyfriend back home. She's got direction, ambition, and a mother who's intent on keeping her that way. But she's barely moved into her freshman dorm when she runs into Hardin. With his tousled brown hair, cocky British accent, tattoos, and lip ring, Hardin is cute and different from what she's used to.

But he's also rude—to the point of cruelty, even. For all his attitude, Tessa should hate Hardin. And she does—until she finds herself alone with him in his room. Something about his dark mood grabs her, and when they kiss it ignites within her a passion she's never known before.

He'll call her beautiful, then insist he isn't the one for her and disappear again and again. Despite the reckless way he treats her, Tessa is compelled to dig deeper and find the real Hardin beneath all his lies. He pushes her away again and again, yet every time she pushes back, he only pulls her in deeper.

Tessa already has the perfect boyfriend. So why is she trying so hard to overcome her own hurt pride and Hardin's prejudice about nice girls like her? Unless...could this be love?

There was the time before Tessa met Hardin, and then there's everything AFTER ... Life will never be the same.

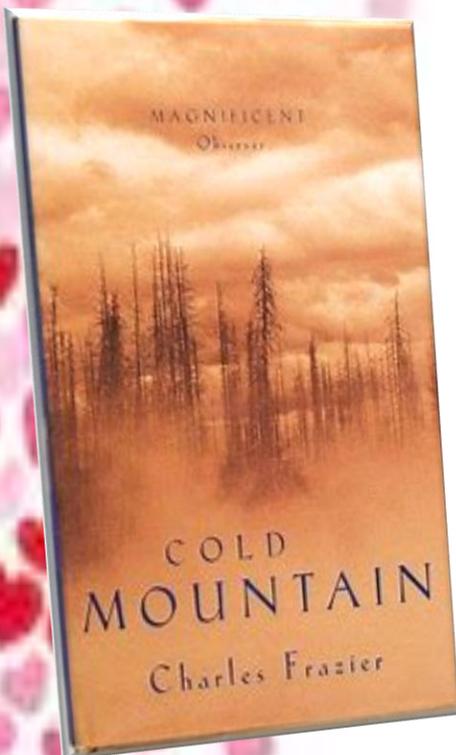
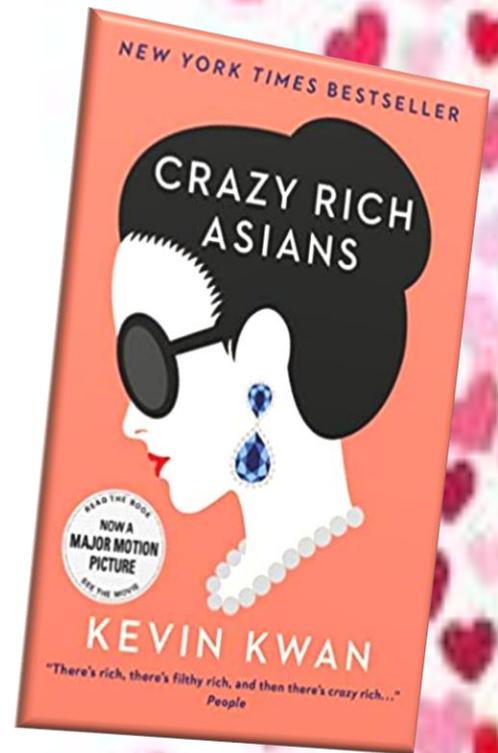


Crazy Rich Asians by Kevin Kwan

Crazy Rich Asians is the outrageously funny debut novel about three super-rich, pedigreed Chinese families and the gossip, backbiting, and scheming that occurs when the heir to one of the most massive fortunes in Asia brings home his ABC (American-born Chinese) girlfriend to the wedding of the season.

When Rachel Chu agrees to spend the summer in Singapore with her boyfriend, Nicholas Young, she envisions a humble family home, long drives to explore the island, and quality time with the man she might one day marry. What she doesn't know is that Nick's family home happens to look like a palace, that she'll ride in more private planes than cars, and that with one of Asia's most eligible bachelors on her arm, Rachel might as well have a target on her back.

Initiated into a world of dynastic splendour beyond imagination, Rachel meets Astrid, the It Girl of Singapore society; Eddie, whose family practically lives in the pages of the Hong Kong socialite magazines; and Eleanor, Nick's formidable mother, a woman who has very strong feelings about who her son should--and should not--marry. Uproarious, addictive, and filled with jaw-dropping opulence, Crazy Rich Asians is an insider's look at the Asian JetSet; a perfect depiction of the clash between old money and new money; between Overseas Chinese and Mainland Chinese; and a fabulous novel about what it means to be young, in love, and gloriously, crazily rich.



Cold Mountain by Charles Frazier

Cold Mountain is a novel about a soldier's perilous journey back to his beloved near the Civil War's end. At once a love story & a harrowing account of one man's long walk home, Cold Mountain introduces a new talent in American literature.

Based on local history & family stories passed down by Frazier's great-great-grandfather, Cold Mountain is the tale of a wounded Confederate soldier, Inman, who walks away from the ravages of the war & back home to his pre-war sweetheart, Ada. His odyssey thru the devastated landscape of the soon-to-be-defeated South interweaves with Ada's struggle to revive her father's farm, with the help of an intrepid young drifter named Ruby. As their long-separated lives begin to converge at the close of the war, Inman & Ada confront the vastly transformed world they've been delivered.

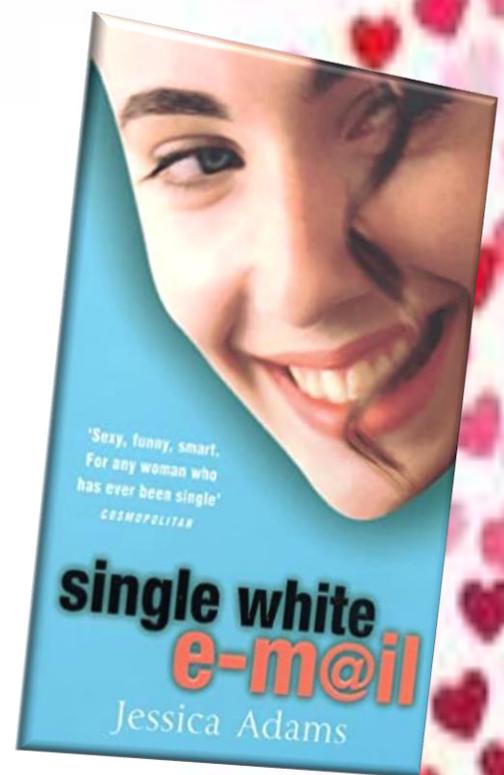
Frazier reveals insight into human relations with the land & the dangers of solitude. He also shares with the great 19th century novelists a keen observation of a society undergoing change. Cold Mountain recreates a world gone by that speaks to our time.



Single White E-Mail by Jessica Adams

Saturday night is a nightmare when you're single. Saturday night is for couples and everyone knows it.

Victoria 'Total Bloody Relationships Disaster' Shepworth is single and knows all about Saturday nights alone. A broken relationship with the guy she thought was 'the one' has led to a string of disastrous dates. Now she's fed-up with being on her own and is once again in search of the man of her dreams. But life begins to look decidedly more interesting when she becomes involved in an internet romance with glamorous Frenchman, Pierre Dubois. Little does she know he could be closer than she thinks...



Gripless by Sophie Hannah

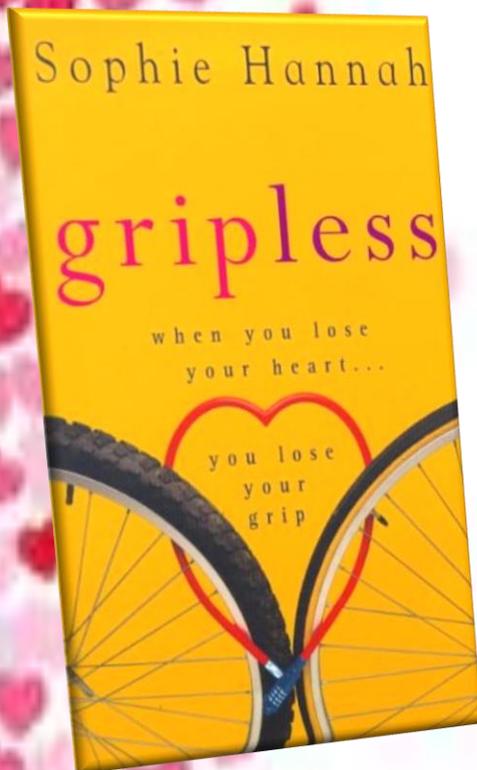
Belinda is intelligent, lives with her boyfriend and has just begun her dream job as a teacher of creative writing at the exclusive private school, Beasdale.

Tony, although gorgeous, has no social skills, has a tendency towards schizophrenic behaviour and has only just scraped a place on the school's Summer Theatre Course.

It's an unlikely basis for a stomach-churning love affair, but as Belinda is at pains to point out, when someone has The Glow, you follow them to the ends of the earth. Her determination to make Tony hers knows no bounds and she devises many a hair brained scheme to make things go her way, including toying with the affections of an even younger pupil. It is unbecoming behaviour for a school teacher but, as it turns out, she's not the only one half crazed with love.

Blackmail, murder, anorexic philosophers and closet homosexual lust soon take centre stage, despite the common consensus that the play must go on.

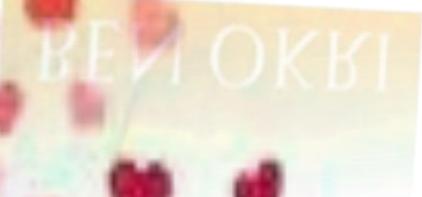
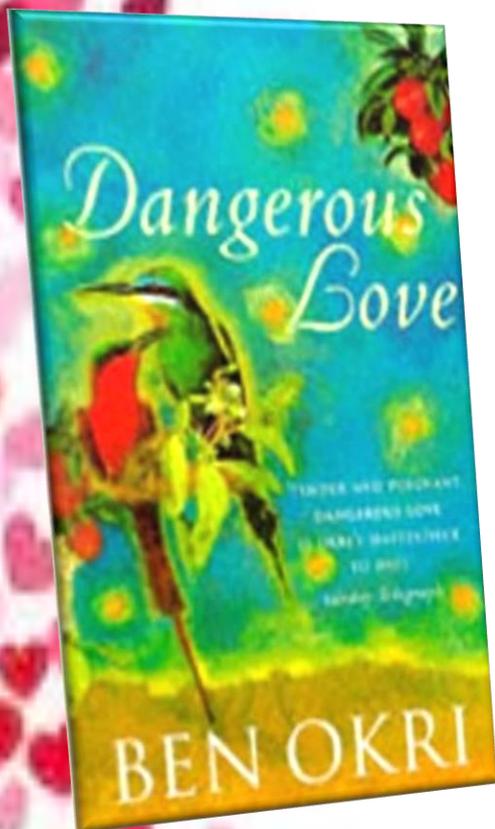
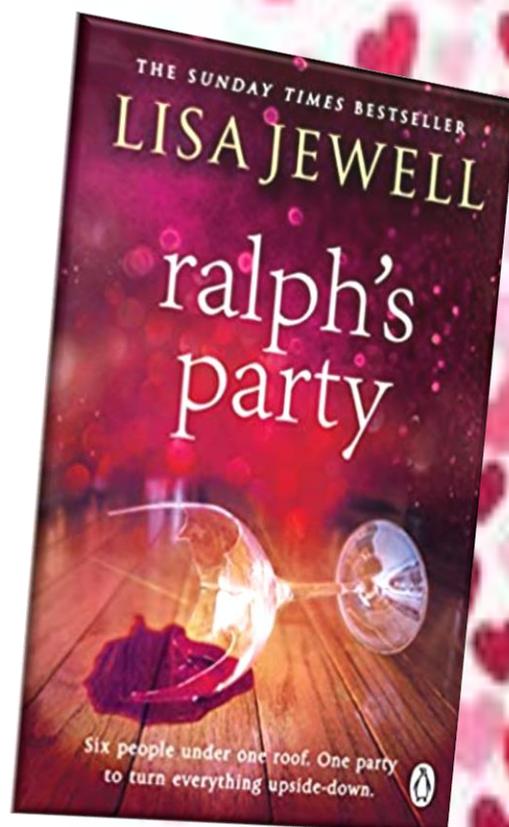
As you might have guessed, this is not the most serious of literary endeavours. But it is considerably better than most giggly girly chattering on the subject of love and other distractions. Belinda's sharp and sassy voice is scathingly entertaining, and if the book occasionally degenerates into farce, it is all the more fun for doing so.



Ralph's Party by Lisa Jewell

Meet the residents of the London brownstone on 31 Almanac Road who together weave a tangled web of romance. Ralph, a ne'er-do-well artist, suddenly realizes he's head over heels in love with his new flatmate Jem, the most fun and sensible girl he's ever encountered. Unfortunately, Ralph's best friend, Smith, has already won Jem's affections, although Smith has not entirely given up his passion for the femme fatale, Cheri, who lives upstairs. Across the hall, Karl and Siobhan have been happily unmarried for years, until Karl gets a smashing job as a London rush-hour DJ and momentarily gets tempted into Cheri's cosy lair.

These six star-crossed tenants become more enamoured, and more confused, as the story progresses-until their true destinies are revealed on one crucial night-the evening of the extravaganza that is . . . Ralph's party. This wonderfully hip new novel was an instant popular success when it was first published in England, and American readers were captivated by the debut of a talented new writer.



Dangerous Love by Ben Okri

In the communal world of the compound in which he lives, Omovo has many friends and some enemies, but most important of all there is Ifeyiwa, a beautiful young married woman who he loves with an almost hopeless passion - not because she doesn't return his love, but because they can never be together.

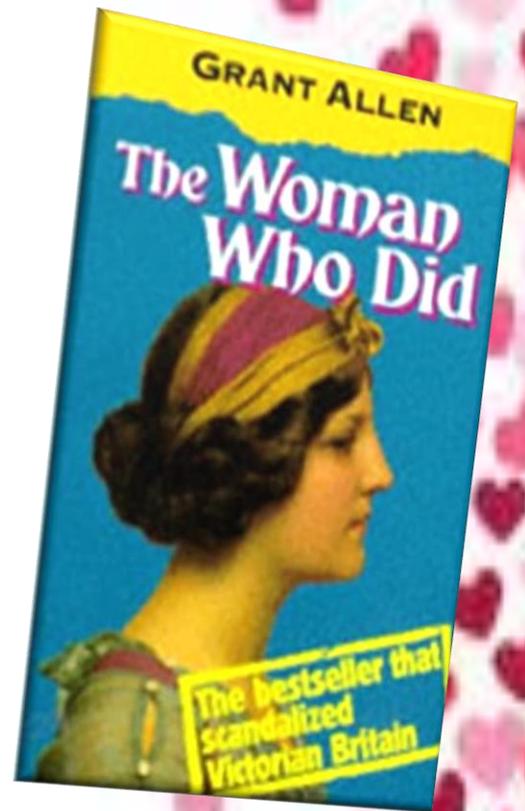
Ben Okri builds a vivid picture of Nigerian life: of the compound with its complete lack of privacy, the gossip, the good times, the street life, the complex nature of family relationships and the kindness and treachery of friends. Overshadowing everything, is the image of a nation struggling to come to terms with the atrocity of the recent civil war, the echoes of which pre-age the story's tragic conclusion.

The Woman Who Did by Grant Allen

Herminia Barton, the Cambridge-educated daughter of a clergyman, frees herself from her parents' influence, moves to London and starts living alone.

As she is not a woman of independent means, she starts working as a teacher. When she meets and falls in love with Alan Merrick, a lawyer, she suggests they live together without getting married. Reluctantly, he agrees, and the couple move to Italy.

There, in Florence, Merrick dies of typhoid before their daughter Dolores is born. Legal technicalities and the fact that the couple were not married prevent Herminia from inheriting any of Merrick's money. Dreaming of being a role model for Dolores and her friends, Herminia returns to England and raises her daughter as a single mother. She wants to show the younger generation that even as a woman there is something one can do about the unfair position of women in society.



Side by Side by Isabel Miller

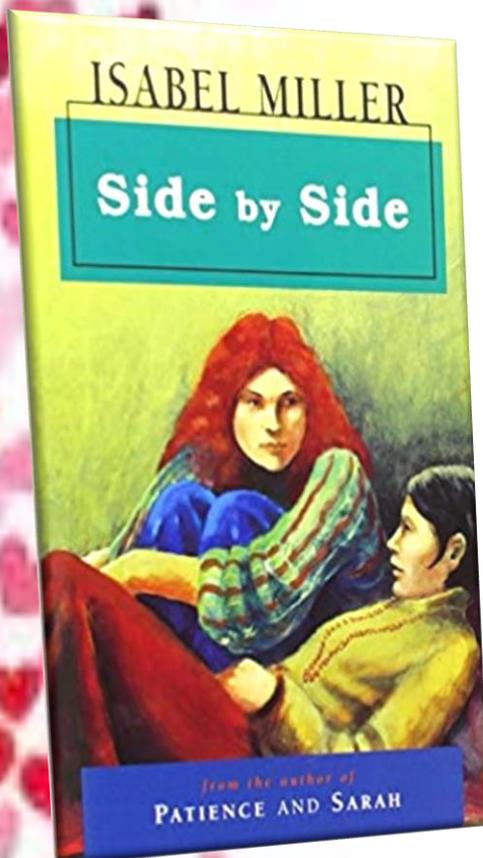
The story of two courageous young women determined to live as they must, no matter what the consequences.

Patricia and Sharon's love is born during the days of their childhood - maybe even before. Discovered in their love and separated by their parents, the two travel very different paths in the ensuing years, the depth of their feeling for each other tested by time, distance and other women.

When they find each other again, they are in the middle of the Stonewall riots. During the tumultuous, heady days of rebellion that follow, Sharon and Patricia realise that they must now seize the day. But it takes all the courage at their disposal to put their lives, their future, their safety and their love completely on the line...

Side by Side shows us the fear and heroism of gay men and women at the perilous, exhilarating and unprecedented birth of their community.

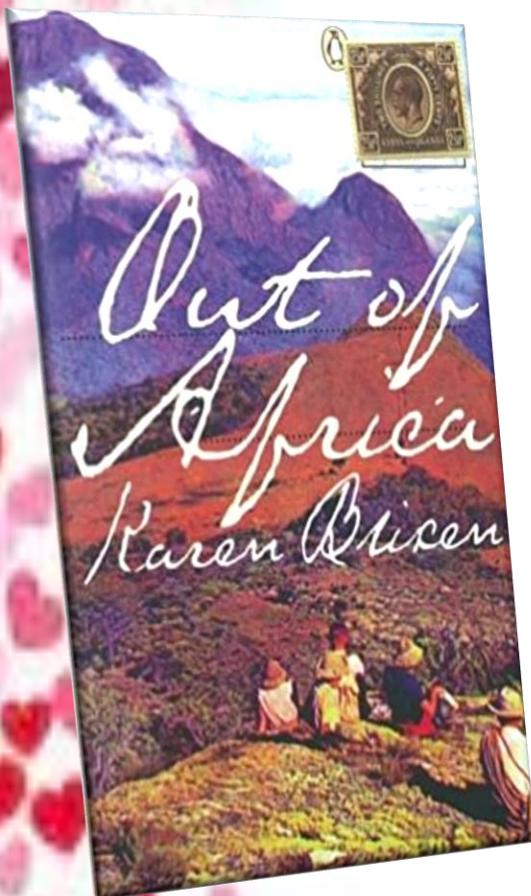
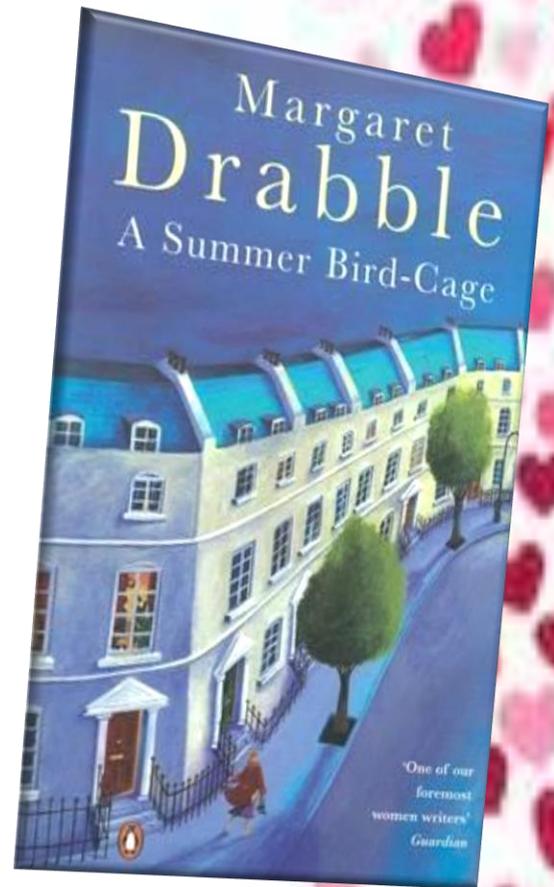
It takes us into the hearts of Patricia and Sharon, two women who make a stand, who put their jobs, their lives and their future on the line for the love they have and for what they know to be right.



A Summer Bird-Cage by Margaret Drabble

Sarah had come home from Paris to be a bridesmaid for her sister Louise. When a child, Sarah had adored her elder sister, but Louise had grown up to be an arrogant, selfish, cold and extravagant woman. She was also breath-takingly beautiful. The man she was to marry, Stephen Halifax, was a successful novelist, very rich and snobbishly unpleasant. From Sarah's first night at home she began to question Louise's motives in this loveless match.

A Summer Bird-Cage is the story of Louise's marriage as seen through Sarah's eyes. It is also the story of a year in Sarah's own life. She is a young woman, intelligent and attractive, just down from Oxford, but completely at loose ends without close friends or a lover. What she discovers about herself is as fascinating as what she discovers about love, infidelity and her sister Louise.



Out of Africa by Karen Blixen

In many ways, a love letter written to the people and places that so marked the author, this book tells the story of the love between a Danish and a vagabond in 1920s Kenya.

From the moment Karen Blixen arrived in Kenya in 1914 to manage a coffee plantation, her heart belonged to Africa. Drawn to the intense colours and ravishing landscapes, Karen Blixen spent her happiest years on the farm and her experiences and friendships with the people around her are vividly recalled in these memoirs. Out of Africa is the story of a remarkable and unconventional woman and of a way of life that has vanished for ever. Out of Africa was made into a highly acclaimed film, starring Meryl Streep and Robert Redford, and won seven Oscars.