



**COFFEE
TABLE
CHOICE**

With Lebanon drawn into the US-Israeli war with Iran, now is an apposite time for the publication of 'Where Do I Go?' by Rania Matar. Born and raised in Lebanon, Matar moved to the US in 1984. In 2020, she returned to Beirut in the aftermath of the port explosion that resulted in 300,000 displaced individuals. She saw the words that she took for the title of her new monograph inscribed on the wall of an abandoned factory. Having herself left the country herself during the civil war, Matar decided to create a photographic love letter to the women of Lebanon, framing them as reclaiming space in their own land. Her subjects played a role in selecting the locations and how to pose, giving them agency in a land where gender inequality remains considerable, and giving them self-determination when so often they are seen as victims in the eyes of western onlookers. Left, 'Petra, Holiday Inn Hotel Pool' (the hotel was destroyed in 1976 shortly after it was built), Beirut, 2021. Above, 'Farah (in Her Burnt Car)', Abyei, 2020.

SHELF LOVE SOPHIE MACKINTOSH on her favourite love stories

Sophie Mackintosh – author of Booker nominee *The Water Cure* and the Women's Prize longlisted *Cursed Bread* – has made her name with surreal, eerie fiction that probes the darker edges of human relationships. Her latest book, *Permanence*, however, turns more directly towards a love story, offering a novel that is as strange and dreamlike as it is tender. Here, she shares her own favourite books about love – the ones that prove the most powerful love stories are often the most unexpected...



A SPORT AND A PASTIME
James Salter
(Picador, £10.99)

"Slim and hypnotic, *A Sport and a Pastime* contains some of the all-time great sex writing, as well as forensically examining both the obsessiveness and precariousness of desire.

"Following a young couple – a well-heeled American and his beautiful, more provincial, French girlfriend – as they travel through France together, hotel to hotel, it also has an intriguing narrative premise.

"Rather than being told by either member of the couple, the novel is narrated by an acquaintance of theirs, an older and more wistful man who sees in them the promise of young love, who experiences a kind of envy of the oblivious American and the experiences he is partaking in.

"The lines between what is real and what is imagined are blurred thanks to this ingenious conceit;

it is an imagining, a fantasy, as much as an account of a relationship. But, then, how much of love is a fiction anyway?"

THE END OF THE AFFAIR
Graham Greene
(Vintage Classics, £9.99)

"Incredibly intense, passionate, and taking an unexpectedly moving religious turn, *The End of the Affair* is concerned with the darker, more obsessive side of love. When Maurice bumps into Sarah, the woman who broke off their affair two years earlier, his jealousy is sparked and he decides to hire a detective to follow her. But as we get Sarah's side of the story, we realise things are not quite as they seem.

"Greene captures vividly the sense of being consumed by lust and yearning, as well as its spiritual dimension: the relationship with Sarah seems necessarily doomed, even in his recollection of euphoric times."

KAIROS
Jenny Erpenbeck
(Granta, £9.99)

"When Katharina receives a box of documents from a former lover who has just passed away, we are transported back into the story of their relationship – one that spans personal and political upheavals over the next years, the disillusionment of their relationship mirrored in the collapse of East Germany, and the rapid reconfiguration of everything they know.

"It is agonising in its depiction of betrayal, of how a great love can become something that warps and destroys everything around it, and the prose is rendered with such beauty and precision. It broke my heart."

HAPPY ALL THE TIME
Laurie Colwin
(W&N Essentials, £10.99)

"Something (deceptively) lighter can be found in *Happy All the Time*, the book I turn to most during times of romantic despair.

"In this novel, beautiful people fall in love, overcome minor difficulties, and ultimately live happily ever after in their own ways.

"The textures and details are stunning, from the enigmatic Holly's accessorising ('She was wearing coral earrings the size of tuxedo studs and nothing else') to the stylish interiors of

the apartments in which their small dramas play out.

"But summing it up so glibly risks doing it a disservice, because as well as being enormously comforting it is also captivating, sharp, and very acute on the sexual and social mores of 70s New York – as well as speaking to more eternal philosophical concerns on what it means to be loved, and to love well in return."

MONKEY GRIP
Helen Garner
(W&N Essentials, £9.99)

"Told in crystalline vignettes, *Monkey Grip* follows young mother Nora as she navigates life in bohemian 70s Melbourne, moving from communal house to communal house and reckoning with her powerful love for the heroin-addicted Javi.

"Non-moralising in how Nora's complex relationship with Javi is portrayed, as well as being a beautiful snapshot of mothering and living, it is a radical novel of sharp sun-soaked images, distilled down to its essence.

"I love how freely love is given in this novel, whether platonic, familial or romantically; there is much hurt, but there is a sense of possibility, too, and motherhood doesn't render the desirous Nora remotely invisible."

'Permanence' by Sophie Mackintosh (£18.99, Hamish Hamilton) is out now

From the rise of totalitarianism through the age of anxiety about nuclear destruction, to fears concerning climate change and AI, novelists have been imagining apocalyptic worlds for more than a century. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) was adapted for TV during Donald Trump's first presidency and the screen version of its Booker-winning 2019 sequel, *The Testaments*, is about to appear. Both novels, about women living under brutal patriarchal systems, are prescient cornerstones of dystopian fiction. Here are 14 more...

WE
Yevgeny Zamyatin
(1924)

This classic by the Russian literary polymath may be the first dystopian novel. Set in a glass-enclosed city where the brutal OneState is all-powerful, it is not subtle. But it shows Zamyatin, who cherished creative freedom, had the Bolshevik regime's number from the outset, and it influenced George Orwell's *1984*.

THE TRIAL
Franz Kafka
(1925)

This unfinished masterpiece tells the story of Josef K, who is accused of an unspecified crime and wanders the eerie streets of his unnamed city trying to find out what he is supposed to have done. Is it an allegory for original sin? A political meditation on human indifference to the suffering of others? Or something else entirely? You decide.

DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?
Philip K Dick
(1968)

In the ruins of World War Three, which decimated animal life and rendered the atmosphere radioactive, a bounty hunter is assigned to kill rogue androids. Dick's novel – the basis for the seminal 1982 film *Blade Runner* – is set in 1992, so it is reassuring to see that not all dire predictions come to pass, although a world in which it is difficult to distinguish the real from the artificial is spot-on.

THE DISPOSSESSED
Ursula K Le Guin
(1974)

Dystopia and utopia are entwined in Le Guin's story of hierarchy-bound Urras and its anarchist neighbour planet Anarres. With stylish prose and intellectual rigour, Le Guin charts the journey of young physicist Shevek, whose theories cause upheaval on both planets, as he struggles to survive, falls in love and contemplates human society.



Ring of truth Set 15 years after 'The Handmaid's Tale', 'The Testaments' explores the lives of women under a theocratic state

what it means to be human and probably cemented its author's Nobel Prize.

THE ROAD
Cormac McCarthy
(2006)

The American delivered a later-career triumph with this soul-rattling story of a father and son walking through a blasted America, full of desperation and violence in the aftermath of environmental disaster. It is a warning about where we risk going and a paean to everything we have to lose.

STATION ELEVEN
Emily St John Mandel
(2014)

This 2014 novel cuts between the build-up to a pandemic which wipes out 99 per cent of the population, and 20 years later, when survivors live in small communities. Its subtlety and awareness of the apocalypse fiction genre's pitfalls help to make it a modern classic.

SUBMISSION
Michel Houellebecq
(2015)

This satire about an Islamist government winning power in France might be the controversial novelist's best book. It is a reactionary premise but Houellebecq's real disdain is for the complacent status quo politicians who make such a scenario possible. He wrings the darkest possible laughter from an indelible depiction of a society's descent into authoritarianism.

THE POWER
Naomi Alderman
(2016)

Teenage girls learn they have the power to injure or kill their male oppressors by releasing electrical volts from their fingertips in this Women's Prize-winning thought experiment. The girls alert older women to their power and patriarchy is reversed the world over. Set in an alternative world, it illuminates the way this one is governed, and asks why people abuse power.

LITTLE EYES
Samanta Schweblin
(2020)

Argentinian Schweblin is one of the most original Spanish language writers to have emerged in the 21st century. This novel is about "kentukis" – cute gadgets containing surveillance tech that gradually takes over the lives of their owners. Schweblin has an eye for unsettling details and knows what truly chills us.

The finest dystopian novels of past century

As a TV adaptation of Margaret Atwood's 'The Testaments' comes to Disney+, **Max Liu** considers the most chilling, prescient and stylish depictions of societies fallen into authoritarianism, desperation and outright anarchy

HIGH-RISE
JG Ballard
(1975)

A luxury 40-storey tower block – "a small vertical city" – disintegrates as its residents descend into inter-floor warfare. They fight over amenities, retreating from the rest of society to become engrossed in battles about the lift, car park and swimming pool. Rules fall away and bodies pile up, as Ballard shows the potential for darkness in urban spaces.

RIDDLEY WALKER
Russell Hoban
(1980)

Like every other aspect of this novel, the setting of which feels ancient but is actually taking place after a nuclear holocaust, language is diminished, so you must read slowly to become accustomed to the stop-start rhythms of its phonetic prose. Stick with it and the story of the 12-year-old eponymous protagonist is absorbing and extraordinary.

LANARK
Alasdair Gray
(1981)

This four-part combination of sci-fi dystopia and realist bildungsroman alternates between the city of Unthank, where there is no light in the sky, and mid-century Glasgow, where Duncan Thaw grows up, attends art school and descends into madness. The intensity of Gray's storytelling and the originality of his imagination make for a book like nothing published since.

THE PALACE OF DREAMS
Ismail Kadare
(1981)

The great Albanian writer wrote this novel – about a young man who goes to work in a mysterious institution where the government analyses the population's dreams for signs of discontent – towards the end of his country's near-half-century of Communist rule. The strangulating effects of life under dictatorship seethe from a short but labyrinthine story that riddles the reader with unease.

NEVER LET ME GO
Kazuo Ishiguro
(2005)

Ishiguro's sixth novel was seen as a departure, but a streak of otherworldliness was part of what made earlier works haunting. The story of Kathy and her friends, who learnt at the end of their time at boarding school that they were clones raised to donate their organs, asks



COFFEE TABLE CHOICE

With Lebanon drawn into the US-Israeli war with Iran, now is an apposite time for the publication of 'Where Do I Go?' by Rania Matar. Born and raised in Lebanon, Matar moved to the US in 1984. In 2020, she returned to Beirut in the aftermath of the port explosion that resulted in 300,000 displaced individuals. She saw the words that she took for the title of her new monograph inscribed on the wall of an abandoned factory. Having herself left the country herself during the civil war, Matar decided to create a photographic love letter to the women of Lebanon, framing them as reclaiming space in their own land. Her subjects played a role in selecting the locations and how to pose, giving them agency in a land where gender inequality remains considerable, and giving them self-determination when so often they are seen as victims in the eyes of western onlookers. Left: 'Petra. Holiday Inn Hotel Pool' (the hotel was destroyed in 1976 shortly after it was built), Beirut, 2021. Above: 'Farah (in Her Burnt Car)', Aby, 2020.