

THE
100
BEST
ROMANCE
NOVELS

*From Pride and Prejudice
to Twilight, books to
fall in love—and lust—with*

JENNIFER LAWLER and the Editors of Crimson Romance

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 **Adams**media
Avon, Massachusetts

Contributors

Jennifer Lawler has her dream job: As the acquisitions editor for Crimson Romance, she gets to read romances and look at pictures of male cover models all day. A former college English teacher (but don't hold that against her), she turned to writing and editing as an alternative to grading papers and realized too late that she'd guaranteed herself homework for life. She is the author or coauthor of more than thirty books.

A fan of romance since she was in her teens, she has a particular soft spot for wisecracking heroines. She writes romances herself under several pen names.

Julie Sturgeon has been a journalist for more than twenty-five years, covering everything from business analysis to college basketball. As an avid romance reader for even longer, she was the romance columnist at *Pages* magazine. Today, she is a development editor for Crimson Romance and owner of Indianapolis on the Cheap.

Jessica Verdi used to dream about getting paid to read about true love and super-sexy heroes all day ... and now, as Crimson Romance's assistant editor, she actually gets to do it! Jessica is the author of the young adult contemporary novel *My Life After Now* and received her MFA in creative writing from The New School. She is also one of the founders of TeenWritersBloc.com, a popular blog dedicated to the world of children's and YA literature.

Jessica watches the Keira Knightley version of *Pride and Prejudice* more often than is probably healthy and remains firm on her stance that vampires beat out cowboys and rugged police detectives as romance's sexiest heroes any day of the week.

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Dedication

For all of the Crimson Romance readers and writers, without whom there'd be no Crimson Romance editors.

Acknowledgments

We'd like to thank all of the staff at F+W Media, for all of their unflagging support and confidence in *Crimson Romance*, and in this book. All books start with an idea, and every author needs someone who believes in that idea.

Special thanks to Halli Melnitsky for her patience and ability to deal with 500 “Oh, wait, I have an idea!” e-mails on any given day. And a shout-out to Meredith O’Hayre, managing editor extraordinaire, without whom we would all be drinking a lot more tequila than we should, and probably during the Friday morning edit meeting.

Introduction

The List—and How We Came Up with It

IN BETWEEN LOOKING AT PICTURES OF SHIRTLESS MEN (purely for book cover research—this is work related) (we swear), we at Crimson Romance also spend a lot of time talking about our favorite romances and why we love them.

“Mary Stewart really knew how to set a scene,” we’ll say, or “You can always count on Jennifer Crusie to make you smile,” or “Did you read the new Eloisa James?”

We also spend a lot of time talking about the kinds of romances we’re looking for at Crimson—romances that our readers will love. “Does it have enough heart?” we ask. “Does it give enough emotional satisfaction at the end? Does it have that spark?” We know what we like, and you should hear us when we find a manuscript with that passion and that payoff. We’re happy not just because we love good romances, we’re happy because we know that’s exactly what readers like you are looking for.

Even though we eat, drink, and breathe romance all day long, we can’t get enough of it. So after a long day of reading and editing romance, we go home and read some more. Junkies are like that.

The Idea

One day not too long ago, one of us (~~it was Julie's fault~~) (~~actually, it may have been Jess~~) (~~or possibly~~ Jennifer did it) said, "We should make a list of the top 100 books in romance. The books that we would publish here at Crimson, if they hadn't already been published."

"Great idea!" we said and went back to editing.

Then someone else said, "Not just a list, a book! You should write a book. You could name each romance and tell what it's about and include cool facts and the reason why Crimson would publish it!" The person who said that was our publisher, Karen, and suddenly there was a deadline and writing assignments and an editor editing the editors (hi, Halli!). Karen *gets things done*. It was a bit like boot camp and we enjoyed every minute of it. Really.

The Criteria

We knew from the start that certain criteria had to be met for a book to be included in our list of the top 100 romances. Any book we considered had to be a romance—a romance as we publish them here at Crimson. That is:

1. Whatever else happens, the novel must focus on the development of the love relationship between the main characters in the book. If the main point of the book is the heroine completing her personal journey, we love that, but it's not romance. If she completes her personal journey in the context of a romantic relationship, then that's romance.
2. There must be an emotional payoff for the reader—in the form of a satisfying happily ever after.
3. It must be full length—a novel, not a short story, play, blog post, or tweet.
4. Something about the book must make it important enough that we would publish it at Crimson. For example, perhaps it pushed the boundaries of the genre or was a pioneer in some way. Or maybe it simply has emotional staying power.

So you won't see *Romeo and Juliet* on this list. Even though it is a beautiful love story, it is not a novel. And we don't think we'll be spoiling the ending if we say it also doesn't end happily ever after.

Beyond that set of basic criteria, we wanted to choose from a variety of subgenres (romantic suspense, paranormal, contemporary, historical, and more) and publishing eras (nineteenth century, the 1980s, just this year).

We have presented the titles in alphabetical order rather than trying to rank them. You should see the vicious arguments that break out when you try to tell Jess that Jane Austen can't have all of the top slots. In order to keep the peace at Crimson, we felt that it made sense to leave the ranking up to you, Dear Reader. Make your argument for who

deserves the top spot, and why, and we'll listen!

You may find your favorite authors and titles on this list—or you may not! If not, send us your pick and your argument as to why it should be in our Top 100, and we'll talk about it on the Crimson Romance blog (www.crimsonromance.com) and possibly include it in a future volume.

***The Top 100
Romance Novels***

16 Lighthouse Road

DEBBIE MACOMBER
CONTEMPORARY / 2001

“Cecilia Randall had heard of people who, if granted one wish, would choose to live their lives over again. Not her. She’d be perfectly content to blot just one twelve-month period from her twenty-two years.”

Macomber portrays realistic, truthful events in a heartwarming, uplifting way. She doesn’t shy away from dealing with heart-wrenching circumstances—in this book, a couple loses a newborn child—but she always finds a way to show how grace, hope, and love can ultimately triumph.

- ✦ This is the first book in Macomber’s celebrated Cedar Cove series. Others include *311 Pelican Court* (2003), *8 Sandpiper Way* (2008), and *1225 Christmas Tree Lane* (2011).
 - ✦ Macomber’s hometown created a five-day Cedar Cove Days festival in 2009 to celebrate the success of these novels.
-

In *16 Lighthouse Road*, connected stories trace the trajectory of various characters’ love relationships. Cedar Cove family court judge Olivia Lockhart hears—and ultimately denies—the divorce petition of a young couple, Cecilia and Ian Randall—a couple seeking a divorce despite having signed a prenuptial agreement promising to love each other forever. Olivia sees hope and promise for them when they cannot see it for themselves.

Olivia’s court decision leads to some challenges in her own romantic life, for the newspaper coverage of the case brings newspaper editor Jack Griffin into her orbit. Long divorced, Olivia finds Jack appealing. Olivia’s daughter must also grapple with a decision about marriage,

Olivia's good friend must deal with her husband's disappearance, and Olivia's mother befriends a disabled man with a secret.

Throughout the novel, Macomber uses her warm and sympathetic style to explore issues of trust and to reject the idea that relationships—and love—can be thrown away.

All Through the Night

CONNIE BROCKWAY
HISTORICAL / 1997

“The landlady shuffled into the long narrow room ahead of Colonel Henry ‘Jack’ Seward and headed right for the curtained window overlooking the square.”

Brockway’s warm and intelligent style shines in all of her stories—but we find this one particularly riveting.

- ✦ Meticulous research makes Brockway’s historical romances richly textured and finely drawn.
 - ✦ Brockway is an eight-time finalist for Romance Writers of America’s RITA Award. And don’t worry, this isn’t a case of “always the bridesmaid” syndrome—Brockway has won the award twice (so far)!
-

Set in Regency England, this tale follows the exploits of the widow Anne Wilder, a thief who targets the richest members of society. Unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately—Colonel Jack Seward sets a trap to catch the thief. Anne seduces him and escapes his snare, but the colonel isn’t one to give up: He chases her all over England, never realizing that the criminal he pursues (and desires) is the same person as the widow he is growing to love.

While Anne does have a noble reason for her thievery (think Robin Hood), she is also motivated by the daring and risk involved. The colonel, a ruthless agent, adds a dark intensity to the story. The characters are troubled, with pasts that must be confronted, who make decisions that aren’t always defensible, but they aren’t the stereotypical troubled characters of romance—they’re complex, sensual, tender, and likeable.

Top Five Romantic Movie Proposals

1. ***Pride and Prejudice***—Elizabeth Bennet (Jennifer Ehle) and Mr. Darcy (Colin Firth). The second proposal. Sigh.
2. ***Walk the Line***—June Carter (Reese Witherspoon) and Johnny Cash (Joaquin Phoenix).
3. ***Love, Actually***—Jamie (Colin Firth) and Aurelia (Lúcia Moniz).
4. ***Jerry Maguire***—Jerry Maguire (Tom Cruise) and Dorothy (Renée Zellweger).
5. ***Pride and Prejudice***—Elizabeth Bennet (Keira Knightley) and Mr. Darcy (Matthew Macfadyen). I know, we cheated. No, we didn't.

Almost Eden

DOROTHY GARLOCK
HISTORICAL / 1995

“Jason Picket was mesmerized. His mind scarcely registered what he was seeing, but he was alert enough to grasp the possibilities this chance encounter could mean to his miserable life.”

The romance trope of the half-breed rejected by society is given a fresh take in this adventure story.

- ✦ Garlock doesn't gloss over historical truths—her historical romances capture the true flavor of the Old West.
 - ✦ Characters in *Almost Eden* also appear in Garlock's *Wild Sweet Wilderness* and *Annie Lash*.
 - ✦ Garlock was one of the launch authors for Bantam's Loveswept line.
-

The two main characters—Baptiste Lightbody (Light) and Maggie—are both outcasts in their respective societies. He's called a half-breed; she's called a witch (mostly because she's beautiful and adept with animals). They meet when Light rescues Maggie from a rapist; Light immediately senses they are two parts of the same spirit.

Though connected by this spiritual bond as well as by a common desire to find a home, they must confront a number of challenges—not least of which is a band of pirates—as they undertake a journey to reach their “almost Eden.”

Along Came a Duke

ELIZABETH BOYLE
HISTORICAL / 2012

“The day dawned like it always did in May in the village of Kempton, with a bright sprinkle of sunshine, a hint of dew on the grass and the birds singing happy choruses in the garden. There was no indication whatsoever that on this day, Miss Tabitha Timmons would not only find herself betrothed, but fall madly and deeply in love. And not necessarily with the same man.”

Boyle has written any number of wonderful historical romances, but this brand-new title is a delightful rags-to-riches Cinderella story.

- ✦ This is the first in Boyle’s Rhymes with Love series—and we’re eagerly anticipating #2!
 - ✦ Expect tongue-in-cheek wit from Boyle rather than a perfectly realistic portrait of Regency England.
 - ✦ We give Boyle the award for most intriguing book titles—come on, who wouldn’t want to pick up a book called *Confessions of a Little Black Gown* or *Memoirs of a Scandalous Red Dress*?
-

Impoverished Tabitha Timmons is the perfect Cinderella—hardworking, smart, with an independent streak and troublesome relatives. And she has the chance to inherit a vast fortune if she weds the right man. Tabitha knows what the sensible thing is—marriage to the proper Mr. Barkworth.

But the Duke of Preston has other plans for Tabitha, which she would be more willing to participate in if he weren’t such a scoundrel. He’s arrogant (as a duke should be!) but ultimately softhearted and worthy of Tabitha’s love. Despite their differences, they make a believable and

genuine match.

Boyle writes with a Jane Austen touch—witty, intelligent, and arch.

Top Five Romantic Dinners

Don't forget the candlelight!

1. Chilled shrimp and champagne. Substitute oysters for the aphrodisiac quality.
2. Steak and lobster.
3. Asparagus risotto for the vegetarian.
4. For women, anything on a picnic!
5. For men, anything on the grill!

Bait

KAREN ROBARDS
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 2004

“It was a professional job, Sam McCabe saw at a glance. The bare minimum of muss and fuss. A couple sprawled on the floor of their cathedral-ceilinged great room, hands bound behind their backs, blood from the bullet wounds in their heads soaking into the already deep red of their Oriental carpet.”

Robards balances page-turning suspense with an emotionally moving romance, and adds in just the right touch of humor, a juggling act few can accomplish as well as she.

- ✦ Robards was in law school before she sold her first romance (at age twenty-four).
 - ✦ Robards started her first romance novel as a class assignment for the University of Kentucky. Go Wildcats!
-

A case of mistaken identity starts *Bait* off with a bang. There are two Maddie Fitzgeralds staying at a hotel in New Orleans. One is an advertising executive on a business trip. The other is an FBI informant. The FBI informant is killed, but the advertising executive barely escapes with her life.

FBI agent Sam McCabe swoops in to question Maddie. McCabe believes the attacker is a serial killer he’s been chasing—and who has been taunting him with his failure to stop the murders. But the murderer has been successful in killing the informant, so Maddie should be safe ... right?

When Maddie is attacked again, McCabe knows the only way to trap the killer is to use her as bait—but first he’ll have to convince her to play

along. And she doesn't want to have anything to do with the FBI, because Maddie's got a secret.

Like all of Robards's novels, this one is character driven and engaging.

Bet Me

JENNIFER CRUSIE
CONTEMPORARY / 2004

“Once upon a time, *Minerva Dobbs thought as she stood in the middle of a loud yuppie bar, the world was full of good men. She looked into the handsome face of the man she’d planned on taking to her sister’s wedding and thought, Those days are gone.*”

This is Crusie at her wry best—an appealing opposites-attract novel with memorable characters, a heartfelt and humorous look at how two different people can find their common ground.

- ✦ To research her PhD dissertation on the different ways men and women tell stories, Crusie set a goal to read 100 romance novels. She was immediately hooked and started writing romances herself—much to our delight!
 - ✦ Crusie keeps a witty, insightful, and very current blog on her official website, where she writes about all sorts of stuff, from things she finds funny to her favorite TV shows to what’s going on in her life at the moment. Don’t you just love when authors give you a sneak peek into their personalities like that?
-

When Minerva Dobbs (an actuary of average looks but quick wit) is dumped by her boyfriend just before her sister’s wedding, she’s more concerned that her overbearing mother will be annoyed that she’s dateless than emotionally wounded by the end of her relationship. So when gorgeous Calvin Morrisey picks her up at a bar, she goes right along with him. She thinks he’s trying to win a bet by dating her, and she’s immune to his charm. Sort of.

Min’s not Calvin’s usual type—she’s overweight, attractive but not

beautiful, and not nearly as adoring as he's accustomed to. They have nothing in common, so there's no reason they should pursue a relationship. They both agree about that.

Fate, and their friends, have a different idea. Through a variety of comic but believable incidents, Min and Calvin find themselves forced together—and battle their growing attraction (unsuccessfully, of course!). They learn to see the truth about one another, and to admire what they see.

Bet Me is an affirming, never-a-dull-moment story with a fun subplot about a beautiful psychologist who thinks of falling in love as an intellectual and biological exercise, only to learn the heart has a mind of its own.

Top Five Romantic Chores

Yes, housework can be sexy!

1. **Gardening**—working together to make those flowers bloom can be a great way to spend time together.
2. **Cooking**—you chop while he sautés, or vice versa.
3. **Walk the dog**—and catch up with each other on how the day has gone.
4. **Grocery shopping**—and pick out some fun, sexy food for play!
5. **Do something your sweetie hates as a gesture of love**—or offer a bedroom game in exchange for his doing a chore you hate!

Blue Heaven, Black Night

SHANNON DRAKE
HISTORICAL / 1986

“Fulk the Black, Count of Anjou, was descended from Rollo, the great Viking who laid claim to Normandy.”

A terrific example of the tempestuous romance many of us grew up loving—the strong-willed heroine battles the somewhat (okay, more than somewhat) obsessed hero until she can finally admit her love for him. How enjoyable when they finally come together as true lovers!

✦ Shannon Drake also writes romantic suspense under the name Heather Graham. (Not to be confused with the actress Heather Graham who is best known for playing a porn star in *Boogie Nights* and a stripper in *The Hangover*—hey, maybe *she* should write a romance novel!) A complex backstory gives texture and depth to this medieval romance (it’s of the “sweeping” variety—“a sweeping romance”); the author works hard to ensure her characters act in an historically accurate way without sacrificing the compelling storyline.

Elise is the bastard daughter of Henry II, the king of England; Sir Bryan Stede is known as the Black Knight. Much to Elise’s chagrin, Bryan engages in a bit of bride stealing, as medieval warriors were wont to do. (You know you already want to read it.) Elise, of course, being stolen, can’t admit that she grows to care about Bryan or we would have no book, but when he goes off to the Crusades, Elise recognizes her love for him and sets off to join him. This being the Middle Ages, travel is not quite as easy as boarding a plane, and she is abducted (a very favorite staple of 1980s romance), with drama and conflict galore. It’s a roller-coaster ride, so hang on tight till you get to that oh-so-satisfying conclusion.

Breaking the Rules

SUZANNE BROCKMANN
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 2011

“It happened so fast.”

This is the culmination of Brockmann’s fabulous Troubleshooters series, and it’s everything a romantic suspense should be—fast paced, engaging, heart wrenching, heartwarming, and when you finally put the book down, you want to grab her by the throat and ask her why she ended the series. All this “new direction artistically” is just not a good enough excuse, Suze.

- ✦ If you thought military suspense was the province of Tom Clancy, you’ve never read Suzanne Brockmann.
 - ✦ Brockmann’s Tall, Dark and Dangerous series of books featuring Navy SEALs sparked a huge trend in romance. And we’re grateful for it.
 - ✦ Brockmann’s husband Ed Gaffney is also an author. The couple, along with their son Jason, cowrote the feature film *The Perfect Wedding*.
-

Izzy Zanella, Eden Gillman, and Danny Gillman have a long, long history. Izzy and Danny are SEAL teammates who’ve never gotten along. Their dislike for one another is complicated by Danny’s sister, Eden, a troubled young woman whom Izzy marries when another man abandons her after getting her pregnant. When Eden has a miscarriage, the relationship between Izzy and Eden ends.

Oh, but this is romance, so it doesn’t end *forever*. It just takes a breather in order to make things way, way more complicated than they otherwise would be.

Eden resurfaces in Izzy’s life when she tries to get custody of her younger brother Ben. Her abusive stepfather has destroyed her life; she

won't let him destroy Ben's. Danny agrees to help, but what would help most is if Eden could prove that she and Izzy have a solid marriage.

Yep, a marriage-of-convenience storyline that is nothing like any other marriage-of-convenience story you've ever read. Throw in a child prostitution ring, an abduction, and a handful of determined Navy SEALs, and you've got a sizzling page-turner.

Ultimately, this is a story about family, trust, and the kind of happily ever after that comes after the infatuation wears off.

Top Five Real-Life Romances

Happily ever after happens in the real world, too!

1. Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn
2. Nicole Kidman and Keith Urban
3. Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith
4. Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward
5. Kirsten Dunst and Jake Gyllenhaal

Bride of Pendorric

VICTORIA HOLT
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 1963

“I often marveled after I went to Pendorrice that one’s existence could change so swiftly, so devastatingly.”

Who doesn’t love a retelling of *Rebecca*? Holt is a suspenseful, romantic writer, sadly neglected these days. We’d publish her in a New York minute.

- ✦ Victoria Holt is the pen name of Eleanor Hibbert, who also wrote under the names Jean Plaidy and Philippa Carr.
 - ✦ Pick this modern-day Gothic romance if you’re interested in getting started reading Holt.
 - ✦ By the time she died in 1993, Holt had sold over 100 million books. And that was in the pre-social media/Internet hype/über-marketing era!
-

Young orphan marries a man she hardly knows. What could possibly go wrong?

Favel Farrington has lived on an Italian island (Capri) with her father all of her life—until Roc Pendorrice sweeps her off her feet. He seems to adore her, and it looks like they are destined for a happily ever after.

When Favel’s father dies, Roc brings her to his estate on a cliff in Cornwall. (These mysterious estates are always on a cliff in Cornwall, have you ever noticed that? Apparently it’s a slightly crowded cliff in Cornwall.) There, Favel learns all about the brides of Pendorrice, who have an alarming tendency to die young and oh-so-tragically. A series of events (of the unfortunate kind) make Favel wonder if she’ll escape the curse of the Pendorrices—and whether she’s really in danger or just a victim of her own overactive imagination.

There’s a wonderful Mrs. Danvers character that you’ll want to smack,

a ghost (maybe), a sister and her family who *seem* welcoming, and a sense of foreboding that will keep you up for approximately three nights after you finish the book.

This is one of Holt's most suspenseful novels, and even though you think you know whodunnit, you don't.

10

Captive Bride

JOHANNA LINDSEY
HISTORICAL / 1977

“The weather was pleasantly warm on this early spring day in the year 1883. The slightest of breezes played daintily with the great oak trees that lined the long driveway leading to Wakefield Manor.”

The language isn't as flowery as Woodiwiss's and the plotline isn't as involved as a Rogers tome, which makes it just right for many casual readers who enjoy a classic tale of a spirited Western gal redefining the rules on how to be a sex slave. It's not politically correct, but desert romances rarely are.

- ✦ *Captive Bride* was the first of fifty-two bestsellers for Johanna Lindsey. She is one of the few pioneers still actively publishing today.
 - ✦ Rather than sticking to one subgenre, Lindsey's books run the gamut. Sci-fi, the Old West, the Vikings ... nothing is off-limits to Lindsey's fantastic imagination. And as long as she keeps writing those dreamy heroes and steamy love scenes, we'll follow her anywhere.
-

Beautiful Christina Wakefield gives in to the lure of the Arabian desert and impulsively follows her brother to Cairo, but her plans for adventure get a new definition when she bumps into someone she knows.

Sheik Abu is known as Philip Caxton back in the London ballrooms, where Christina didn't deem him worthy of her hand in marriage. He has remained a bachelor because he's looking for a wife with intelligence rather than merely a flair for fashion. He jumps at this opportunity to show her a new side to him by kidnapping her and holding her prisoner as his slave.

The danger, however, stems from a rival tribe that succeeds in capturing Christina and dragging her away from the relative safety of Philip's tent. She becomes the lure to bring him to their camp, where they plan to take revenge on their rival for a past slight. As Abu, her lover rescues Christina and escapes a slow death—then lies about his feelings to convince her to return to England and safety before he eventually joins her for their happily ever after.

The tale begins with total male dominance, the usual flavor of the times, and evolves to an emotional dance where Christina and Philip lean toward each other only to pull back when the L-word starts to hover on the edge of their physical relationship.

11

Carolina Moon

NORA ROBERTS
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 2000

“She woke in the body of a dead friend. She was eight, tall for her age, fragile of bone, delicate of feature. Her hair was the color of corn silk, and slid prettily down her narrow back. Her mother loved to brush it every night, one hundred strokes with the soft-bristled, silver-backed brush that sat on the graceful cherry-wood vanity.”

As if we need a reason to pick a Nora Roberts title. Bah. [*We really need to give a reason.*—The Editor.] [*All right, all right.*—The Authors.] We picked this title, written well into Roberts’s career, because it showcases her ability to engage her readers with a heartfelt, gripping story.

- ✦ *The New Yorker* calls Roberts “America’s favorite novelist” and she’s one of ours, too!
 - ✦ The prolific Nora Roberts also writes under the pen name J. D. Robb.
 - ✦ Roberts met her husband when she hired him to build bookshelves for her. A gorgeous handyman comes over to the single writer’s house and she finds herself attracted to more than just his skills with a hammer? Jeez, if that doesn’t sound like the plot of a romance novel, we don’t know what does!
-

Tory Bodeen, a child with a psychic gift, grows up in an abusive home. Her gift is neither respected nor appreciated by her unredeemable, soul-crushing parents, causing her to develop understandably ambivalent feelings about it. Despite her horrific home life, she is able to seek refuge with her friend Hope Lavelle—until the day Hope is murdered. Hope’s life isn’t the only one that’s destroyed with this brutal act: Tory’s life comes undone as well.

Years pass and as a grownup, Tory returns to her home of Progress, South Carolina, trying to make peace with the past. She has friendships she wishes to renew and a point she wishes to prove—but moving home is going to be harder on her than she ever imagined.

Hope's family blames Tory for her role in Hope's death, although Cade Lavelle, Hope's older brother, steps in to shield Tory from his family's dislike—and if you can't guess what happens between them, you are not a romance reader, my friend.

Reclaiming her past and rebuilding her life isn't complicated just by the mixed emotions she and those around her feel—the murderer is still on the loose, and Tory is next on his list.

Here Roberts shows off the reason why she's the queen of southern Gothic.

12

Chance McCall

SHARON SALA
CONTEMPORARY / 1993

“A strange anxiety seized him. It was time! Suddenly he couldn’t get away fast enough. He grabbed the can he’d brought from the station and began walking through the house, methodically pouring a thin, steady stream of gasoline on and over everything.”

This early Sharon Sala novel makes a common fiction trope—the hero who loses his memory—something special and heartwarming.

- ✦ Sala is the author of more than eighty novels, including those written under the name Dinah McCall. In fact, on the cover of many of her books, her name is actually written as “Sharon Sala, also known as Dinah McCall.” Add that lengthy moniker to a book named after a character with the same surname as the author (i.e., McCall), and things are bound to get confusing—surely only a writer as good as Sala/McCall would be able to get away with it!
 - ✦ Sala began writing in 1980 but it wasn’t until after the deaths of her father and sister several years later that she decided to seriously pursue her dreams of being a published author.
 - ✦ Sharon Sala has won both the National Reader’s Choice Award and the Colorado Romance Writers Award of Excellence five times each!
-

For years, Jennifer Ann Tyler has had a thing for Chance McCall, who came to her father’s ranch looking for work when he was just a teenager. Though Chance becomes like family, he hasn’t dared to pursue a romantic relationship with her because of his past.

This stalemate is upset when Chance loses his memory—knowing only that he cares for Jennifer but not remembering anything beyond that. He

sets out to learn who he is—and Jennifer finds the courage to go with him, not caring what she may risk to do so. Together they must face the secrets of Chance’s past that have kept them apart for so long.

In this novel, Sala explores the theme of “love never dies” but ultimately the story is one of love renewed, love restored.

Chasing Perfect

SUSAN MALLERY
CONTEMPORARY / 2010

“Charity Jones loved a good disaster movie as much as the next person—she would simply prefer the disaster in question not be about her life.”

Fool’s Gold is the town you wished you lived in. Mallery has a deft touch with creating a vivid sense of community in this novel.

- ✦ This is the first book in Mallery’s popular Fool’s Gold series, already up to nine titles at the time we wrote this.
 - ✦ *Booklist* has said of Mallery’s writing, “Novels don’t get much better than Mallery’s expert blend of emotional nuance, humor, and superb storytelling.” And we agree!
-

Settle in for a round of excellent storytelling with Mallery’s characteristic humor and emotion. City planner Charity Jones comes to Fool’s Gold, Nevada, to help create jobs so that the men of the town don’t have to leave to find work. The itinerant Charity sees Fool’s Gold as a chance to put down some roots. She is absolutely not interested in dating, no siree, no how. She’s been stung too many times.

Enter Josh Golden, whom the town has taken to their collective heart. A former professional cyclist, his womanizing reputation precedes him and Charity wants no part of him. None at all. *Really*. The other women in town have no problem with his past, and of course he could pick one of them, but he doesn’t. He wants Charity.

Despite her reluctance to get involved again, Charity doesn’t stand a chance, especially when the townspeople start playing matchmaker. Everyone knows they’re meant for each other, and eventually Charity figures it out, too!

14

The Convenient Marriage

GEORGETTE HEYER
HISTORICAL / 1934

“Lady Winwood being denied, the morning caller inquired with some anxiety for Miss Winwood, or, in fact, any of the younger ladies. In face of the rumour which had come to her ears it would be too provoking if all the Winwood ladies were to withhold themselves. But the porter held the door fully open and said that Miss Winwood was at home.”

Heyer’s meticulous research—and her captivating style—make this a must-read for any fan of historical romance.

- ✦ She’s been called a modern-day Jane Austen—and we agree! (That is, of course, if you consider the 1930s “modern-day.”)
 - ✦ Heyer wrote her first novel, *The Black Moth*, when she was seventeen. Since 1921, it has never been out of print.
-

Not surprisingly, given the title, this is a story about a marriage of convenience—which eventually turns into a true love relationship. Although Heyer is probably best known for her Regencies, this novel is set in the Georgian era.

When the Earl of Rule proposes marriage to Elizabeth Winwood, a marriage that would help her entire impoverished family, her younger sister Horatia steps in. Elizabeth is in love with someone else, and if Horatia were to marry Rule then Elizabeth would be free to follow her heart.

But don’t worry! Horatia’s noble sacrifice shall be rewarded eventually. After his marriage to Horatia, Rule continues his relationship with his mistress, Lady Caroline Massey (tsk tsk). Horatia doesn’t particularly mind at first—she knew exactly what she was getting into.

But as she finds herself drawn more and more to Rule, the knowledge that he is intimate with another woman becomes a source of pain to her.

Horatia begins a friendship with Lord Lethbridge, who has an ulterior motive for cultivating their relationship: He wants revenge on Rule and hurting Horatia is an excellent way to get it. Rule begins to fall in love with his wife, but she keeps her distance, believing he is still attached to his mistress. A series of calamities set in motion by Lethbridge could drive Rule and Horatia apart—but they finally learn to tell each other their true feelings, robbing Lethbridge of his revenge and living (you saw this coming, didn't you?) happily ever after.

15

The Cove

CATHERINE COULTER
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 1996

“Someone was watching her. She tugged on the black wig, flattening it against her ears, and quickly put on another coat of deep-red lipstick, holding up the mirror so she could see behind her.”

Fast-paced suspense and a compelling romance jump-start the first book in Coulter’s popular series of FBI suspense thrillers. We love page-turners, even when they’re a little ... preposterous.

- ✦ Coulter has had sixty *New York Times* bestsellers!
 - ✦ Coulter says she writes every morning from 7:30 to 11 A.M.
-

To escape her past (and her arms-dealing father’s murderers) Sally Brainerd moves to a small town that appears to be picture perfect—and ideal spot for her to hide. But the townspeople have a secret....

FBI agent James Quinlan has no intention of letting Sally hide. To him, she’s a witness (possibly a hostile one, and potentially a murderer). He goes undercover to find a way to bring her into custody.

Loads of twists and turns keep you turning the pages, and, okay, the plot is not the most realistic you’ve ever read. You’ll love it or you’ll hate it: We love it!

16

Dark Lover

J. R. WARD
PARANORMAL / 2005

“Darius looked around the club, taking in the teeming, half-naked bodies on the dance floor. Screamer’s was packed tonight, full of women wearing leather and men who looked like they had advanced degrees in violent crime. Darius and his companion fit right in. Except they actually were killers.”

Erotic vampires. Yum.

- ✦ This is the first book in Ward’s The Black Dagger Brotherhood series.
 - ✦ Sherrilyn Kenyon fans will love Ward’s books.
 - ✦ The book opens with a superhandy glossary of terms that you’ll need to know as you embark on your journey through the pages, such as, “Needing period (n): Female vampire’s time of fertility, generally lasting for two days and accompanied by intense sexual cravings.”
-

Vampires. Vampire slayers. Vampire warriors. Oh, my, our hearts are racing! This is not just another vampire story, but a vampire story with a twist! (Which we are not going to reveal; you’re going to have to find out for yourself.)

Wrath, the leader of The Black Dagger Brotherhood (a.k.a., band of vampire warriors), is consumed by the desire to revenge himself on the vampire slayers who murdered his family. That any number of centuries have passed doesn’t deter him from his vendetta.

Beth Randall is the orphan of one of Wrath’s warriors—and she doesn’t have any idea what her father was or why she’s having such weird changes happening to her body. It’s up to Wrath to help her understand what she’s getting into—and to protect her from their enemies. Despite Beth’s uncertainty about the world Wrath lives in—and

that she is now part of—she also craves his touch.

Sexy, sexy, and did we say sexy? We wouldn't mind a little nibble from Wrath ourselves....

17

Dark Possession

CHRISTINE FEEHAN
PARANORMAL / 2007

“Manolito De La Cruz woke beneath the dark earth with his heart pounding, bloodred tears streaking his face and grief overwhelming him. A woman’s despairing cry echoed in his soul, tearing at him, reprimanding him, drawing him back from the edge of a great precipice. And he was starving.”

Feehan reaches her peak with this sexy, captivating novel. We reached our peak, too.

- ✦ Feehan is also the author of the manga comic *Dark Hunger*.
 - ✦ At last count, Feehan’s Dark series included twenty-three titles.
 - ✦ On her official website, Feehan says, “Once I create my characters, I try very hard to have them react to situations as they really would. Sometimes I have preconceived ideas of what I would like them to do, but they don’t mind me, because it would be out of character for them. They take on a life of their own.” That might sound crazy to some of you, but we at Crimson know that wayward voices in your head is the mark of a great writer!
-

We know, we know. It’s not the first book in the Dark series. It’s not the last book in the Dark series. It’s the eighteenth book in the series! Why’d we pick the eighteenth? ’Cause we liked it the best! C’mon, it’s got a guy whose afraid he’s about to become a vampire, it’s got jaguar-men, it’s got a werewolf, it’s got any number of evil persons who must be outwitted.

Manolito De La Cruz, one of the Carpathians*, knows that his life mate is MaryAnn Delaney, who really has no intention of getting embroiled with a Carpathian man. They’re aggressive, territorial, possessive. A

relationship with a Carpathian would sort of be like a rabbit becoming a lover to a wolf. Possibly interesting, definitely way, way too risky.

Okay, wipe that visual from your mind. Sorry.

So, standoff: He wants her, she doesn't want him. If you were an alpha male (e.g., Carpathian man), what would you do?

Exactly.

*You know, the Carpathian Carpathians. People who are not what they seem.

18

The Devil in the Junior League

LINDA FRANCIS LEE
CONTEMPORARY / 2006

“The Junior League of Willow Creek, Texas, is très exclusive, one of the oldest and most elite women’s societies in the country. And we work hard to keep it that way. Outsiders need not apply.”

This story pokes fun at every rich society gal stereotype and leaves you clutching your sides.

- ✦ Linda Lee herself is a member of the Junior League.
 - ✦ Linda Lee says she got the idea to write a story about “the secret handshakes of life we learn to prove we fit in” when she realized that, as a transplanted Texan living the cosmopolitan New York City life, she didn’t fully “belong” anywhere.
 - ✦ Lee is a social media queen! She’s constantly updating her blog, her Twitter feed, her Facebook page, and her YouTube “Linda Francis Lee in NYC” webisodes.
-

Fredericka Mercedes Hildebrand Ware—a.k.a. Frede—knows the rules of Willow Creek, Texas’s high society life inside out: Never dominate a conversation, don’t look at yourself in a mirror in public, do not give your children a middle name like Sue or Jo, and always wear make-up, even to the gym. Oh, and it simply won’t do to show up for meetings and charity work without a Luis Vuitton messenger bag.

But how do you uphold your genteel lifestyle when your husband runs off with his girlfriend and all the money, leaving you high, dry, and embarrassed? You let the tackiest guy in the neighborhood blackmail you into getting his gaudy wife, Niki Grout, into the Junior League in exchange for legal action against your thieving, cheating husband.

Sawyer Jackson is the dashing but reclusive artist Frede turns to when she needs to make her hobby art gallery pull its weight as a true profit-churning business. She instantly labels him “A Shame”—her category for men who possess a sheer waste of good looks because they have no money or status—and assumes he’s gay. It’s the perfect introduction for two lovers with very little in common, but everything in the world to teach each other.

The laughs never stop as this unlikely group bonds to track down her ex-husband and make him pay, all while learning what really holds a society together.

Devil May Cry

SHERRILYN KENYON
PARANORMAL / 2007

“Vengeance. Some say it’s a poison that infiltrates the soul and strips it bare. That its path only destroys the one who treads it. But to others, it’s mother’s milk. It nourishes and thrives—gives them a reason to survive when they have nothing more to hold them to this world. This is the story of one such creature.”

The hero is a Vegas-casino-owning god. Yes, a literal god. Well, a former literal god. What’s not to love?

- ✦ This is one of the many books in Kenyon’s Dark-Hunter series. Classical mythology has never been this much fun before.
 - ✦ Kenyon calls being a #1 *New York Times* bestselling author “the most miraculous and surreal thing imaginable to me.” And she’s been in that coveted spot no fewer than sixteen times!
-

This madcap adventure is worth your time. Sin is—or, rather, *was*—a powerful Sumerian god until that nasty goddess Artemis overthrew him and stole his godhead. Sin’s been waiting a long, long (long!) time to get his revenge.

But that’s not Sin’s only problem. There are also those pesky gallu, demon-like creatures that are trying to escape to devour all humanity.

Artemis, sensing that Sin is going to make her regret her past, sends an acolyte (Katra, called Kat) to kill him, but Kat recognizes the danger the gallu present and joins forces with Sin instead of killing him. High jinks and hot sex ensue. Also, love.

Actually, we feel kinda bad getting you started on Kenyon’s Dark-Hunter series. Your “to read” pile just got way bigger.

20

Devil's Bride

STEPHANIE LAURENS
HISTORICAL / 1998

“The duchess is so very ... very ... well, really, most charming. So ...’ With very an angelic smile, Mr. Postlethwaite, the vicar of Somersham, gestured airily. ‘Continental, if you take my meaning.’”

Not your ordinary historical—and not your ordinary historical heroine!

- ✦ This is the first book in Laurens’s popular Cynster series.
 - ✦ Laurens was born in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), which is also the birthplace of Rosemary Rogers, author of *Sweet Savage Love* (#82 on our list). There must be something extra-romancey in the water over there!
-

This is a rollicking good time. If you like your romances brimful of sex and adventure, Laurens knows how to deliver the goods!

Governess Honoria Wetherby tries to help an injured man (Tolly Cynster) and ends up turning her life upside down. As a result of going to Tolly’s aid, Honoria ends up in a compromising position with Tolly’s cousin Devil (an unrepentant scoundrel who lives up to his nickname). Devil surprises everyone (society, his family) by offering to marry her.

If this were an ordinary historical romance, they would get married and then discover they truly love each other. But it’s not....

Honoria doesn’t see why she should marry Devil just because they were caught unchaperoned. She longs for a life of adventure, not marriage, and Devil is determined to show her that life with him is just the adventure she’s looking for.

21

Dreaming of You

LISA KLEYPAS
HISTORICAL / 1994

“The lone figure of a woman stood in the shadows. She leaned against the wall of a crumbling lodging house, her shoulders hunched as if she were ill. Derek Craven’s hard green eyes flickered over her as he came from the back-alley gaming hell.”

An historical with a hero who isn’t an earl. Or a duke. Cockney street rat Derek Craven is unforgettable.

- ✦ Lisa Kleypas is a former Miss Massachusetts and competed in the Miss America pageant. She says that because “Massachusetts” is such a long word and she’s only 5’2”, she had to tuck the end of her banner into her swimsuit, thereby inspiring her nickname “Miss Massachu.” We think a story that quirky and endearing is begging to be put in one of Kleypas’s romance novels!
 - ✦ Derek Craven, the hero of *Dreaming of You*, was a minor character in Lisa Kleypas’s previous book, *Then Came You*. She just couldn’t get him out of her head, and knew he needed a book of his own. We couldn’t agree more! Now, she writes on her website, the only problem is that he overpowers whatever story he appears in. That’s okay by us!
 - ✦ Kleypas published her first novel when she was only twenty-one years old!
-

Derek Craven came from nothing but has managed to make himself the wealthy owner of a famous London gambling house. He has all the scars to prove it. Gently bred Sara Fielding, a popular novelist, is going to be no match for him ... is she?

Sara enters Derek's world merely for the sake of research—she wants her latest novel to be realistic and she's taking notes. She ends up saving Derek from a group of thugs and he grudgingly allows her to conduct her research in his realm.

Derek, the orphaned child of a prostitute, doesn't allow anyone to get close to him, but he is enchanted by the innocent Sara, whose practical exterior covers up a deep desire for love and adventure.

We love the nuanced characterization and a fast-paced plot—don't be surprised if you reread this one again and again!

A Duke of Her Own

ELOISA JAMES
HISTORICAL / 2009

“The duke must be here somewhere,” said Mrs. Bouchon, née Lady Anne Lindel, tugging her older sister along like a child with a wheeled toy. ‘And therefore we have to act like hunting dogs?’ Lady Eleanor replied through clenched teeth.”

As the reigning queen of historical romance, James is welcome at Crimson anytime!

- ✦ This is the sixth, best, and last book in James’s Desperate Duchesses series.
 - ✦ Each of the previous Desperate Duchess books closed with a party; the next book in the series opened with that same party.
 - ✦ James is a well-known Shakespearean scholar and professor of English literature; her novels have a delightful literary feel.
-

Don’t read this one until you’ve read all the others, because that will make the Duke of Villiers’s finally meeting his match oh-so-satisfying.

Once the epitome of the bored, irresponsible aristocrat, Leopold Dautry (the aforementioned duke) has grown into a mature man. He has decided to raise his (illegitimate) children in his own home. For that purpose, he needs a wife.

Which is how he finds himself betrothed to Eleanor, the Duke of Montague’s daughter and really the only proper match for him. Eleanor is chaste and respectable. Or is she?

Lisette, the daughter of a different duke, is completely unlike any other woman in the society where Leopold spends his days. He thinks she’s nutty. He thinks she’s many things. He can’t, in fact, *stop* thinking about her ... even though she is also betrothed to someone else.

Which woman will capture Leopold's heart?

23

Emma

JANE AUSTEN
CONTEMPORARY AT THE TIME BUT HISTORICAL TO US! / 1815

“Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.”

With *Emma*, Jane Austen proved the power of love stories—a good romance can even make the most unlikable of characters become likable!

- ✦ Before writing *Emma*, Jane Austen said she was going to write a heroine “whom no one but myself will much like.” And she stuck to her word—Emma Woodhouse is spoiled, self-aggrandizing, oftentimes rude, and ignorant of how damaging her penchant for interfering with other people’s lives can be. But even so, by the end of the book, thanks to Austen’s brilliant writing, readers can’t help but fall in love with her.
 - ✦ The 1995 film *Clueless*, starring Alicia Silverstone, is a modern-day adaptation of *Emma*, set in Beverly Hills.
 - ✦ Emma Woodhouse has been portrayed on film by Gwyneth Paltrow and Kate Beckinsale. Don’t even get us started on the “who played the role better” argument—we might be here a while.
-

Emma Woodhouse is a beautiful, smart, and privileged young woman who lives with her hypochondriac father. Her only friend is the handsome George Knightley—who also happens to be the only person who seems to think her newfound interest in matchmaking couples is a bad idea.

Emma gets it into her head that her new friend Harriet Smith is meant to be with Mr. Elton, the town vicar. When Harriet is presented with an offer of marriage by Mr. Martin, a farmer, Emma convinces her to refuse him, stating that he's not good enough for her. Emma tells Harriet to direct her sights toward Mr. Elton instead, and Harriet complies. But when Mr. Elton proposes to Emma instead of Harriet, Emma's plan falls apart. Harriet is heartbroken, and, after being refused by Emma, Mr. Elton runs off and marries someone else.

Over time, Harriet falls for a new man—and Emma is astonished when she learns who it is: Mr. Knightley! She instantly objects to the match, and comes to realize that it's because she's jealous. She'd been spending so much time meddling into other people's love lives that she never took the time to tend to her own. And now it may be too late—if Mr. Knightley returns Harriet's affections, Emma may never get a happily ever after of her own.

24

Faking It

JENNIFER CRUSIE
CONTEMPORARY / 2003

“Matilda Goodnight stepped back from her latest mural and realized that of all the crimes she’d committed in her thirty-four years, painting the floor-to-ceiling reproduction of van Gogh’s sunflowers on Clarissa Donnelly’s dining room wall was the one that was going to send her to hell.”

No one does romantic comedy quite like Crusie!

- ✦ *Faking It* is connected to (and comes after) Crusie’s delightful *Welcome to Temptation*.
 - ✦ Crusie is a former art teacher—a background she puts to good use in this novel.
-

Matilda Goodnight has a secret. In fact, she has a lot of secrets. Davy Dempsey does, too. In fact, practically the entire cast of characters is hiding something with the possible exception of the dog.

Matilda comes from a long line of art forgers, but she is determined to make sure the reputation of her family’s art gallery remains squeaky clean. No one has ever connected the Goodnights with their forgeries, and their forgeries hang in some hallowed halls.

To protect that reputation, Matilda has to steal back a painting from the conniving Clea Lewis (who may or may not have killed all of her previous husbands). But Matilda’s a better forger than she is a thief and in her attempt to get the painting, she falls in with Davy, a reformed (sort of) con man who is himself trying to steal something—the fortune that was embezzled from him by Clea’s lover, who is (or make that *was*) Davy’s financial advisor. Davy and Clea also have a past: He stole the money from her in the first place.

Whee! And that's just for starters. The plot snowballs from there, but Crusie runs the show with her usual skill, blending in subplots and backstories, crazy relatives, FBI agents, and hit men, not to mention muffins, doughnuts, piña coladas, paper umbrellas, and Double Crostics. Her larger-than-life characters (like Michael, Davy's impossible, unrepentant thief of a father) will charm you even as they pick your pocket. You'll be cheering when Davy finally figures out the truth, frees Matilda from her self-imposed goodness, and—with the good-natured aplomb of all Crusie's heroes—shows her how to solve all of her problems.

25

Fat Tuesday

SANDRA BROWN
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 1998

“He’ll walk.’ Burke Basile extended the fingers of his right hand, then formed a tight fist. This flexing motion had recently become an involuntary habit. ‘There’s not a chance in hell they’ll convict.’”

Emotionally charged, this page-turner hauntingly evokes all the tangled complexities of life in the Big Easy.

- ✦ Brown has written sixty *New York Times* bestsellers.
 - ✦ She is also a recipient of the Romance Writers of America’s Lifetime Achievement Award.
 - ✦ She’s also written under three pen names: Laura Jordan, Rachel Ryan, and Erin St. Claire.
-

New Orleans detective Burke Basile is a pretty good cop until the day he mistakenly kills his own partner during a raid. When the man ultimately responsible for the death is acquitted and Basile comes home to find his wife cheating on him, Basile can’t take anymore and sets in motion a series of events that will change his life—and the lives of many others.

Frustrated with a criminal justice system that doesn’t seem to work and angered by the corruption he sees all around him, Basile resigns from the police force and seeks his own kind of justice.

Pinkie Duvall, one of the creepiest villains ever written, is the man Basile blames for his partner’s death. Basile will do just about anything to see his nemesis suffer—including kidnapping Duvall’s beautiful wife, Remy. What Basile doesn’t realize is that Remy is suffering, too: Her husband is abusive and domineering; she is only with him because he holds her sister’s life in his hands; and she doesn’t believe she can trust

anyone.

As they come to know each other, these two broken souls find hope for the future and determine to bring Duvall down together.

26

The Flame and the Flower

KATHLEEN E. WOODIWISS
HISTORICAL / 1972

“Somewhere in the world, time no doubt whistled by on taut and widespread wings, but here in the English countryside it plodded slowly, painfully, as if it trod the rutted road that stretched across the moors on blistered feet.”

The Flame and the Flower launched the modern romance, as women delighted in both a rollicking tale and satisfying sex—a refreshing change from the kiss-and-a-smoldering-stare approach of older romances.

- ✦ The book was the first single-title romance novel to be published as an original paperback.
 - ✦ Woodiwiss settled for 4 percent of the royalties after an Avon editor pulled it out of the slush pile.
 - ✦ Raised by her mother and many sisters, Woodiwiss attributes her own plucky and determined heroines to the strong females surrounding her as a child.
 - ✦ As one of the first steamy romance writers, Kathleen E. Woodiwiss changed the romance genre forever. We have her to thank for many of the spicy books on this list!
-

Heather Simmons is on the run for killing a man who tried to rape her, and ends up on the London docks, where she’s captured by men who think they’re providing a prostitute for the captain of the *Fleetwood*. Heather goes aboard the ship on the misunderstanding that she’s been arrested for murder, and Captain Brandon Birmingham ends up bedding her as the hooker he thought was on offering.

When she ends up pregnant, the magistrate forces them to marry, and

two unhappy strangers set sail for his home in America. Brandon's former fiancée and a pack of mean girls who had an eye on the handsome captain are also unhappy at the news when they land.

Heather withstands cutting jealousy from Charlestonian belles, and then blackmail when someone from her past threatens to spill her murderous secret. Brandon himself ends up accused of murdering his ex-betrothed. Through these trials, she finds her self-confidence, and he allows love to soften his rougher always-in-control edges.

The couple discovers love in the transformation, and the reader immerses herself in the rich details of two worlds—the well-ordered England of 1799 and the brawling newness of America.

Flowers from the Storm

LAURA KINSALE
HISTORICAL / 1992

“He liked radical politics and had a fondness for chocolate.”

It's rare to mix religious devotion and sex, but Kinsale found a way to respect both, converting readers who considered romances a guilty pleasure.

✦ Kinsale spent six years as a geologist before writing her first romance novel, putting her at the forefront of a wave of professional women who weren't afraid to say they loved this genre.

Christian Langland, Duke of Jerveaux, is a combination of a genius mathematician and a complete rake whose initials (D of J) are found often in the London newspaper gossip columns. Then a stroke seizes him just before he engages in a duel, which leaves him permanently unable to speak. His embarrassed family declares him insane and ships him off to a sanitarium, giving out the story the duke was killed on the field of honor. Meanwhile, he is trapped in a hell of understanding his circumstances but is unable to communicate his plight.

Along comes Maddy, a righteous Quaker and do-gooder, who is well aware of Christian's profligate past, as he once tried to flirt with her while working on an academic paper with her father. But when the two recognize each other during one of her charity rounds, she adheres to her Christian duty to care for the sick and becomes his caretaker and often protector from the guards.

Through her gentle patience and understanding, she is able to live with Christian's intense anger and frustration, and eventually ferrets out what others overlooked: This man is sane, and merely mute. She becomes his champion and coach to help him improve to the point where he can pass a competency hearing and prevent greedy relatives

from stripping his title and worldly possessions.

Maddy's struggle to reconcile her love for this man and her faith is genuine, and the author is careful not to ridicule or pooh-pooh the young Quaker's devotion. Meanwhile, Christian's experience is a classic tale of a proud man being stripped of everything to learn his lesson, but his refusal to quit fighting and despair at the roadblocks will soften the strongest cynic's heart.

Forever and a Day

JILL SHALVIS
CONTEMPORARY / 2012

“Tired, edgy, and scared that she was never going to get her life on the happy track, Grace Brooks dropped into the back booth of the diner and sagged against the red vinyl seat. ‘I could really use a drink.’”

In this sweet and sexy romance, Shalvis combines a delightful contemporary sensibility with an old-fashioned, heartfelt embrace of community and family.

- ✦ This is the sixth (and most recent) book in Shalvis’s Lucky Harbor series.
 - ✦ Shalvis has written more than fifty romances.
-

Like a lot of romance heroines, Grace Brooks has lost everything and is starting over again. Which is how she ends up in the small town of Lucky Harbor, working as a dog walker for Josh Scott, the ER doctor. Before she knows it, she’s helping to take care of Josh’s son, too. The dog, the son, and the doctor all capture Grace’s heart, but she’s not ready for a commitment and Josh hasn’t got the time for love.

As their relationship grows, Grace rebuilds her life and discovers what she was meant to do. And Josh learns that sharing the burden means ... more time for love!

Lighthearted and humorous, this is the epitome of the summer beach read.

Forsaking All Others

LAVYRLE SPENCER
CONTEMPORARY / 1982

“North Star Agency,’ answered the voice on the phone.”

Spencer’s romances focus on the family as much as on the couple in the relationship, making her novels the precursors of today’s women’s fiction.

- ✦ Spencer has won five RITA awards from the Romance Writers of America.
 - ✦ Kathleen E. Woodiwiss was instrumental in getting Spencer’s first novel published—she sent it to her editor at Avon.
 - ✦ Much to the regret of romance readers—and the writers she inspired—Spencer retired from writing in 1997.
-

In this novel, one of Spencer’s earliest, Allison Scott is a photographer who is deeply wounded when her model-turned-lover abandons her. She finds herself heading down the same road with Rick Lang, her new model who, in addition to being gorgeous, is also kind. But can she trust her heart with him?

Though an early 1980s book, don’t mistake this for the typical bodice-ripper of the time. Spencer’s characters feel like real people in your neighborhood, coping with the same problems everyone else has, yet always able to find hope and love.

30

The Grand Sophy

GEORGETTE HEYER
HISTORICAL / 1950

“The butler, recognizing her ladyship’s only surviving brother at a glance, as he afterward informed his less percipient subordinates, favored Sir Horace with a low bow, and took it upon himself to say that my lady, although not at home to less nearly connected persons, would be happy to see him.”

One of Heyer’s best Regencies, with a playful sense of humor and a meticulously rendered historical setting.

✦ Heyer is considered the mother of historical romance.

Sophia Stanton-Lacy has traveled around the world with her father, a diplomat, for many years, but when he receives a posting to South America, he sends Sophy to live with his sister—it being time for Sophy to find a husband and settle down in England.

Sophy’s cousin, Charles Rivenhall, who is responsible for the household, does not view Sophy’s arrival with favor. Sophy, tall, confident, and brash, is not one who is easily overlooked. Charles’s fiancée, Eugenia, does not care for Sophy’s presence in the household, either, and does her best to make Sophy miserable.

But Sophy is not so easily subdued, and thus the dueling of wits begins. Sophy takes the household in hand, dispatching one problem after the other, and ultimately Charles realizes that she is, indeed, the one for him.

31

Guilty

“Where the sweet hell do you think you’re going?”

No one does “past-coming-back-to-haunt-you” as well as Robards.

✦ “I read, I write, I chauffeur children. That’s my life,” Robards says on her website, describing her daily life. Most of us can probably relate!

Prosecutor Kate White, the single mother of an eight-year-old son whom she adores, has a secret: When she was a teenager, she and a group of friends robbed a store—and one of them killed an off-duty police officer.

Now, years later, she’s in a courtroom when chaos erupts and someone starts shooting. Kate is grabbed as a hostage—and then to her surprise, one of her friends from that night, who is in a jail holding cell, kills her captor—and expects Kate to protect him. If she doesn’t? Well, no one has ever been convicted of killing that cop, and maybe it was Kate who did it....

The case is being investigated by Tom Braga, a homicide detective she’s had plenty of run-ins with before as prosecutor, and he thinks she’s got a secret she isn’t telling—which she does.

The stakes are upped when Kate and her son are threatened. Someone is trying to kill them. She’s going to have to trust someone with the truth about her past—but how can she do that without destroying the life she has built?

The fast-paced suspense does not overshadow the emotionally satisfying relationship that develops between the two as they learn to love each other.

32

High Country Bride

LINDA LAEL MILLER
HISTORICAL / 2002

“Angus McKettrick hated every thorn and cactus, every sprig of sagebrush, every juniper tree and jackrabbit and hunk of red rock for fifty miles in all directions, and if he could have scorched the land bare as a pig’s hide at rendering time, he’d have done it, yes, sir.”

Miller’s Western-flavored romances have enormous appeal to romance readers—and this is one of her best.

- ✦ Miller is the daughter of a town marshal.
 - ✦ Miller has written more than 100 novels.
 - ✦ *High Country Bride* is the first book in the McKettrick Cowboys trilogy; there are also any number of related McKettrick novels.
-

Angus McKettrick has one ranch and three sons. He’ll give the ranch to whichever son marries and produces an heir first. Thus, the McKettrick Cowboys core trilogy is set up.

The oldest son, Rafe McKettrick, looks around their little town and decides a mail-order bride is just the ticket. Emmeline, who comes West for her own reasons, agrees to his proposal. It is basically a business decision for both of them.

But it doesn’t stay business forever! Though Rafe can be a bit thick-headed, he’s sincere, and he and Emmeline grow closer through some tender moments. Their love is threatened when Emmeline’s past shows up at the door and a most surprising secret is revealed!

Ice Storm

ANNE STUART
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 2007

“Mary Isobel Curwen had never shot a man before. She stood there, numb, unmoving. She’d never fired a gun before, and the feel of it in her grasp was disturbing.”

The heroine heads up a covert mercenary organization! She kills people without remorse! We love us some kick-ass heroines!

✦ Anne Stuart has written contemporaries, romantic suspense, historicals, paranormals—and more! But we think she may have invented the genre of black ops romance.

Isobel Curwen is the head of The Committee, a covert mercenary organization. Dealing with some of the most dangerous people in the world doesn’t shake her. But confronting her past does.

Serafin, an assassin, seeks help from her organization—help only she can give. But it turns out that Serafin is a man she thought she killed a long time ago. What does he really seek? Is he looking for revenge? And what are they supposed to do about the attraction that has flared up between them now, just as it did then?

Serafin is a bad boy extraordinaire, and Isobel just might be the only one who can tame him.

34

In Too Deep

JAYNE ANN KRENTZ
PARANORMAL / 2010

“Paranormal fire burned in the darkness. Auroras of psi splashed across the ether. The night sky of San Francisco was ablaze with light from across the spectrum. Fallon Jones gripped the condo balcony railing with both hands, fighting to anchor himself to reality.”

This is a wonderful example of a paranormal that anyone can enjoy—even readers who aren’t fans of the genre. No blood-sucking vampires, no werewolves, just a lot of conflict and suspense.

- ✦ Krentz also writes under the names Amanda Quick and Jayne Castle. She has also published as Amanda Glass, Jayne Taylor, Jayne Bentley, and Stephanie James. We’re exhausted just reading that list.
 - ✦ *In Too Deep* is the tenth novel in the Arcane Society series. We love this one because Fallon Jones finally gets what’s coming to him. Krentz juggles the mystery/detective story, the paranormal suspense, and the romantic relationship with consummate skill, all the while exercising her trademark wit.
 - ✦ Thirty-two of Jayne Ann Krentz’s 122 romance novels have made the *New York Times* bestseller list. We like those odds!
-

In a slightly futuristic world, Fallon Jones lives in Scargill Cove, a place where otherworldly phenomena thrive. And Fallon is a paranormal investigator, so he’s in his element. He runs Jones & Jones, which might best be described as a detective agency for things that regular law enforcement can’t handle. Things like ... dark energy and people who can bend the will of other people.

Fallon’s also a recluse, dour, cynical, and the last person you’d ever

expect to see starring in his own book. He's sort of an accidental romance hero, which makes him extra-delightful.

Isabella Valdez, a talented intuitive, arrives in Scargill Cove and takes over Fallon's office—and his life. But she's on the run from danger, and it's not just the physical kind. An encounter with an object of dark energy puts them both in danger and they must unravel its secrets before it destroys them. Krentz creates two unforgettable characters here.

35

It Had to Be You

SUSAN ELIZABETH PHILLIPS
CONTEMPORARY / 1994

“Phoebe Somerville outraged everyone by bringing a French poodle and a Hungarian lover to her father’s funeral.”

Sassy, sexy, heartwarming, and oh-so-emotionally satisfying. SEP, we adore you.

✦ *It Had to Be You* is the first in Phillips’s enormously successful Chicago Stars series.

We dare you to read that first line and not be hooked.

Phoebe Somerville, a blonde bombshell, inherits the Chicago Stars football team from her despicable father. She doesn’t know the first thing about football, and she can’t imagine anything she cares about less. She knows her father’s will is his final slap in the face: If she doesn’t lead the team to the playoffs, she’ll lose the inheritance and it’ll go to her creepy cousin Reed. And if there’s one thing Phoebe is least likely to do, it’s succeed at running a football team.

Dan Calebow is the stubborn, sexist coach of the team, the type of man she heartily dislikes. The feeling is mutual: The last thing Dan needs is a boss like Phoebe. What he wants is a new owner, so he has no intention of helping her figure out what to do.

But they can’t help their attraction. And they come to realize that they are both more complex than they seem to be at first glance. Their attraction grows, and so does their ability to work together as a team. In the end, Dan has a chance to ride to Phoebe’s rescue, and they both get to enjoy the fruits of their success.

36

Jade Island

ELIZABETH LOWELL
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 1998

“The man was frightened.”

Romance, adventure, and treasure hunting! No one does it quite like Lowell.

✦ This is the second book in the Donovan family saga—the others are *Amber Beach* and *Pearl Cove*.

Kyle Donovan, of the Donovan gem empire, prefers the allure of hunting for treasure to sitting in an office negotiating deals. When Lianne Blakely, a jade expert and the illegitimate daughter of the powerful Johnny Tang (a jade collector), is accused of stealing a precious cultural artifact from China, Kyle has to figure out what happened or Lianne and his family will be in jeopardy.

In one fun twist, Tang asks Lianne to seduce Kyle for the good of their family, and Kyle is asked to seduce Lianne for the good of *his* family, and neither knows what the other is up to.

The two must work together to find the true thief, and you know what that means! Love amidst the jewels.

Sensual and fast paced, this is the best book of the Donovan trilogy. The characters are nuanced and complex, their motivations compelling and sympathetic—even when they’re at odds with each other.

Jane Eyre

CHARLOTTE BRONTË
CONTEMPORARY AT THE TIME BUT NOW HISTORICAL / 1847

“There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning; but since dinner (Mrs. Reed, when there was no company, dined early) the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further out-door exercise was now out of the question.”

Though *Jane Eyre* is considered a classic love story today, when it was first published it was truly ahead of its time, as it features a strong-willed, individualistic female main character and explores the issues of sexuality, religion, and feminism, paving the way for contemporary romance novels.

✦ *Jane Eyre* was originally published in three volumes, which was a common publishing practice in the nineteenth century. Volume One consisted of [chapters 1 to 15](#), Volume Two—[chapters 16 to 26](#), and Volume Three—[chapters 27 to 38](#).

The novel begins with ten-year-old Jane Eyre living with her deceased uncle’s wife and children in a home where she is routinely emotionally and physically abused. When she is given the opportunity to leave the family and attend school at the Lowood School for Girls, Jane finally stands up to her aunt and tells her what she really thinks of her. But her school life doesn’t turn out to be much better, as the headmaster is a cruel man who subjects his students to cold rooms, thin clothing, and insubstantial meals.

After six years as a student and two as a teacher, Jane leaves Lowood and takes a job as a governess, where she meets the handsome Mr.

Rochester. The two quickly fall in love and are preparing to get married when Jane learns that Mr. Rochester is actually already married—to Bertha, the mentally ill woman living locked up in the house.

Ashamed and brokenhearted, Jane flees from Mr. Rochester's home. She soon meets St. John, a clergyman who asks to marry her and take her away to India. Now Jane must make a decision—live a life of duty with St. John or go back to the man who lied to her and shamed her.

Kiss Me If You Can

CARLY PHILLIPS
CONTEMPORARY / 2010

“News flash! The Daily Post is happy to announce a partnership with the Bachelor Blogs, bringing you news of New York’s hottest men, both online and in print!”

Feel-good, fun romance with a contemporary voice.

- ✦ Phillips was an attorney before trying her hand at writing romance.
 - ✦ This is the first book in Phillips’s Bachelor Blog series.
-

Reporter Sam Cooper (Coop) is not a man who likes change. But things are about to get turned upside down in his world when he stops a robbery at a jewelry store and is rewarded with an antique ring—and shows up in the city’s Bachelor Blog.

Free spirit Lexie Davis is interested in the ring, which was stolen a long time ago and which she thinks belongs to her family. Events get complicated when someone tries to steal the ring from Coop.

As they try to figure out why the ring matters, Lexie and Coop are drawn to each other, but will Coop find a way to change, and can Lexie be content settling down?

A Knight in Shining Armor

JUDE DEVERAUX
PARANORMAL (TIME TRAVEL) / 1990

“Nicholas was trying to concentrate on the letter to his mother, a letter that was probably the most important document he would ever write. Everything depended upon this letter: his honour, his estates, his family’s future—and his life.”

Deveraux does an excellent job putting both Douglass and Nicholas in fish-out-of-water scenarios and showing the reader just how difficult yet funny a culture swap can be.

✦ The original release, which was the author’s hardcover debut, didn’t give romance readers the expected happily ever after—the hero dies alone in his time and the heroine ends up in the twenty-first century with his reincarnation. But despite some readers’ restlessness, Deveraux left this plot twist in place with her 2002 rerelease.

American schoolteacher Douglass Montgomery finally stands up to the boyfriend who is constantly taking advantage of her and pays a high price in the short run: She finds herself abandoned in a churchyard in England sans money, passport, or a plan. Who wouldn’t shed a few tears of panic? But Douglass’s tears conjure up Sir Nicholas Stafford, a womanizing, roguish Earl of Thornwyck who died in 1564, in the flesh before her—and not exactly happy to find himself whisked into the wrong century.

Once Nicholas manages to convince Douglass that his story is real, they build their romantic relationship on a friends-in-need basis rather than a friends-with-benefits arrangement as they team up to find the passage to this time travel portal. When they find it and he leaves her

behind, she realizes her emotions are love and she must follow him. The kink in this plan? She lands in 1560—several years before Nicholas’s time-travel jaunt.

Naturally, he has no recollection of his lady love, so Douglass must set out to nurture their bond all over again despite the fact that ancient Nicholas’s personality is nothing like the man he became in 1988. The tender ending leaves even casual readers with tears as these two begin a third time to regenerate their connection—a solid definition of true love.

40

Lessons in French

LAURA KINSALE
HISTORICAL / 2010

“Lady Callista Taillefaire was a gifted wallflower. By the age of seven and twenty, she had perfected the art of blending into the wallpaper and woodwork so well that she never had to dance and only her most intimate friends greeted her.”

A sexy, humorous romp that also delivers a poignant love story.

✦ Known more for her darker stories, this novel is a delightful departure for Kinsale.

Shy, plain Lady Callista Taillefaire has resigned herself to spinsterhood. She has been dumped (there’s no way to put it politely) three times, even though she comes equipped with a fortune. So she has turned her attention to other matters. Like raising her bull, Hubert.

Hot bad boy Trevelyan d’Augustin is a scoundrel from Callista’s past—the man who gave her lessons in French. And also *French*. Oh-la-la! Though he’s the worst possible choice for Callista, when he returns home, the sparks fly—and so do the adventures! And yes, Hubert is involved in them.

These are deeply believable characters drawn with a touch of whimsy.

41

Lion's Bride

IRIS JOHANSEN
HISTORICAL / 1995

“I have it!” Thea whirled to see Selene running through the city gates toward her. The child’s red hair had come loose from her braid and was flowing wildly down her back, and her narrow chest was lifting and falling as she tried to catch her breath.”

This medieval romance keeps you biting your nails as you try to figure out how Thea and Ware will ever be able to outwit the Knights Templar.

- ✦ Best known for her Eve Duncan forensic thrillers, Johansen got her early start writing category romance.
 - ✦ Although she’s switched from romance to suspense, she writes on her website that she still tries to put a love story in each of her books.
-

Set during the Crusades, this is a story of romance, adventure, and intrigue. Johansen evokes the reality of the time with all of its many abuses of humans—everything from child labor to slavery. But she doesn’t forget that she’s writing a romance; where there’s romance, there’s hope.

Thea of Dimas is an indentured servant, working for a silk merchant. She steals some silk worms, intending to set up her own silk shop, and travels to Damascus, hoping to free her sister Selene. But her caravan is set upon, everyone is killed but her, and Lord Ware rescues her and carries her off to his castle.

Ware, who is in danger from the Knights Templar, knows that just being near him puts anyone in jeopardy and he doesn’t intend to get close to Thea. Thea likewise has her own plans, and Ware isn’t going to thwart them. In fact, she intends to have him help her.

At first, they battle each other, and then they battle their enemies, eventually finding a way to keep the Templars from ever finding them. Peace, at last.

42

Lord of Danger

ANNE STUART
HISTORICAL / 1997

“There were monsters who walked the land. Alys had never seen one in the flesh, but she had no doubt they existed.”

We love a good medieval romance—and this is one of the best!

- ✦ Stuart’s first novel was *Barrett’s Hill*, a gothic romance. Ballantine published it in 1974.
 - ✦ According to Stuart, this is the first medieval romance she wrote, and still one of her personal favorites. Ours too!
-

The hero of this tale, the wizard Simon of Navarre, is not your average good guy hero. He practices the dark arts, is greatly feared by everyone who knows him, is thought to be a monster, not a man, and is otherwise the kind of person you’d not want to meet in a dark alley on a rainy night.

Richard the Fair (also a very bad man) wants Simon on his side and offers one of his sisters in marriage (this being the type of thing they did in the Middle Ages to cement alliances; now we’d sell some military hardware).

Alys, said sister, is more clever than beautiful. Though she’s intelligent, she was raised in a convent and is not terribly worldly. Simon makes her afraid for her soul. On the other hand, he is very attractive, and he can be charming. And he is entranced by her.

Through danger and court intrigue (including the scheming of Richard), they are both tested, and must come to trust each other.

43

Lord of Scoundrels

LORETTA CHASE
HISTORICAL / 1995

“In the spring of 1792, Dominick Edward Guy de Ath Ballister, third Marquess of Dain, Earl of Blackmoor, Viscount Launcells, Baron Ballister and Launcells, lost his wife and four children to typhus.”

Some readers call this tale the perfect Regency romance. We won't go so far as to assert that, but we do love a bright, not-naïve heroine, delightful dialogue, and the reformation of a rogue!

- ✧ *Lord of Scoundrels* won a RITA for best short historical.
 - ✧ Like many writers, Loretta Chase has held down various jobs on her way to success, including a six-month stint as a meter maid.
-

The Marquess of Dain, Sebastian Ballister, is a scoundrel. (You might even call him the lord of scoundrels.) In addition to his very many bad habits, he's arrogant, prideful, and occasionally sneering. He has no intention of redeeming himself; he enjoys his life of sin far too much. He has his reasons for being the way he is, but he has successfully managed to squelch any feelings of regret.

Jessica Trent has a plan to save her brother Bertie—“the greatest nitwit in the Northern Hemisphere.” The plan requires extracting him from his friendship with the lord of scoundrels, which Jessica is fully prepared to do.

From their first meeting, Sebastian and Jessica butt heads—and the sparks fly. The sparks fly so much that they are caught in a compromising position and Sebastian is eventually forced to marry Jessica in order to protect her reputation.

When this rake is finally reformed, it's to the great satisfaction of

everyone (including the reader).

44

Lord of the Night

SUSAN WIGGS
HISTORICAL / 1994

“Sandro Cavalli’s day took a turn for the worse when he walked into the airy, sunlit studio and encountered a naked woman.”

Known for her contemporary romances and women’s fiction, Wiggs also writes a compelling historical. This is her best.

- ✦ Wiggs has won the RITA award three times, including one for *Lord of the Night*.
 - ✦ Wiggs finished her first novel when she was eight years old. Talk about precocious!
-

Set in sixteenth-century Venice, this novel follows the relationship between Sandro Cavalli (Lord of the Night) and the beautiful Laura Bandello.

Sandro is a nobleman who, as head of the sixteenth-century Venetian version of the police, brings criminals to justice. Laura is a commoner, training as a painter with the famed Titian with dreams of being admitted to the Academy (all male, of course).

When an important man is killed and Laura is assaulted, the two are thrown together—but they are separated not only by age (Sandro is nearly twice her age) but by social class. Yet in facing dangers together, they not only unravel the mystery but also find their common ground.

45

Love's Tender Fury

JENNIFER WILDE
HISTORICAL / 1976

“Pale, shaken, the girl descended the stairs clutching her pathetically battered bag and trying not to sob.”

This book never sits still and even contemporary readers will appreciate Marietta’s Unsinkable Mollie Brown attitude.

- ✦ *Love’s Tender Fury* was the first romance that romance writer Linda Francis Lee read after a friend gave it to her as comfort when her high school boyfriend invited someone else to the prom.
 - ✦ Jennifer Wilde was the pen name for Tom E. Huff, who died in 1990. Tom Huff also wrote category romance novels as Beatrice Parker, Edwina Marlow, and Katherine St. Clair before finding fame in the historical romance category.
 - ✦ Huff earned a Career Achievement Award from *Romantic Times*.
-

Marietta Danver was not exactly living a charmed life. Her employer raped her, a jealous mistress accused her of theft, and the feisty redhead found herself shipped to the Colonies to become a bondservant for fourteen years to the highest bidder while she stood on the block.

Derek Hawke becomes her master in more ways than one, but sells her when he catches her helping two slaves escape his property. In her escape from the bondservant life, she makes her way to New Orleans, where she takes up with a man and together they run a gambling house. But Jeff tragically dies before he marries her, leaving Marietta penniless enough to be forced into marrying a rich German sadist who owns most of Natchez.

All the while, she pines for Derek and the chance to rekindle that spark they had.

It’s only a matter of time before Marietta’s German husband turns

against her when she again pitches in to help someone—her sister-in-law this time—flee his evil grip. It's up to Derek to charge in and save her and their love, which continues across swashbuckling adventures in *Love Me, Marietta* and *When Love Commands*. The story continues to enjoy good reviews from modern-day readers who identify with the hero and heroine more sympathetically than with other classic pairings from the bodice-ripper days.

46

Lucky's Lady

TAMI HOAG
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 1991

“You want to do what, chère?” Serena Sheridan took a deep breath and tried again. ‘I need to hire a guide to take me to the swamp.’”

Hoag’s later novels are more suspense than romance, and her earlier novels are more romance than suspense; *Lucky’s Lady* is a perfectly balanced blend of both—page turning, sexy, romantic.

- ✦ Hoag’s first thriller, *Night Sins*, was made into a miniseries.
 - ✦ Hoag competes in the equestrian sport of dressage.
-

Serena Sheridan returns to Louisiana to find her missing grandfather and enlists the help of Etienne Doucet (Lucky), who can guide her through the swamps and backwoods of the area. Serena’s missing grandfather is just the beginning of her problems, though; her sister wants to sell their family home to an oil company, and Serena fears this will create an ecological disaster. Drama ensues and Serena’s life is threatened.

Lucky is a madly attractive, rough-and-ready Cajun and Serena can’t help falling into bed with him any more than she can help falling in love with him. But he has reasons for not wanting to settle down.

Hoag’s evocative setting makes you feel like you’re right there in the swamps with them.

47

Mackenzie's Mountain

LINDA HOWARD
CONTEMPORARY / 1989

“He needed a woman. Bad.”

Mackenzie’s Mountain is classic romance.

- ✦ This is the first in the Mackenzie family series.
 - ✦ Linda Howard wrote for her own personal enjoyment for twenty-one years before deciding to submit a manuscript for publication.
-

Mary Elizabeth Potter is a spinster school teacher. Vietnam vet Wolf Mackenzie is a half-breed (the epitome of a romance hero!) who belongs in neither of the worlds he’s part of. Mary goes toe-to-toe with him over sending his son to school, and the two of them develop an unlikely relationship. They are opposites in all ways (she wears her heart on her sleeve, he is deeply reserved; she is innocent, he is experienced) yet their attraction seems believable—and it crackles on the page.

While everyone else sees him as a dangerous criminal (he did not commit the crime), she is able to see the true person he is. When a string of crimes occurs in the small town where they live, Wolf is the main suspect. Will the true criminal be found, will Wolf be able to make peace with the townspeople who are so deeply suspicious of him, and can Mary and Wolf find their way to a happily ever after?

48

Married by Morning

LISA KLEYPAS
HISTORICAL / 2010

“Anyone who had ever read a novel knew that governesses were supposed to be meek and downtrodden. They were also supposed to be quiet, subservient, and obedient, not to mention deferential to the master of the house. Leo, Lord Ramsay, wondered in exasperation why they couldn’t have gotten one of those.”

A delightful take on the classic romance theme of lord-of-the-manor-marries-the-governess.

- ✧ *Married by Morning* hit #3 on the *New York Times* bestseller list.
 - ✧ *Married by Morning* is the fourth book in the Hathaways series.
-

Catherine Marks is the former governess of and now companion (the paid kind of companion) to the Hathaway sisters. Leo Hathaway (Lord Ramsay), the sisters’ older brother, learns that to keep the family home he must immediately marry and produce an heir.

Cat and Leo have never gotten along, but their arguments hide a mutual attraction that blazes into full force the first time they kiss. So Leo proposes that Cat become his wife. A perfectly sensible solution.

But Cat and Leo both have pasts that keep them from being able to give themselves fully. Leo is tortured by the death of his former love, and his feelings of culpability in the death of one of his sisters; Cat comes from a horrific home, barely escaping being forced into prostitution by her evil aunt. Though Cat and Leo try to keep the past in the past, it doesn’t want to stay there. Can they deal with their demons to get to their happily ever after?

49

Mistress

AMANDA QUICK
HISTORICAL / 1995

“Your latest mistress is creating a sensation back in London, Masters. Society finds her vastly entertaining.’ Charles Trescott, seated before the fireplace, downed a swallow of brandy and eyed his host with a sly expression.”

Amanda Quick, Jane Ann Krentz’s pseudonym for her historical genre books, gives us a heroine who doesn’t make virgin synonymous with naïve.

✦ Iphiginia (pronounced Eff en jeh NEE uh) was the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra in Greek mythology, with a name that means “born to strength.”

Financially independent, twenty-seven-year-old Iphiginia Bright has a brilliant plan and her Aunt Zoe’s best interests at heart: In order to find the blackguard blackmailing this sweet woman, Iphiginia decides to pose as Marcus Cloud, the Earl of Masters’s, mistress. After all, he’s dead, so what’s to trip up this disguise that will lead her to uncover the villain’s identity?

Well, the earl himself, for starters, who strolls into a ballroom as alive as any well-dressed noble in the room. Intrigued at what this newcomer, now infamously known as Lady Starlight, is trying to pull off, he backs her mistress story. After all, one of his friends is also being blackmailed, so he has something to gain from getting to the bottom of the mystery as well. He’s bulletproof to emotional danger, thanks to his five guiding principles:

1. Never remarry.
2. Never discuss the past.

3. Never explain his actions to others.
4. Never retreat from an objective or alter a decision.
5. Never get involved with virgins or other men's wives.

Of course, you can't call off the hormones when a smart, beautiful woman declares herself a handsome, rich man's paramour, despite what isn't happening between the sheets. Marcus's seduction attempts lend the sexy to this story, which ends up as much about how he learns to let go of his rigid rules for living as it does catching a blackmailer.

And in a refreshing twist to the usual Regency novel to that date, the two are deceiving society, not each other.

50

Montana Sky

NORA ROBERTS
CONTEMPORARY / 1996

“Being dead didn’t make Jack Mercy less of a son of a bitch. One week of dead didn’t offset sixty-eight years of being mean. Plenty of people gathered by his grave would be happy to say so.”

One of Roberts’s nonseries titles, *Montana Sky* showcases her at her storytelling best, as she juggles the demands of telling three romances—not to mention working in a suspenseful subplot and capturing the setting with vivid accuracy—all without dropping a ball.

- ✦ Nora Roberts is definitely the MVP of our favorite genre! When the Romance Writers of America Hall of Fame was established, Roberts was the first author to be inducted.
 - ✦ According to *Publishers Weekly*, Roberts writes eight hours a day. Every. Single. Day.
 - ✦ She’s written more than 200 romance novels, and she shows no signs of stopping! She passed the 100-novel mark with *Montana Sky*.
 - ✦ *Montana Sky* was made into a Lifetime movie.
-

When rancher Jack Mercy dies, he leaves his valuable ranch (worth millions) to his three daughters (all by different mothers) with one caveat—the three, who are basically strangers to one another, must live together on the ranch for a year or else lose it entirely.

Willa, Tess, and Lily are thrown together and must learn to get along. Willa, the bossy type, is the only one of them who knows anything about running a ranch. Hard-headed Ben is the only possible match for her.

Tess likes the idea of inheriting money but not of living with her sisters. A Hollywood type, she succumbs to the charms of the cowboy

Nate.

Lily, a quiet woman suffering from her abusive marriage and subsequent divorce, is glad to have a place to go to. Adam, the calmest of the men in their lives, is the balm Lily needs to heal.

As each woman learns to get along with her sisters and overcome the obstacles in her love relationship, the stakes are upped when someone starts committing gruesome atrocities on the ranch. Who would commit such heinous acts—and why?

51

More than a Mistress

MARY BALOGH
HISTORICAL / 2000

“The two gentlemen who were in their shirt sleeves despite the brisk chill of a spring morning were about to blow each other’s brains out. Or attempt to do so, at least.”

Balogh comes into her own with this novel, a charming Regency with a twist. The standard plot device is for the aristocrat’s wife to feel threatened by his mistress and for him to give up his mistress and declare his love for his wife. Here, the aristocrat falls in love with his mistress. Unthinkable!

✦ *More than a Mistress* is one of two connected books (the other being *No Man’s Mistress*), with a prequel called *The Secret Mistress* rounding out the Mistress series. It was Balogh’s hardcover debut.

Jocelyn Dudley, the incorrigible Duke of Tresham, is shot during (yet another) duel. Jane Ingleby, who was trying to prevent it, rushes to his aid. Though Jocelyn finds her bold and impudent, he is deeply attracted to her and sets her up as his mistress.

Jane accepts the arrangement in order to keep a secret, telling herself it’s just business. She is not, actually, a commoner, but in fact Lady Sara Illingsworth—and she believes she has killed a man.

The two are, naturally, stubborn, headstrong, and unwilling to admit that their mutual attraction has deepened into something more lasting. Jane doesn’t dare reveal her secret, not even to Jocelyn. And Jocelyn, a confirmed bachelor, would never make the foolish mistake of falling in love with his mistress—would he?

52

Naked in Death

J. D. ROBB
FUTURISTIC / 2004

“She woke in the dark. Through the slats on the window shades, the first murky hint of dawn slipped, slanting shadowy bars over the bed. It was like waking in a cell.”

Here Robb (the pen name of Nora Roberts) shows she can deliver fast-paced suspense with emotional resonance—all the while building a world of the future.

✦ *Naked in Death* is the first in Robb’s hugely popular In Death series. The other novels follow Dallas through other cases.

Set in a slightly future New York City, *Naked in Death* follows Lt. Eve Dallas as she tracks a murderer. A senator’s granddaughter is killed with an old-fashioned gun, and Dallas is plunged into a violent case that brings her into contact with the wealthy and dangerous Roarke, a prime suspect.

Though Dallas wants to believe that the attractive and oh-so-sexy Roarke is what she believes he is (a man skating the edge between legal and illegal, but not a murderer), the evidence doesn’t seem to back her up.

Robb creates a stunningly believable future world while delivering a page-turning mystery—and oh my, is that romance hot.

Natural Born Charmer

SUSAN ELIZABETH PHILLIPS
CONTEMPORARY / 2007

“It wasn’t every day a guy saw a headless beaver marching down the side of a road, not even in Dean Robillard’s larger-than-life world. ‘Son of a....’ Dean slammed on the brakes of his brand-new Aston Martin Vanquish and pulled over in front of her.”

The witty, smart-alecky dialogue and ego smackdowns between everyone in this story keep you laughing and turning pages.

- ✦ This book, number seven and the last in the author’s Chicago Stars series, has a strong male bent that attracted a few Y-chromosome fans, too.
 - ✦ Phillips met her husband on a blind date, and now they have two grown sons.
-

Dean Robillard has it made in the shade as an NFL quarterback hotshot millionaire with an underwear advertising contract on the side that means his physique is plastered billboard-size across America. His problem? He’s not sure this is the life for him, so he sets off on a Colorado backwoods trek for some alone time to think deep thoughts.

Unfortunately, he runs into Blue Bailey in this back of beyond, a spunky gal on a mission to murder her ex, if she could only get out of the advertising beaver suit she donned in one of her desperate schemes to earn money. He gives her a lift, and the two end up together for weeks that include returning to his Tennessee farm, where his contrite, former groupie mother shows up trying to make amends for giving her son a lousy childhood, and the rock star father he never knew drops in when Dean’s eleven-year-old stepsister runs away—to Dean’s house.

The group manages to work out the kinks from their dysfunctional childhoods, and share a big group hug. Along the way, they also save the small town from extinction by outwitting the crabby old crone who is trying to choke off its livelihood. The characters are over the top, but never cartoonish in this fun story. And while down on her luck from a financial standpoint and freewheeling by nature, you never mistake Blue as either weak or unintelligent.

Top Five Romantic Scents

Men find these smells sexy!

1. **Cinnamon and vanilla** (or just make cookies!)
2. **Lavender**
3. **Sandalwood**
4. **Citrus—orange, grapefruit** (we're serious!)
5. **Baby powder**

54

North and South

ELIZABETH GASKELL
CONTEMPORARY AT THE TIME, NOW HISTORICAL / 1855

“Edith!’ said Margaret, gently, ‘Edith!’ But, as Margaret half suspected, Edith had fallen asleep. She lay curled up on the sofa in the back drawing room in Harley Street, looking very lovely in her white muslin and blue ribbons. If Titania had ever been dressed in white muslin and blue ribbons, and had fallen asleep on a crimson damask sofa in a back drawing room, Edith might have been taken for her. Margaret was struck afresh by her cousin’s beauty.”

Gaskell, a pioneer in using fiction to point out social problems, tells her story through the evolution of a romantic relationship between the two main characters. A seminal novel.

- ✧ *North and South* was turned into a television serial in 2004.
 - ✧ Charlotte Brontë was a friend of Gaskell’s.
 - ✧ This is considered the second of Elizabeth Gaskell’s novels to take place in the industrial city; the first was *Mary Barton*, published in 1848.
-

Gaskell explored tensions between workers and their industrialist employers in an earlier novel, *Mary Barton*, but *North and South* is a more balanced examination of what gives rise to those tensions.

In this novel, which was originally serialized in twenty installments (in *Household Words*, which was edited by Charles Dickens), Margaret Hale moves from the south of England (still rural) to the north (undergoing industrialization) with her parents, and the difference in setting shocks her. She witnesses brutal strikes and develops a deep sympathy for the workers.

John Thornton is a manufacturer who treats his workers with scorn. Margaret confronts him about his attitude and behavior. It doesn't seem possible that a romance could result from this, but it does. John comes to appreciate Margaret's independent spirit; Margaret admires John's tenacity and ability to better himself. Both change and grow as they come to know each other.

A series of family secrets and outside events eventually culminate in John having to stop production at his mill and Margaret inheriting the means for them to go into business together—creating a future that is more balanced for themselves and the society they live in.

55

Nothing But Trouble

RACHEL GIBSON
CONTEMPORARY / 2010

“Just because a man was lucky to be alive, didn’t mean he had to be happy about it.”

Gibson’s edgy approach to romantic comedy has won fans worldwide—including us!

- ✦ *Nothing But Trouble* is the fifth novel in Gibson’s Chinooks Hockey League series.
 - ✦ Rachel Gibson’s first novel, *Simply Irresistible*, launched her onto the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestsellers lists.
-

Chelsea Ross is an actress who has never quite hit the big time. All right, her main claim to fame is playing a dead body. So when the Seattle Chinooks offer her a job as a personal assistant to one of their stars, she takes it.

Mark Bressler, an injured hockey player, knows his career is over, and he’s a little bitter. Chelsea would dump the job in a second but she needs the money. And ... he is hot. Very hot. Hot, hot, hot. A jerk, but hot. What’s a girl to do?

In this delightful opposites attract, Mark’s not able to push Chelsea away (she needs the money!) and discovers, to his surprise, that there is life after hockey.

56

Outlander

DIANA GABALDON
PARANORMAL (TIME TRAVEL) / 1991

“It wasn’t a very likely place for disappearances, at least at first glance.”

We agree with Gabaldon, who is often asked to describe what kind of book this is: “Pick it up, open it anywhere, and read three pages. If you can put it down again, I’ll pay you a dollar.’ I’ve never lost any money on that bet.”

- ✦ The book is titled *Cross Stitch* in the U.K. release and contains six additional paragraphs scattered throughout where heroine Claire worries about the husband she left back in time. The publisher also made her remove the sex scene that ends the “Raiders in the Rocks” chapter.
 - ✦ In 2010, an album consisting of fourteen songs that tell the story of *Outlander* was released under the title *Outlander the Musical*. It was so successful that several theaters are now considering staging a full-scale stage production of the musical.
-

In 1946, after World War II, a young Englishwoman named Claire Beauchamp Randall goes to the Scottish Highlands on a second honeymoon with her husband, Frank. As a combat nurse and an army grunt, the two have been separated for six years, and have set aside this time to restart their future. But one day Claire goes out walking by herself, and comes across a circle of standing stones, which are common across this part of the country, and is sucked through a time portal to 1743.

The first person she meets is Jack Randall, Frank’s ancestor—a sadistic bisexual pervert. While trying to escape from him, Claire falls into the hands of a gang of Highland Scots, who are also trying to avoid Black

Jack Randall to escape political persecution.

To avoid being handed over to this common enemy, Claire is obliged to marry one of the young clansmen: Jamie Fraser, a loyal Jacobite who, in a romantic surprise twist, is a virgin. He's also a traditional kilt guy taught that the way to a great marriage is to keep his woman in line, a pronouncement that does not work at winning the love of a twentieth-century, independent woman.

Claire finds herself trying to escape from Castle Leoch and her Scottish captors, trying to avoid being recaptured by Captain Randall, needing to find the way back to Frank—and falling in love with Jamie, who is quickly proving he's got her back whenever she clashes with the culture, despite the fact he has no idea where she came from or who she really is. Does she really want to walk away from this love to go home? Gabaldon has spent twenty-one years and seven books providing hungry fans with the answer.

57

Over the Edge

SUZANNE BROCKMANN
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 2001

“The moon was hanging insolent and full in the sky just to the left of a billboard for a bankruptcy lawyer, and Stan knew. It was the full moon’s fault. It had to be the goddamn full moon.”

This third book in the Troubleshooters series is where Brockmann hits her stride. You won’t be able to put it down.

- ✦ *Over the Edge* can be read as a standalone, but you may as well go ahead and get all the books in the series. You’re going to read them anyway.
 - ✦ In her nonwriterly life, Brockmann is very active with several civil rights organizations.
-

Lieutenant Teri Howe is an excellent helicopter pilot who needs a little help. Fortunately, her friend, Senior Chief Stan Wolchonok, has got her back. He’s a quiet kind of hero—not a flashy warrior but the man who keeps the mission under control. He’s also a lot older than Teri, and he’s determined to keep their relationship strictly platonic, going so far as to introduce Teri to the guy he thinks she should be with.

When a jet is hijacked, Teri and Stan must work together to save the day—and they push their relationship over the edge.

The subplot with Max Bhagat, the FBI hostage negotiator, and Gina, who bravely sacrifices herself as a hostage to prevent more deaths, is heart wrenching—and the relationship between Alyssa and Sam, which doesn’t culminate for several books, is hot, hot, hot.

58

Persuasion

JANE AUSTEN
CONTEMPORARY AT THE TIME, NOW HISTORICAL. / 1818

“Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch Hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage; there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one; there his faculties were roused into admiration and respect, by contemplating the limited remnant of the earliest patents; there any unwelcome sensations, arising from domestic affairs changed naturally into pity and contempt as he turned over the almost endless creations of the last century; and there, if every other leaf were powerless, he could read his own history with an interest which never failed.”

Though not as popular as *Pride and Prejudice* or *Sense and Sensibility*, the story of *Persuasion* just as easily sweeps readers into its timeless love story. The theme of lost love and regret is one that so many people can identify with, and Austen brings those feelings so brilliantly to life on the page—complete with, of course, an incredibly moving happy ending!

- ✦ *Persuasion* is Jane Austen’s last completed novel—she finished it in August 1816 and it was published five months after her death in 1817.
 - ✦ *Persuasion* is linked to Jane Austen’s novel *Northanger Abbey* for two reasons: The two works were originally bound and published together, and both stories are set partly in Bath, the city where Austen herself lived from 1801 to 1805.
-

Eight years before the start of the novel, nineteen-year-old Anne Elliot, a

lovely, happy young woman, accepts a marriage proposal from the handsome and smart yet poor Frederick Wentworth. Anne's friends and family, unhappy with Wentworth's position in society, persuade her to break off the engagement.

Now twenty-seven, Anne is unhappy and alone. She still loves Frederick Wentworth, even though she hasn't seen him in many years, and regrets her decision to turn down his proposal. Dire financial circumstances force Anne's father to rent out their home—and the tenant turns out to be Wentworth's sister and her husband! Thus, Wentworth, an extremely wealthy man now, re-enters Anne's life. He is cold and standoffish to Anne, but flirts openly with every other young woman he meets, including Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove, the younger sisters of Anne's sister Mary's husband Charles.

Unable to watch Wentworth around these flirty young women, Anne directs her attentions elsewhere and soon becomes the object of affection for several new men, including two military officers and her father's cousin and heir, William Elliot. As Anne's relationship with Elliot progresses, Wentworth starts hanging around more and more. Could he be jealous? And even if he were, is it too late? Has Anne finally moved on?

The Pirate Lord

SABRINA JEFFRIES
HISTORICAL / 1998

“Miss Sara Willis had known a great many awkward moments in her twenty-three years. There was the time as a seven-year-old when her mother had caught her filching biscuits from the grand kitchen at Blackmore Hall, or the time shortly afterward when she’d fallen into the fountain at her mother’s wedding to her stepfather, the late Earl of Blackmore. Then there was the ball last year when she’d unwittingly introduced the Duchess of Merrington to the duke’s mistress. But none of those compared to this—being physically accosted by her stepbrother as she departed from Newgate Prison in the company of the Ladies’ Committee.”

A swashbuckling adventure—think Jack Sparrow getting his comeuppance.

- ✦ Jeffries was born in New Orleans and raised in Thailand—where her missionary parents moved when she was seven.
 - ✦ Jeffries has also written under the names Deborah Martin and Deborah Nichols.
-

The Pirate Lord is the first of the Lord series. Gideon Horn, a pirate captain, and his men are ready to retire from the high seas. But they need wives if they’re going to settle down. The pirates target a ship of convict women (because, they reason, the women will surely rather be with them!) and get more than they bargained for.

Sara Willis is not a convict. She’s a reformer, determined to learn how women convicts are treated when transported for their crimes. She

knows exactly what Gideon wants, and she casts herself in the role of the protector of the other women. She knows she can't really stop the pirates from doing what they please, but she can negotiate certain demands.

Gideon is willing to negotiate with her—and the two of them find their sparring leads to attraction. But Sara's stepbrother is trying to find her, and when he does, he may destroy the happiness they've discovered.

60

Playing with Fire

GENA SHOWALTER
PARANORMAL / 2006

“Isn’t it amazing how one seemingly innocent decision can change your entire life? For me, that decision came in the form of a grande mocha latte.”

With over-the-top plotting, bigger-than-life characters, lots of action, suspense, and laughs, you’ll fall in love with this book.

- ✦ This is the first book in Showalter’s Tales of an Extraordinary Girl series.
 - ✦ Showalter often writes using the first-person perspective, a bit unusual in romance.
-

Belle Jamison spends a lot of her life unemployed or underemployed, which is why she’s working at a coffee shop when her life turns upside down. A mad scientist type slips her a mickey, but not the usual kind—this one gives her the power to control the four elements (earth, wind, fire, water).

Rome Masters, a government agent, is supposed to kill her, but that would make for a short book, so instead he falls for her—which means the two of them end up on the run.

Belle just wants to get her life back and go back to being her normal self ... or does she?

Neither of these characters is sugar and spice, but they both have hearts of gold—and it’s a roller-coaster ride to see them reach their happily ever after.

61

Possession

DEVYN QUINN
PARANORMAL / 2009

“In a library crammed wall to floor with a collection of books unmatched by any public collection in the world, a specially constructed steel lectern stood by itself.”

A compelling, dark, erotic romance that will keep you riveted.

✦ Quinn got started writing paranormal romance and erotic romance under the pen names Caitlyn McKenna and Jaya Jenson.

Deeply scarred (emotionally and physically) Kendra Carter returns to her brother’s home from a mental hospital. She opens an occult book—and unknowingly unleashes a demon. He’s a very sexy demon, and he enralls Kendra in the bedroom—but he may also steal her soul.

Remi understands her. He knows why she suffers and what she wants. But she thinks she may be losing her mind. She has memory lapses, people think she tried to kill herself, and now she’s got a demon lover. That can’t be good.

The paranormal suspense becomes a taut psychological thriller as Kendra discovers who is behind her mental instability. In the end, she and Remi must unite to save themselves and find a way to be together.

62

Pride and Prejudice

JANE AUSTEN
CONTEMPORARY AT THE TIME, NOW HISTORICAL / 1813

“It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.”

Pride and Prejudice is the original love-spawned-from-hate romance story! Though first published nearly 200 years ago, the novel remains beloved among readers and literary scholars alike, and the story has spawned many dramatic adaptations, imitations, and modern-day retellings.

- ✦ Originally titled *First Impressions*, *Pride and Prejudice* received its new name after Austen’s publishers encouraged her to choose a title that would play off the alliterative name of her previous, already successful novel *Sense and Sensibility*. It is widely believed that Austen got the title *Pride and Prejudice* from a passage in Fanny Burney’s 1782 novel *Cecilia*, which is a book Austen is known to have loved.
 - ✦ The opening line of *Pride and Prejudice* is considered to be one of the most famous in all of literature (see quote!).
 - ✦ If you prefer a bit more gore with your Regency romance, check out *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith—it’s basically the same story, but with a few fun twists. But, of course, only read it after you’ve read and appreciated the original in its pure, unaltered form!
-

Elizabeth Bennet is the second daughter in a family of five unwed girls. Her family’s home is entailed, which means it will go to her father’s clergyman cousin Mr. Collins upon Mr. Bennet’s death—therefore, it is of the utmost importance, especially to Elizabeth’s mother, that the Bennet girls marry as soon as possible in order to ensure security for the family.

Two eligible, rich men, Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy, arrive in town. Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth clash immediately—Elizabeth believes Mr. Darcy is too proud and Mr. Darcy believes Elizabeth, and her family, to be beneath him. Mr. Bingley, on the other hand, takes an immediate liking to Elizabeth's elder sister Jane, and it looks as if the family is saved. But Mr. Bingley leaves suddenly and inexplicably, without proposing to Jane.

Meanwhile, Mr. Collins comes to visit and proposes marriage to Elizabeth—an offer that she quickly refuses even though it would mean her home would remain in the family. Her friend Charlotte marries Mr. Collins instead. Months later, Elizabeth goes to visit Charlotte and runs into Mr. Darcy. To her surprise, Mr. Darcy proposes to her—but, despite her attraction to him, she refuses, angrily citing her suspicion that he was responsible for the separation of Jane and Mr. Bingley, and also recounting the story she heard that Mr. Darcy cruelly refused to pay his old friend Mr. Wickham the money left to him in Mr. Darcy's father's will.

Only after Mr. Darcy writes Elizabeth a letter explaining everything does she realize how wrong she was about him, and that she loves him. But is it too late? Or is there a way for Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth to find their way to each other one more time?

63

The Proposition

JUDITH IVORY
HISTORICAL / 1999

“The most highborn lady Mick had ever been with—the wife of a sitting member of the House of Lords, as it turned out—told him that the French had a name for what she felt for him, a name that put words to her wanting his ‘lionhearted virility’; he liked the phrase and remembered it.”

The action in this book is minimal, with much of it taking place in one setting—Winnie’s house—so the book hinges strongly on the characters’ personalities and chemistry to keep you turning the pages.

- ✦ The author’s inspiration for this story was Cinderella, but with a gender swap in the roles.
 - ✦ Ivory’s father once bought all of the copies of her latest book from a bookstore and demanded that the owner reorder it. Now that’s love!
-

Lady Edwina “Winnie” Bollash’s unsavory cousin threw her out of her estate when he inherited the Duke of Aries title at her father’s death. Not one to let life’s disasters get the best of her, she offers elocution and deportment lessons to country folk and foreigners.

Two lords approach her on a gamble to see if this blueblood can turn an uncouth Cornish rat catcher, Mick Tremore, into a viscount that can attend her cousin’s annual ball undetected in a mere six weeks’ time. Recognizing both the challenge and the way to get some personal revenge on the current Duke of Aries, she takes Mick under her wing.

Mick is willing to go along with this bet because the reward will help support his large family of siblings, and he’d like to get to know Winnie better. He’s pure Cockney from Cornwall, but he’s not a big enough fool to turn down a big break. Still, he’s more into flirting and trying to talk

his teacher into risqué behavior than practicing his homework. While the two fall in love, she manages to transform her pupil into the suave, handsome Michael, Viscount Bartonreed—a stranger Winnie doesn't like nearly as well as the happy-go-lucky commoner.

True love lies ahead, but only after they complete this ruse (which eventually gives Winnie morality pangs) and learn the truth behind both the wager and Mick's background.

64

The Raven Prince

ELIZABETH HOYT
HISTORICAL / 2006

“The combination of a horse galloping far too fast, a muddy lane with a curve, and a lady pedestrian is never a good one. Even in the best of circumstances, the odds of a positive outcome are depressingly low. But add a dog—a very big dog—and, Anna Wren reflected, disaster becomes inescapable.”

You might call it a true-to-life fairy tale—a retelling of Beauty and the Beast. This one is a fan favorite—and we’re definitely fans!

- ✦ *The Raven Prince* is the first in Hoyt’s Princes trilogy.
 - ✦ *The Raven Prince* was Hoyt’s debut historical.
-

Anna Wren, a widow, finds herself in financial straits, forcing her to seek employment. Edward de Raaf, the Earl of Swarthingham, needs a secretary—someone who can put up with him (not an easy task). They settle into an uneasy alliance.

But Edward has needs ... you know, *needs*. And Anna has needs of the same variety. Still, it’s unthinkable that they could even admit such a thing to one another, let alone assuage their needs together. So Edward decides to visit a brothel, and Anna conceives a plan that will satisfy them both.

But Edward is also intent on forming a betrothal with someone who isn’t Anna, and it’ll take some doing to convince him that love really can conquer all.

65

River of Fire

MARY JO PUTNEY
HISTORICAL / 1996

“The situation was even worse than he’d feared.”

Deeply emotional, this one will stay with you long after you read the last page.

- ✦ Putney is not afraid to tackle tough subject matters. She’s written about alcoholism, domestic violence, and other social ills but always leaves her readers with a feeling that hope can triumph.
 - ✦ *River of Fire* is the sixth title in Putney’s The Fallen Angels series.
-

Kenneth Wilding returns home from fighting the Napoleonic Wars and discovers that his estate is ruined and his sister dowry-less. In order to repair his fortunes, he accepts a paid commission to uncover a murderer. Doing so requires that he get a job as a secretary to an artist (Sir Anthony Seaton), which he is able to do because of his knowledge of art. When he was younger, Kenneth had been interested in artistic pursuits, but his father, Viscount Kimball, dismissed such hobbies as unsuitable.

While in Sir Anthony’s employ, Kenneth realizes he has never lost his own desire to paint—and discovers a desire to possess the artist’s daughter.

Rebecca Seaton is something of an outcast in society—at seventeen, she foolishly eloped, and in their eyes is “ruined.” She now spends her time painting, despite the fact that society does not believe that women can create true art. She and Kenneth come to care for each other, but can their love survive Kenneth’s unmasking?

66

The Rogue Hunter

LYNSAY SANDS
PARANORMAL / 2008

“Warm summer air swam over Tanya as she stepped out into the night.”

Sands knows the meaning of escapism, and she delivers! This one is lighthearted and fun.

✦ *The Rogue Hunter* is the tenth in Sands’s hugely popular Argeneau series.

Garret Mortimer has spent 800 years as a bachelor. (And you thought your last boyfriend was commitment shy.) He’s a rogue hunter who keeps vampires from behaving badly, which is a task made both easier and harder by the fact that he, too, is a vampire. Right now, he’s been sent to stop a vampire who has been committing a bunch of no-nos.

Samantha Willan is a lawyer of the workaholic type, and she needs a break. Some fun in the sun with her sisters is just the ticket. Still smarting from her last romantic entanglement, she’s not about to put her heart on the line again. But that neighbor sure is sexy....

Can their attraction really be true love? Forever is a long time to a vampire.

Top Five Sexy Cars

These babies will make you (and him!) drool.

1. Anything Porsche
2. Bentley Continental

3. Alfa Romeo Competizione
4. Aston Martin Vanquish (or the Virage. Either way.)
5. Corvette Stingray

67

The Runaway McBride

ELIZABETH THORNTON
HISTORICAL / 2009

“It was February, the coldest, most miserable February in Scottish memory.”

An historical with a paranormal touch—what’s not to love? At turns charming, passionate, and poignant, this book shows why Thornton’s a master.

✦ Thornton fell in love with the genre by reading Georgette Heyer (who can blame her?). She’s also a Harry Potter fan. (So are we!)

Widower James Burnett isn’t sure he appreciates his grandmother’s gift—the gift of clairvoyance. On her deathbed, she tells James that his bride is in danger. James doesn’t *have* a bride. He does have memories of Faith McBride—the one he calls *Faithless*. And if she’s the one in danger, James isn’t sure he cares.

Until the visions start.

Faith McBride waited for James. Waited and waited, and then she learned that he married someone else. So she can be forgiven her cynicism about love. Instead of looking for love, she’s looking into her mother’s death—but someone doesn’t want her to.

James can save her from the murderer, but can Faith trust him with her heart again?

68

Saving Grace

JULIE GARWOOD
HISTORICAL / 1994

“Holy Bishop Hallwick, will you explain to us the hierarchy in heaven and on earth? Who is the most esteemed in God’s eyes?” the student asked.”

Fans clamor for Garwood’s medieval Scottish romances, and for good reason! *Saving Grace* has realistic characters, a fine sense of humor, a well-drawn (but not overdrawn) romantic setting—and a tender love story.

✦ More than 35 million copies of Garwood’s books are in print.

Happily widowed at sixteen, wealthy and beautiful Lady Johanna vows never to marry again—but King John (you may remember that he was a very bad man) intends to force her to marry the man he has chosen. Johanna’s foster brother talks his friend Gabriel MacBain, a Scottish warrior, into marrying her instead, knowing that John can’t have anyone good planned for her.

Gabriel is suspicious of all things English, including Johanna, and she has to learn to understand the new culture she’s thrust into—and how to stand up to Gabriel and his clan.

Just when they seem ready to love one another, court scheming threatens to tear them apart.

A Season of Angels

DEBBIE MACOMBER
CONTEMPORARY / 1993

“The manger was empty. Leah Lundberg walked past the nativity scene Providence Hospital put out every year, stopped, and stared. The north wind cut through her like a boning knife as Leah studied the ramshackle stable, her heart heavy, her life more so.”

Macomber’s heartwarming tale is sweet, sentimental, and hopeful.

- ✦ Macomber was one of the first romance authors who published Christian romances that did not have to fit a standard, predictable formula and that included a variety of real-life problems and issues. Breaking the rules certainly paid off for Macomber and her readers!
 - ✦ In 2009, Macomber published a cookbook, a children’s book, an inspirational nonfiction title, and a handful of novels!
-

A Season of Angels is the first in Macomber’s Angelic Intervention series. Shirley, Goodness, and Mercy are each given a prayer to answer. Shirley must find young Timmy Potter a father, despite the fact that his mother Jody never wants to risk her heart again. Goodness must help Monica Fischer find a home of her own and a husband to love, although Monica has just about given up hope. Mercy has to help Leah Lundberg, who wants a child with her husband Andrew.

But answering prayers isn’t as simple as granting a wish.

70

Seductive as Flame

SUSAN JOHNSON
HISTORICAL / 2011

“The Duke and Duchess of Groveland were entertaining at their hunting lodge in the West Riding.”

Did someone turn up the heat in here?

✦ *Seductive as Flame* is the most recent title in Johnson’s Bruton Street Bookstore series.

Johnson is known as a writer who writes hot. And she doesn’t disappoint with this title.

Alec Monro, Earl of Daigliesh, can have any woman he wants—and any woman would want him to want her. Wealthy, gorgeous, seductive—he’s every woman’s fantasy.

Enchanting and beautiful Zelda MacKenzie has an adventurous side. It’s 1894, and she’s just returned from a trip to the rain forest. But adventurous or not, she has no interest in rakes—and Alec is a married man. Her lack of interest in him makes her a challenge Alec is most delighted to take on....

But what he doesn’t realize is that he’ll fall in love.

You’ll wonder how they’ll ever reach their happily ever after right up to the end.

71

Sense and Sensibility

JANE AUSTEN
CONTEMPORARY AT THE TIME, NOW HISTORICAL / 1811

“The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex. Their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park, in the centre of their property, where, for many generations, they had lived in so respectable a manner as to engage the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance.”

Sense and Sensibility was the first published work by the world’s most seminal and beloved romantic fiction author, Jane Austen. Without this novel, which sparked Austen’s success, the romance world would be much different today. Austen first began writing *Sense and Sensibility* in 1795 when she was nineteen years old. The first draft of the novel was written in the form of letters, and called *Elinor and Marianne*. In 1811, the book, complete with a new title and new narrative form, was finally published—though Austen published it under the simple pseudonym of “A Lady.”

- ✦ After *Sense and Sensibility* was accepted by the Military Library publishing house in London, Jane Austen had to pay out of her own pocket to have it published. The cost of publication was more than a third of Austen’s annual household income.
 - ✦ In 1995, a major Hollywood adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*, written by Emma Thompson and directed by Ang Lee, was made. The film starred Thompson, Kate Winslet, Hugh Grant, and Alan Rickman, and won Thompson the Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay.
-

Elinor, Marianne, and Margaret Dashwood’s lives are upturned when

their father dies and their estate goes to their half-brother John, Mr. Dashwood's son from his first marriage. John and his wife Fanny move in and reduce the Dashwood women to the status of unwelcome guests.

Then Fanny's brother, Edward Ferrars, comes to town and develops feelings for Elinor, a connection that Fanny fervently objects to. When Fanny suggests to Mrs. Dashwood that Elinor is just after her brother's money, Mrs. Dashwood moves her family to the smaller, less luxurious Barton Cottage in Devonshire. It is there that they meet Colonel Brandon, a quiet man who falls in love with Marianne. But Marianne considers Colonel Brandon, at thirty-five, to be too old for her.

One day, while out for a walk in the rain, Marianne slips and hurts her ankle, only to be rescued by the handsome, desirable John Willoughby. She falls head over heels for him and the two begin spending a lot of time together, despite the fact that Willoughby has not yet proposed marriage. Then, out of the blue, Willoughby tells Marianne that he is leaving for business in London and won't be back. When the two finally meet again, Marianne is devastated to learn that he is engaged to someone else.

Meanwhile, Elinor still has feelings for Edward Ferrars, but learns that he's been secretly engaged to a vulgar woman named Lucy Steele for four years.

The Dashwood women are distraught and lovelorn, but they soon realize that things may not always be what they seem.

72

Seven Tears for Apollo

PHYLLIS A. WHITNEY
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 1963

“The museum’s statue of Apollo was a copy. The original held a place of honor in Olympia in the faraway Peloponnese. On his pedestal, the god stood unclothed in the full magnificence of male youth.”

Whitney is a true grandmaster of the genre—and was awarded Grand Master status by the Mystery Writers of America. *Seven Tears for Apollo* is Whitney at her suspenseful best.

✦ Whitney’s writing career spanned more than eighty years.

Dorcas Brandt suspects her husband Gino had some unsavory dealings in the art world, and after his death, her suspicions are confirmed when she is threatened by people who think she knows more than she does.

She and her young daughter escape to the Greek island of Rhodes, where she hopes they will be safe—but danger follows them, placing both Dorcas and her daughter in grave peril. Yet those around her fail to see the threats, leading Dorcas to wonder if she is slowly losing her mind.

Dorcas turns to Johnny Orion, a teacher who is traveling in Rhodes, for help, and as their relationship deepens, he comes to see that the threats to her are real. But ultimately, Dorcas must learn to stand up for herself to confront that evil that dogs her.

73

Shadow Dance

JULIE GARWOOD
CONTEMPORARY / 2006

“The wedding was no small affair. There were seven bridesmaids, seven groomsmen, three ushers, two altar boys, three lectors, and enough firepower inside the church to wipe out half the congregation. All but two of the groomsmen were armed.”

The way Garwood handles the taming of the bad boy by the unlikely heroine makes this one a must-read!

- ✦ Garwood has also written a young adult novel called *A Girl Named Summer*.
 - ✦ Garwood is known for her historicals, but don't miss her contemporaries—especially her stories of the Buchanans, like this one!
 - ✦ Eager readers of Garwood's contemporaries waited for Noah Clayborne to get his story, and Garwood delivered!
-

Jordan Buchanan's brother Dylan is getting married to her best friend, Kate MacKenna, but an unlikely wedding crasher in the form of a medieval history professor spoils the affair, leaving a warning about an ancient clash between the two families.

Jordan doesn't know what to think, but when an encounter with family friend Noah Clayborne prompts her to do something spontaneous, she sets out to discover what the professor was talking about—only to find herself threatened. When she's set up as a murderer, she calls in Noah and her brother Nick for backup. Dusty research was never so perilous—or so sexy!

74

Shattered Silk

BARBARA MICHAELS
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 1986

“They refused to let her drive them to the airport.”

A modern gothic with a heroine who learns to take back her life. Our kind of story!

✦ Michaels writes mystery capers under the pen name Elizabeth Peters.

After her decade-long marriage crumbles, Karen Nevitt moves to Georgetown to live temporarily with her beloved aunt while she figures out what to do next. Karen’s focused on rebuilding her life, not looking for love—especially not in the form of Mark, the college boyfriend she left behind. He warned her not to marry the man, and now she thinks he’s going to say, “I told you so.”

It would be easier to avoid him if his sister Cheryl didn’t need a friend—and if Karen didn’t need a friend, too. Karen takes a job in an antiques shop and becomes interested in vintage clothing. With Cheryl’s encouragement and her aunt’s backing, Karen starts to plan to open her own shop.

But something’s not right in Georgetown—and Karen’s in danger. Unraveling why brings Mark back into her life, but this time as her equal. Karen finally learns to stand up for herself—and solves a decades-old murder.

75

The Sheik

E. M. HULL
CONTEMPORARY AT THE TIME, NOW HISTORICAL / 1919

“Are you coming in to watch the dancing, Lady Conway?” ‘I most decidedly am not. I thoroughly disapprove of the expedition of which this dance is the inauguration. I consider that even by contemplating such a tour alone into the desert with no chaperon or attendant of her own sex, with only native camel drivers and servants, Diana Mayo is behaving with a recklessness and impropriety that is calculated to cast a slur not only on her own reputation but also on the prestige of her country. I blush to think of it.’”

The forerunner of all bodice-rippers, *The Sheik* is a product of its age. Reading it is an eye-opener—you’ll find out where so many of those romance tropes come from (including the seductive desert sheik!). This book was enormously influential on the romance genre.

✦ Rudolph Valentino starred in the movie based on the book.

The falling-in-love-with-your-rapist theme had a long run in romance, and you can thank (or blame) Hull for its wild popularity. But you can’t get away from the fact that this theme was present for a long time and it was extremely popular. The alpha male is still in high demand in contemporary romance, although he no longer shows his love quite so violently. (At least, he’s not violent toward the heroine; he may murder any number of people to protect her, however.)

The plot of *The Sheik* has Lady Diana Mayo planning to go into the desert of Algiers with only Arab guides accompanying her. She’s headstrong and confident; having lost both parents at a young age, she

wasn't reared like a lady. (Her mother died in childbirth and her father killed himself in grief.)

She no sooner sets foot in the desert when she's kidnapped by Ahmed Ben Hassan, the titular sheik. He brutalizes her repeatedly (this is not explicit in the book but you can tell); he hates all things English (toward the end it is revealed that Ahmed's Spanish mother was brutalized by his English father and so Ahmed wants revenge). Diana makes an escape and is recaptured by him, then comes to realize she loves him (we know, we know).

She's kidnapped by a different sheik, and Ahmed realizes he loves her and goes off to rescue her (we know, we know). He's wounded, and Diane cares for him. Later, he says he is sending her away because he loves her. Distraught, she plans to kill herself as her father did, but Ahmed stops her and the two declare their love, etc., etc.

This is not a novel you read to appreciate its artistry; it's a novel you read for context—to understand the origin of modern romance.

76

Shield's Lady

JAYNE ANN KRENTZ
PARANORMAL / ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN 1989
UNDER THE PEN NAME AMANDA GLASS

“The unconscious man stirred slightly and groaned.”

Far-off worlds, dangerous mercenary hero, kick-ass heroine—you know we stayed up all night with this one.

✦ Krentz won the Susan Koppelman Award for Feminist Studies for *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*, a book she edited about the appeal of the romance genre.

The western Avylyn clan has hired easterner Sarianna Dayne to solve a problem. All-business Sarianna can usually handle anything life throws at her, but this is one situation she can't manage herself, so she hires a member of the Shield clan, a mercenary named Gryph Chassyn.

Gryph's the opposite of all business. He's got plans for her that go way, way beyond solving a crime. He wants her as his shield mate. But Sarianna wasn't raised in his culture, and she has no idea what that means. Although she's about to find out....

Fast paced, sexy, with an engaging plot and fascinating world.

77

Skylar O'Malley

BERTRICE SMALL
HISTORICAL / 1984

“It was a perfect early summer day in the year 1555.”

Small is A Name in romance writing, and this is arguably her best work.

✦ Small’s O’Malley series has six books and the Skye Legacy series also has six. *Skye O’Malley* is the start.

Skye O’Malley is one of those romance sagas that many of us grew up reading. She’s the epitome of the bold romance heroine we love: In the end, she dares to stand up to Elizabeth I, the queen of England.

Skye swashbuckles (there’s no other way to put it) her way through sixteenth-century England and Algiers, becoming a woman of great wealth and power, taking on the occasional lover and spurning countless advances. Through it all, she never forgets Niall Burke, her first love (and her first lover). Time and again they are forced to turn away from each other—will they ever have their chance to be together?

78

Slightly Scandalous

MARY BALOGH
HISTORICAL / 2003

“By the time she went to bed, Lady Freyja Bedwyn was in about as bad a mood as it was possible to be in.”

Slightly hard to put down, *Slightly Scandalous* is a delightful they're-made-for-each-other-and-when-will-they-figure-it-out? romp. If you're a fan of smart historicals, this goes on your nightstand.

- ✦ Not surprisingly, Balogh's two main influences as a writer were Jane Austen and Georgette Heyer.
 - ✦ This is the third novel in Balogh's Bedwyn series about the six Bedwyn siblings. They make their first appearance in *A Summer to Remember*.
-

Freyja Bedwyn is no shrinking violet: Having four brothers has taught her how to hold her own. So when Joshua Moore, the Marquess of Hallmere, steals a kiss, she punches him. And that is the start of their beautiful relationship.

This is no opposites attract story. Both Freyja and Joshua are reckless, restless, and unwilling to settle down. That's why Joshua's plan seems so perfect: He wants to stop his aunt's matchmaking scheme. What if Freyja pretends to be his fiancée? He'll thwart his aunt's ambitions.

Freyja agrees to the plan, because what could possibly go wrong? Neither one of them expects to fall in love....

79

Smoke and Mirrors

BARBARA MICHAELS
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 1989

“They came to him every night. They never moved; they never spoke. They just stood there, by the side of his bed, their grave dark eyes fixed on his face.”

Even though the book is over twenty years old and the technology is outdated, Erin’s thrill at becoming privy to the inner workings of a political campaign still ignites the imagination and makes you want to sign up as a volunteer. This is one of the few romances where the heroine’s work plays such a prominent role in the storyline.

- ✦ Michaels (under her real name, of course!) studied Egyptology at the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago, earning her doctorate at age twenty-three!
 - ✦ Be sure not to confuse Barbara Michaels’s *Smoke and Mirrors* with Jayne Ann Krentz’s (also great) *Smoke in Mirrors*!
-

Erin Hartsock moves to Washington, D.C., and takes a job with a friend of the family, Rosemary White Marshall, who is running for Senate. Erin gets a bracing look at how politics works and how campaigns are run, and instead of leaving her squeamish, she realizes she has finally found her life’s calling—politics, for her, is a great adventure.

Nick, a member of the campaign staff, helps Erin learn the ropes, and the two of them begin a friendship that deepens into something more.

But a secret from Rosemary’s past threatens them all—including Erin, who thinks she may be the murderer’s next victim, and who, as the outsider, must convince the others that she’s not the criminal.

80

Something Wicked

JO BEVERLEY
HISTORICAL / 2005

“I’m going to miss you.’ Lady Elfled Malloren went into her twin brother’s arms, determined not to cry.”

A young lady raised among a bevy of brothers gives us a strong heroine we can identify with and cheer—no one takes advantage of this savvy miss.

✦ The Malloren series eventually climbed to total twelve books, as the author brought the family friends’ romances into the circle as well.

The third in the series of five books about the Malloren family, *Something Wicked* focuses on the sister of the brood, Lady Elfled. Elf visits a friend in London and ends up alone in the big city—the perfect opportunity for a boxed-in twenty-four-year-old to rebel a little and kick up her heels. A disguise, of course, will protect her reputation. Her night out on the town, however, puts her in the right spot in Vauxhall Gardens to overhear the family’s enemy, Fortitude Ware, Earl of Walgrave, embroiled in a Jacobean plot.

And as nature would have it, the bad blood between the Wares and the Mallorens has only helped heighten Fort’s sex appeal for Elf. He, of course, is not a Jacobite out to betray the king, but a spy determined to save His Majesty. And when it comes crashing down on his head, who else but the Mallorens would charge in to save his hide?

The action in *Something Wicked* takes a back seat to the character development, as Elf has to build her self-confidence and decision-making skills away from her brothers’ overprotective ways. The result is a mature woman who understands she can’t choke the life out of a love if it’s truly love. Fort wrestles with a history that tortures him, and has to learn that a woman—previously a gender he considered playthings—can

hold the key to redemption.

81

Son of the Morning

LINDA HOWARD
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE/TIME TRAVEL / 1997

“The stone walls of the secret underground chamber were cold and dank, the chill penetrating wool and linen and leather, going straight to the bone.”

While the suspense level is commendable, readers respect and remember Grace for honoring her dead husband’s love throughout the book without shortchanging her emotional ties to Niall. The balance is truly heartwarming.

- ✦ As wildly popular as *Son of the Morning* turned out to be, this remains Howard’s only time-travel story.
 - ✦ Howard’s husband is a bass tournament fisherman and she often travels with him to remote locations—but she always makes sure to bring her laptop with her. Yet another perk of being an author—you can do it from anywhere!
-

Grace St. John merely stepped next door for some computer help from her geeky neighbor, and returns to witness her boss killing her husband and brother. Now on the run herself from both the murderer’s long reach and law enforcement who have pinned the deaths on Grace, she finally pieces together that the bad guys are after a document regarding the Knights Templar that she unearthed.

Determined to find the key to why her life turned upside down, Grace races to finish translating the writings of Black Niall, written 700 years earlier to explain why this half-brother of Robert the Bruce became a Templar—and then rejected the brotherhood.

Niall and Grace eventually connect by mind meld in a parallel dimension (yes, this includes a physical relationship with the hunky Scot) until he is able to shoot through time to arrive in this century and

help Grace find her justice and freedom. In between, the story is filled with rich details of a hunted woman (she breaks into houses by day to shower and steal clothes, and is almost caught while merely stocking up on necessities at a discount store) and the complicated intrigues of the fourteenth-century church. It's a rich read that deftly leaves no unanswered questions.

Sweet Savage Love

ROSEMARY ROGERS
HISTORICAL / 1974

“Virginia Brandon was sixteen, that spring of 1862, and the thought of her first ball, now only two weeks away, was much more exciting than the letter that had arrived that morning from her father in America. She had not seen her father, after all, since she was still a baby—perhaps three or four years old; and although he sent money for her care every month through his bankers in San Francisco, his letters were infrequent.”

Before Christian Grey and his Fifty Shades, there was Union soldier, gunslinger, crusader cowboy Steve Morgan dominating women with his bad boy ways. Masochistic, horny heroes everywhere owe Morgan a tip of the hat.

- ✦ The book’s dedication to C. E. refers to Clint Eastwood, one of the masculine models Rogers built her hero Steve on.
 - ✦ Rosemary Rogers is a romance pioneer—she was only the second author to have her books published in the now mainstream trade paperback format!
 - ✦ Rogers lived in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) until the age of twenty-seven. Since then, she has lived in London, Missouri, California, and Connecticut.
-

Virginia “Ginny” Brandon is the daughter of a U.S. Senator raised in Paris who finds herself trekking across the west with her stepmother as part of her father’s business, which is a front for running a wagon-load of gold into Mexico to help the French military. Like most bored, pretty young women, she has an eye for their guide, Steve Morgan.

Steve is in this spot because he fought a duel with a high-ranking Union army officer over a prostitute during the Civil War, and won. His punishment was execution, until he took a sweet deal as an 1860s version of a U.S. undercover agent. Now sent to stop this financial windfall from reaching his enemies, he fakes an Indian raid. But when his lady love Ginny recognizes him, he kidnaps her as his human shield.

The pair fight and love through the wilderness, giving us the yardstick for the term “bodice-ripper” as they hide in whorehouses, pretend to be married when they drop in on friends, and eventually find a relationship strong enough for Ginny to trade sex with the enemy to save Steve’s life.

They admit their love and marry in the end, but do not manage to live happily ever after until enduring more international intrigue and wild children in *Dark Fires* and *Sweet Love, Last Love*.

83

Thief of Dreams

MARY BALOGH
HISTORICAL / 1998

“The day was going to be an extraordinarily busy one. A birthday was to be celebrated—the one and twentieth of Lady Cassandra Havelock, Countess of Worthing.”

Balogh is upfront in telling the reader that Nigel’s motivations aren’t pure, so everyone keeps reading to find out how a bad guy is actually a victim.

✦ For years, Mary Balogh was published in every country but her homeland, the United Kingdom, which is reluctant to publish books from America, despite the fact the author is Welsh/Canadian.

Cassandra Havelock reaches her majority at age twenty-one blissfully happy. She is free of her guardians, free from the year of mourning for her father, and free to assume the title Countess of Worthington. Although the family wants to see her wed, she intends to hang on to her independence and enjoy this sweet setup alone.

Then Nigel Wetherby, Viscount Wroxley, arrives on the Kedelston doorstep to pay his respects to the daughter of a man he claims was a good friend. Cassandra welcomes this man and his stories of her father, and the attraction builds so fast, Nigel proposes within days and they are married within a fortnight.

They can’t begin their happily ever after, however, until Cassandra unearths a myriad of distressing secrets, including the ones that involve her father, her position, and her new husband’s nightmares and scarred back. Along the journey, she discovers a man who has learned to reject all emotional feeling as a survival mechanism and thus, can’t admit he loves the countess he married. Then she must swallow her own betrayal to see if their relationship has a chance at healing. Overall, it’s a meaty

historical with a dark and unpredictable side that belies its Georgian time frame stereotypes.

84

This Is All I Ask

LYNN KURLAND
HISTORICAL / 1997

“The twigs snapped and popped in the hearth, sending a spray of sparks across the stone. One of the three girls huddled there stamped out the live embers, then leaned into the circle again, her eyes wide with unease.

‘Is it true he’s the Devil’s own?’

“Tis the rumor,’ the second whispered with a furtive nod.”

An early Kurland, we dare you to try to finish this one without a hanky in hand.

- ✦ Kurland is a trained classical musician. She plays the cello and the piano, and she sings.
 - ✦ *This Is All I Ask* is the seventh title in Kurland’s De Piaget series.
 - ✦ Almost all of the main characters in Lynn Kurland’s books belong to one of three families: the Macleods, the McKinnons, and the de Piagets.
-

Gillian of Warewick has been terribly abused by her father, so when he arranges her marriage to Christopher of Blackmour, she expects the worst. She has heard the rumors that Christopher practices black magic, but once they’re married, she finds he is a much different man than she expected. He was, in fact, a friend of her brother’s (the brother died young) and has made a promise to care for her, knowing how brutal her father was.

Christopher has suffered as much in his own way as she has in hers; his first wife betrayed him, resulting in his blindness; he is wary of love and of the way it can cloud one’s thinking. Both of them must grow to trust themselves and each other before love can blossom.

It's no wonder this is a fan favorite.

Top Five Love Songs

Put these on your playlist, and you'll be in the mood for love!

1. "Wonderful Tonight" by Eric Clapton
2. "I Will Always Love You" by Whitney Houston
3. "Love Me Tender" by Elvis Presley
4. "I Don't Want to Miss a Thing" by Aerosmith
5. "Be Without You" by Mary J. Blige

85

This Rough Magic

MARY STEWART
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 1964

“‘And if it’s a boy,’ said Phyllida cheerfully, ‘we’ll call him Prospero.’”

Exotic scene-setting and lyrical prose make for a captivating read.

- ✦ The title comes from the Shakespeare play *The Tempest*, in which the wizard Prospero gives up his magic with the announcement, “This rough magic I here abjure.”
 - ✦ In 1964, the same year *This Rough Magic* was published, Mary Stewart’s novel *The Moon-Spinners* was adapted into a Hollywood film starring Hayley Mills, Eli Wallach, and Peter McEnery.
-

When London actress Lucy Waring has a show fold under her and nothing on the table to follow it, she heads to her pregnant sister’s summer home in Corfu, where she finds herself almost immediately ensnared in an intrigue.

Talented musician Max Gale is doing his best to protect his father, the famous actor Julian Gale, who has taken to drinking too much since the death of his wife and daughter. Julian has sought solace at Corfu, a place with some history for him—his godchildren, Spiro and Miranda live here and work for Lucy’s sister. The island has the added attraction of being, he argues to anyone who will listen, the setting for Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.

Max strikes Lucy as suspicious and arrogant, but finds herself charmed by his father (think Laurence Olivier), with whom she, of course, shares a career path (if not similar success!).

Photojournalist Godfrey Manning is also on Corfu, completing a book project, and he hires Spiro to do some work for him. When Spiro is apparently killed off the coast of Albania during a boating accident,

Godfrey seems devastated and of course, Miranda, Spiro's sister, is inconsolable.

But the tragedy isn't just a tragedy—something is going on under the surface. Lucy befriends a dolphin in the waters near her sister's home—and someone tries to kill it. Why? Even more frightening, Lucy stumbles on a dead smuggler in the cove. Who killed him—and why?

Lucy isn't an amateur sleuth trying to dig up answers. She's a young British woman with a strong sense of responsibility and duty, and it is those characteristics that wind up putting her smack in the middle of the danger. She doesn't know whom to trust—but one of the men she cares about is a murderer.

Top Five Romantic Destinations

Bon voyage!

1. Rome, Italy
2. Paris, France
3. Santa Fe, New Mexico
4. Barcelona, Spain
5. Wichita, Kansas—okay, okay, just kidding! How about Maui, Hawaii?

86

To Have and to Hold

PATRICIA GAFFNEY
HISTORICAL / 1995

“But it is too rude of you, Bastian! How can you send me away like this? Don’t you like Lili anymore?”

Darker than Gaffney’s other novels, with a morally ambiguous hero, this is a fan favorite.

- ✦ Patricia Gaffney worked as a high school English teacher and a court reporter before becoming a writer. It wasn’t until she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1984 that she decided to give her dream of being an author a try.
 - ✦ After getting her start in romance, Gaffney began writing women’s fiction, including her first bestseller, *The Saving Graces*.
 - ✦ *To Have and to Hold* is the second book in the Wyckerley trilogy.
-

Rachel Wade is wrongfully convicted of killing her husband and sent to prison. Released ten years later, she has nothing left and no one to turn to. She’s arrested for vagrancy, and the Viscount D’Aubrey, Sebastian Verlaine, cynically and selfishly offers to employ her as his “housekeeper,” an obvious, in this case, euphemism for “mistress.”

There is nothing remotely endearing or loveable about Sebastian at the beginning, and he torments Rachel in cruel ways. Their relationship is ugly and sad. Sebastian is debauched, Rachel beaten down.

But this is a story of transformation, and that is why readers keep coming back to it. How Sebastian learns to become kinder and how Rachel learns to stand on her own two feet again make for riveting reading. The characters are realistic, their trials are difficult to endure, but they are both able to find a way to connect, first as friends, and then as people who love each other with their whole hearts.

87

Touch Not the Cat

MARY STEWART
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 1976

“My lover came to me on the last night in April, with a message and warning that sent me home to him. Put like that, it sounds strange, though it is exactly what happened.”

Touch Not the Cat shows Stewart at the height of her suspenseful powers. Later novels are quieter and less thrilling, though still lyrical and well worth reading. This, though, is a superb balance of suspense and romance.

✦ Mary Stewart is best known for her Merlin series, a series of historicals with fantasy elements based on Arthurian legend.

Bryony Ashley’s father dies under mysterious circumstances, and she returns home to Ashley Court, and the Ashley cousins. Significant to the story is the psychic link Bryony has to one of her cousins—she’s not sure which one, for he isn’t willing to tell her just yet. By the time the story concludes, it’s clear why her psychic lover didn’t reveal himself earlier, but throughout, his unwillingness to share this one vital thing chafes on her.

Eventually she decides she knows which of her cousins she shares this connection with, and since she loves and trusts her psychic partner, she loves and trusts the man she thinks he is. That sets her off on a path that ends in mortal jeopardy.

In the end, it’s the man she has loved and trusted all along who turns out to be her psychic connection—and they become lovers physically as well as psychically.

88

True Confessions

RACHEL GIBSON
CONTEMPORARY / 2001

“There were two universal truths in Gospel, Idaho. First, God had done His best work when He’d created the Sawtooth Wilderness Area. And except for the unfortunate incident of ’95, Gospel had always been heaven on earth.”

Romantic comedy meets sexy romance. Yum.

✦ *True Confessions* won a coveted RITA award from the Romance Writers of America.

The townspeople in Gospel, Idaho, have a tendency to blame all earthly ills on California, so when Hope Spencer, an LA-based tabloid reporter shows up, they’re a little skeptical. “They” include sheriff Dylan Taber who doesn’t think she’ll stay more than a week in their little town.

Hope is looking for something to write about—she’s been dealing with writer’s block for months. And she definitely finds it in Gospel.

Dylan’s living down a wild past. He’s mature now. Got a son to be a role model for. He is not going to do anything foolish with Hope. Nope. No way, no how.

These two opposites become unlikely friends, but they both have secrets. And the only way they’ll ever be able to live happily ever after is if they both make some true confessions.

Twilight

STEPHENIE MEYER
PARANORMAL / 2005

“My mother drove me to the airport with the windows rolled down. It was seventy-five degrees in Phoenix, the sky a perfect, cloudless blue. I was wearing my favorite shirt—sleeveless, white eyelet lace; I was wearing it as a farewell gesture. My carry-on item was a parka.”

Though Crimson doesn't publish young adult novels, we'd make an exception for *Twilight*. It's impossible to discuss the top romance books without including the phenomenon that is The Twilight Saga. Not only has the series earned billions of dollars in sales, been translated into thirty-seven languages, and been adapted into five blockbuster films, it is largely responsible for the recent boom in the young adult genre, and even inspired another international literary sensation—E. L. James's erotic novel *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which originally began as *Twilight* fan fiction!

- ✦ Author Stephenie Meyer had never written a book before *Twilight*, and says that the idea for the story came to her in a dream. Upon awaking, she immediately began writing the scene she'd seen (which is now [Chapter 13](#) in the book). Less than three months later, the manuscript was completed.
 - ✦ The four-book Twilight Saga has been adapted into five feature films, the first four of which have grossed more than \$2 billion—so far!
 - ✦ Stephenie Meyer is also the author of *The Host*, an adult science fiction novel about body-snatching aliens.
-

The first book in Stephenie Meyer's wildly successful Twilight Saga, *Twilight* tells the story of Bella Swan, a seventeen-year-old high school

outcast who moves from Arizona to a small, rainy town in Washington state to live with her father. But soon after starting at her new school, she meets the mysterious Cullen family and realizes that life in Forks is going to be anything but dull.

The pale, quiet, gorgeous Edward Cullen takes an interest in Bella immediately, and when he saves her, using what can only be described as super speed and super strength, from an oncoming out-of-control van, their lives become dangerously intertwined. Bella learns Edward—and his entire family—are vampires. He can read minds—everyone’s except hers—and lusts after her blood, even though he and his entire family have sworn off human blood, instead subsisting only on the blood of animals. Still, the love between them is too strong to fight. They begin a relationship, even though he could kill her at any moment.

But when Bella goes to a baseball game with the Cullen family and catches the interest of a sadistic tracker vampire named James, Bella—and her family—are in a whole new kind of danger.

90

Until You

JUDITH MCNAUGHT
HISTORICAL / 1994

“Propped upon a mountain of satin pillows amid rumped bed linens, Helene Devernay surveyed his bronzed, muscular torso with an appreciative smile as Stephen David Elliott Westmoreland, Earl of Langford, Baron of Ellingwood, Fifth Viscount Hargrove, Viscount Ashbourne, shrugged into the frilled shirt he’d tossed over the foot of the bed last night.”

A mistaken identity and amnesia story all rolled into one—no one but McNaught could have pulled this off.

✦ McNaught has been called the inventor of the modern Regency.

This sequel to *Whitney, My Love* tells the story of Stephen Westmoreland, the brother of that novel’s hero. American Sheridan Bromleigh, a paid companion, is escorting Charise Lancaster to London for her wedding to the man her father has arranged for her to marry. But Charise elopes, leaving Sheridan in a bind. Stephen comes to meet the ship to explain that Charise’s fiancé has died, and he mistakes Sheridan for Charise.

She is injured on the pier and suffers amnesia as a result. She awakens in Westmoreland’s home, with everyone thinking she’s Charise. The doctor tells Stephen to pretend to be Charise’s fiancé so that the shock of learning her fiancé is dead does not do further damage to her health.

Sheridan and Stephen come to care for each other, but then Charise shows up, demanding to know why Sheridan is pretending to be her, and Stephen believes that Sheridan has misled him all along. Sheridan isn’t all that happy about being duped either, and it takes some intervention by Stephen’s family to make sure all ends well.

The Viscount Who Loved Me

JULIA QUINN
HISTORICAL / 2006

“Anthony Bridgerton had always known he would die young. Oh, not as a child. Young Anthony had never had cause to ponder his own mortality. His early years had been a young boy’s perfection, right from the very day of his birth.”

Families in a Julia Quinn novel are wonderful things, full of supportive, loving people who ensure a plot won’t lean on dastardly lies from wicked, jealous mothers and other romance clichés.

- ✦ Fans of the Bridgerton series know that the parents named their children in alphabetical order: Anthony, Benedict, Colin, Daphne, Eloise, Francesca, Gregory, and Hyacinth.
 - ✦ Julia Quinn once considered becoming a doctor. Just as she was trying to decide which medical school to go to (she got into both Columbia and Yale ... smarty pants) she got a call from her agent and found out her first two novels were in hot demand by some pretty big publishing houses. That should be the end of the story, right? Wrong. It took her several months of actually going to medical school for her to realize that she was meant to be a writer, after all. We could have told you that, Julia!
-

Kate Sheffield shares her first London season with her younger half-sister—platinum blond Edwina, considered the family beauty—and finds herself concentrating more zealously on protecting her sibling’s reputation than her own. After all, if Edwina makes the right match, the Sheffields can hope to end their cash flow problems and take their proper place in Society. Kate’s idea of Mr. Right for herself is as vague as “a kind-hearted man.”

Certainly, affirmed rake Anthony Bridgerton doesn't fit the bill for either one of them despite his viscount title, but sure as gun's iron, he shows up to call on Edwina, sending Kate into a flurry of sharp-tongued barbs to barricade her innocent sister. This sets Kate and Anthony at deep odds with one another, complete with bickering, from the minute she opens the door.

What the infamous *Lady Whistledown's Society Papers* gossip rag can't know to spill about Bridgerton's wifely pursuit is the young man figures he'll die at a young age—his father, after all, cocked up his toes at age thirty-eight—so he wants to get this heir affair behind him before he departs for clouds and harps. He needs someone attractive, pleasant, and smart, but who leaves him with no special feelings beyond the lust he needs to reproduce.

So his mother, hoping to help her eldest son's cause, invites the Sheffield sisters to their country home, where Kate relents to let him marry little sister. But before she can relay the happy news, the two are innocently caught in a compromising situation, thanks to a bee sting, and Society's rules and reputation threats force Kate to stand at the altar as the Bridgerton bride. As she falls in love with her accidental husband, she must convince him theirs is a relationship worth living for.

What Happens in London

JULIA QUINN
HISTORICAL / 2009

“By the age of twelve, Harry Valentine possessed two bits of knowledge that made him rather unlike other boys of his class in England of the early nineteenth century.”

Quinn’s trademark wit is on full display here.

- ✦ In 2001, Quinn appeared on the game show *The Weakest Link* and won a \$79,000 jackpot.
 - ✦ Quinn is the youngest member of the Romance Writers of America Hall of Fame.
 - ✦ *What Happens in London* is the second book in Quinn’s Bevelstroke series.
-

Olivia Bevelstroke is told that her new neighbor, Sir Harry Valentine, killed his fiancée. She doesn’t really believe it, but she does do a little spying—and discovers that whatever the truth about the dead fiancée, he is indeed up to something covert.

Harry works for the War Office, but only in the most boring of ways. He’s a translator, not a spy, but he knows when someone’s spying on him. And then he’s enlisted to spy back, because Olivia’s Russian friend may not have the country’s best interests at heart.

Though they don’t like each other at first, they soon discover that a mutual attraction can lead to love.

This lighthearted, fun romp ends with satisfaction all around.

Where Roses Grow Wild

PATRICIA CABOT
HISTORICAL / 1998

“Lord Edward Rawlings, second and only surviving son of the late duke of Rawlings, was unhappy.”

Warm and witty, this charming Victorian-era historical (Cabot’s debut) is a treasure.

- ✦ Patricia Cabot gained fame later as herself, Meg Cabot, the author of the young adult *Princess Diaries* series.
 - ✦ After Patricia’s first manuscript was rejected, her grandmother gave her some sage advice: “You’re not a hundred-dollar bill, not everyone is going to like you.” Based on that advice, Patricia kept trying, and *Where Roses Grow Wild* was published five years later. Ironically, she published it under a pen name so her grandmother wouldn’t find out she was writing “smutty” novels!
-

Edward, Lord Rawlings, learns that his dead brother has a son, a ten-year-old who is the rightful Duke of Rawlings. Edward goes off to find the boy and discovers him in the care of Pegeen MacDougal, the boy’s aunt, whom he has to persuade to let the boy take up his inheritance.

Pegeen is not afraid of voicing her opinion, and she’s something of a surprise to Edward, who can’t fit her into a convenient category. He’s a bit of a rake and accustomed to women of dubious morality, not women who have a social conscience and aren’t that interested in letting him kiss them.

But eventually Pegeen decides that kissing Edward isn’t that bad....

Top Five Romantic Date Destinations

Tired of the same old dinner-and-a-movie? Try changing it up a bit.

1. The beach, any beach. Well, almost any beach.
2. A park, garden, or other natural environment.
3. A theme park, amusement park, or arcade.
4. A sporting event—or play a sport of your own. You get the idea.
5. Couple's spa day! You're welcome.

White Hot

SANDRA BROWN
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 2004

“Some say that if he was going to kill himself, he couldn’t have picked a better day for it.”

Like the title says, this one is white hot—suspenseful and sexy.

- ✦ Sandra Brown started her writing career on her husband’s dare! With more than 80 million copies of her books in print today, we bet she’s glad she did!
 - ✦ As if she isn’t already busy enough, Sandra Brown is also a TV presenter, having guest-hosted episodes of truTV’s *Murder By the Book* and Investigation Discovery’s *Hardcover Mysteries*.
-

Sayre Lynch escaped from her terrible father and swore to herself she’d never return to Destiny, Louisiana, where her family owns an iron foundry and controls the town’s fate. But after her younger brother kills himself, she finds herself back in Destiny for his funeral—and asking questions about his last days. Her corrupt family doesn’t want her looking too closely into anything—and they’ve hired Beck Merchant, a handsome lawyer, to keep trouble off their backs.

Sayre is attracted to Beck even as he gets in the way of her finding answers about her brother’s death.

When Sayre discovers that her brother’s death might not be suicide but murder, and that her family might well be involved in his murder as well as its cover-up, the stakes get even higher—and her relationship with Beck gets even hotter.

Can they work together to discover what happened to her brother? Or is Beck just trying to keep her from the truth?

Whitney, My Love

JUDITH MCNAUGHT
HISTORICAL / 1985

“As their elegant travelling chaise rocked and swayed along the rutted country road, Lady Anne Gilbert leaned her cheek against her husband’s shoulder and heaved a long, impatient sigh. ‘Another whole house until we arrive, and already the suspense is positively gnawing at me. I keep wondering what Whitney will be like now that she’s grown up.’”

As a debut novel for McNaught, *Whitney, My Love* was an emotionally elevated bodice-ripper that eschewed the usual pirates and outlaws in favor of a duke.

- ✦ *Whitney, My Love* received the *Romantic Times* award for Best New Historical in 1985, which propelled sales and made it an instant classic.
 - ✦ McNaught rereleased the book in 2000 with a longer ending and a few changed scenes—the hero stops short of beating and raping the heroine in the do-over.
-

Whitney Stone puts the wild in wild child, living out her impulsive tomboy ways and embarrassing herself repeatedly in attempts to get the object of her fifteen-year-old crush, Paul Sevarin, to notice her. Eventually, her widowed father packs his rebellious daughter off to relatives in France, hoping someone can apply a coat of social polish on his daughter.

Whitney does blossom under her aunt’s instructions to become the toast of French society and a perfect matrimony match for Clayton Westmoreland, the family’s new neighbor back home, who, behind the scenes, makes all the arrangements for a trip down the aisle. But

Whitney, unaware she is betrothed, still harbors fantasies of charming the elegant Paul, despite the Duke of Claymore's flattering and steady courtship, Regency style. When she finally gets her chance to elope with the man of her dreams, she realizes Paul's intentions aren't exactly pure, and puts an end to their relationship. Ah, her heart is free to give to the man who appreciates her.

But misunderstandings and overheard rumors pull Whitney and Clayton apart three heartbreaking times before they finally leave the reader with satisfied sighs as Whitney (and their son) survive a premature delivery and the two star-crossed lovers finally get this trust thing right.

Wildfire at Midnight

MARY STEWART
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 1956

“In the first place, I suppose, it was my parents’ fault for giving me a silly name like Gianetta. It is a pretty enough name in itself, but it conjures up pictures of delectable and slightly overblown ladies in Titian’s less respectable canvases, and, though I admit I have the sort of coloring that might have interested that Venetian master, I happen to be the rather inhibited product of an English country rectory.”

Although an early novel, this one showcases Stewart’s incomparable style, and features a divorced couple as the main protagonists, a very unusual approach.

✦ Stewart herself called this a “closed-room” mystery—only a small group of people (who know each other) could have done the murder—and the process of solving the mystery serves to illuminate the characters as their romantic relationship develops. That sets this novel apart from any ordinary mystery.

Gianetta Brook needs a vacation—from her work, from England, from her family, and from her ex-husband. Gianetta, a model, is not and never was the sophisticate her husband Nicholas Drury believed her to be, and Gianetta was, at a decade younger than her husband, too young to understand Nicholas’s wartime scars. Thus, their brief marriage has ended.

A trip to the remote Isle of Skye is just the place to help Gianetta escape her troubles. But Skye is not remote enough: Gianetta’s ex-husband just happens to be there, too (a coincidence explained at the end with the author’s usual charm).

Having to share the same hotel with Nicholas would be bad enough, but someone has killed a girl, and the evidence points to Nicholas.

Gianetta must decide if she believes Nicholas is capable of such a thing, and they must both set aside their masks in order to love again.

The Windflower

LAURA LONDON
HISTORICAL / 1984

“Merry Patricia Wilding was sitting on a cobblestone wall, sketching three rutabagas and daydreaming about the unicorn.”

Though London had only a brief career, *The Windflower* is a much-loved fan favorite.

✦ Laura London is the pen name of the author team of Sharon and Tom Curtis.

When Merry Wilding is accidentally abducted by pirates, the roller-coaster ride starts. How is one accidentally abducted? The pirate Devon Crandall thinks she knows something about the people who killed his sister, and he’s out for revenge. But Merry doesn’t know anything about it.

For many thousands of words, Merry tries to escape the pirate ship while trying not to fall madly in love with the devilishly handsome Devon.

The vivid characters (including secondary characters) and the beautiful prose style make this one stand head and shoulders above other romances of its time.

Winterwood

DOROTHY EDEN
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 1967

“From the moment of leaving the hotel the enchantment of the night had grown.”

Writing around the same time as Mary Stewart, Eden also was a master of taut psychological suspense—but sadly, her novels are not nearly as well-known now. A forgotten master.

✦ Dorothy Eden also wrote novels under the name Mary Paradise.

Lavinia Hurst goes to Venice to escape the publicity following a trial she’s been involved in. She becomes involved with the Meryon family, who are there to bring an elderly relation back to their home, Winterwood.

They hire Lavinia as a paid companion to their crippled daughter, Flora. Daniel, the father, is deeply attractive to Lavinia, but his wife (Charlotte) is cruel and conniving. When Flora inherits a fortune, the intrigue heats up.

Is that enough plot twists to keep you guessing how this will wrap up?

The Wives of Bowie Stone

MAGGIE OSBORNE
HISTORICAL / 1994

“Sheriff Gaine squinted up at the gallows and thumbed back his hat. ‘Well boys, this is your lucky day.’”

Only Osborne could redeem two such unredeemable characters—in the same book!

✦ Osborne also wrote romances under the name Margaret St. George.

Rosie Mulvehey suffered horrifically at the hands of her stepfather. She’s become an alcoholic and is not at all interested in marriage. She doesn’t need love; what she needs is a ranch hand.

Bowie Stone is a former Army captain (dishonorably discharged) and a convicted murderer.

According to local custom, a man can escape the death penalty by marrying a local woman. Rosie agrees to save Bowie from hanging, thereby getting a husband and a ranch hand. She’s more interested in the ranch hand. Bowie works to clear his name and to get his wife to trust him.

But Bowie doesn’t happen to mention that he already has a wife....

You won’t be able to put this down without first finding out how all three of them get their happily ever after.

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The Wrong Hostage

ELIZABETH LOWELL
ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / 2006

“The phone rang four times before Judge Grace Silva pulled her head out of the legal documents she was reviewing. ‘Maybe it’s Ted. Finally.’”

Action, danger, romance—Lowell later in her career is just as riveting as she was in the beginning.

✦ Lowell has also published several successful science fiction and nonromantic suspense novels. She often collaborates with her husband of more than forty years, Evan Maxwell, and together they have published several suspense novels under the name Ann Maxwell (Lowell’s real name).

Judge Grace Silva pulled herself up out of poverty through hard work and determination, never once losing sight of the brass ring. If that didn’t leave much room for love or laughter, so be it. She’s an upholder of the law, period. She upholds the law with the same determination that pulled her out of her nightmarish beginnings.

Joe Faroe has paid the price for believing in the law. Now he knows it’s just a thing made by humans, too often corrupt, and that sometimes it needs to be bent. After a friend tries to kill him, he retires from everything.

Until Grace comes to him for help. Her son has been kidnapped and Joe is the only one who can get him back. If only Joe didn’t hate her....

Top Five Romantic Movies

With a happily ever after, of course!

1. *An Officer and a Gentleman*
2. *Bull Durham*
3. *His Girl Friday*
4. *When Harry Met Sally ...*
5. *While You Were Sleeping*



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