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# ShelfLife

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### ACROSS THE NIGHTINGALE FLOOR by LIAN HEARN

RIVERHEAD BOOKS, 2002

In feudal Japan, rival clans maneuver for power. Taeko, born into a remote and spiritual tribe, narrowly misses the destruction of his home and family by the ruthless warlord Iida. Rescued by rival Lord Shigeru, Taeko is adopted and taught the arts of a warrior.

In the following years he learns that he is the son of a powerful assassin and has inherited strange abilities beyond the scope of the average human.

Thoughts of revenge and loyalty to his adopted father draw Taeko closer to a deadly encounter with Iida. Shadowy assassins, forbidden love, heroic sacrifices, and breathtaking danger make this first novel in a series of three a fast read.

*“It is good to come home, ... but just as the river is always at the door, so is the world always outside. And it is in the world that we have to live.”*

Thoughts of revenge and loyalty to his adopted father draw Taeko closer to a deadly encounter with Iida. Shadowy assassins, forbidden love, heroic sacrifices, and breathtaking danger make this first novel in a series of three a fast read.



### TWELVE BAR BLUES by PATRICK NEATE

GROVE PRESS, 2002

*“Twelve bar blues: the most common harmonic progression in all jazz; it comprises twelve bars based on tonic (I), dominant (V), and subdominant (IV) harmonies, organized in the simple pattern:*

*I-I-I-I-IV-IV-I-I-V-V-I-I.”*

This is the most basic form of the blues, based on two lines—12 bars—sung or played again and again, each verse telling a new bit of the story. Lick Holden is the son of a Cooltown prostitute. As the only boy, Lick feels responsible for helping to support his family from an early age. So young Lick delivers ice to the local honky-tonks during the day. By night, he and his friend Naps sneak back to hear the great musicians of the day. One night the great Buddy Bolden arrives to play at Toothless Bessie’s. The doorman at Toothless Bessie’s, known only as “Good,” doesn’t like Lick and Naps at all. Disaster befalls, and Lick and Naps soon find themselves in the local juvenile hall.

Nothing occurs without a reason. While in Mt. Marter Correctional Hall for Negro Boys (ages 8-14), Lick is introduced to the cornet, and finds his calling. Upon his release, he makes his way by playing the blues, while searching for his lost “sister,” Sylvie.

Intertwined with Lick’s story is the tale of Tongo, an African chieftain, and his friend Musa, the local “zakulu” (witchdoctor). Musa is stricken with a strange recurring dream of a singing boy, a girl drowning in her tears, and a zakulu. He undertakes a journey to discover the truth of his dream. As he does so, the parts of the two stories begin to intertwine, winding around and around until they converge like the elements of blues.

Author Patrick Neate is a music journalist from London. His previous book is *Musungu Jim and the Great Chief Tuloko*.

*“When we read a story, we inhabit it. The covers of the book are like a roof and four walls. What is to happen next will take place within the four walls of the story. And this is possible because the story’s voice makes everything its own.” John Berger*

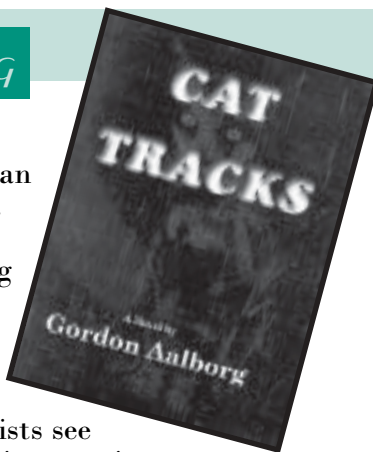


### CAT TRACKS by GORDON AALBORG

DELPHI BOOKS, 2002

The Australian feral cat is a product of human carelessness at best and callousness at worst. The feral cat is probably the most successful predator in the Australian bush and a growing threat to the rare native marsupials, birds, and reptiles. The cat’s agility, speed, and hunting skills as well as a lack of natural predators, make it one of Australia’s most destructive introduced species. Conservationists see its eradication as vital but unlikely. This cat is a survivor.

This is the story of an Australian feral cat, seen partly through the cat’s eyes and partly through the eyes of an old bushman, who becomes fascinated with the way the cat survives. This story really brings the Outback alive for the reader. Many readers will find the story so compelling that they will read the book in one sitting.



With this issue of *ShelfLife*, we plunge headlong into summer with something for everyone. Reference staff members have selected some of their current favorites, which make up a truly eclectic sampling from our library’s shelves. We hope you enjoy this issue.

### THE HILLS AT HOME by NANCY CLARK

PANTHEON BOOKS, 2003

Meet the extended Hills family in this first book of a trilogy. Maiden Aunt Lily lives in a large, aging New England house. She opens her home to three generations of relatives who have sought refuge from their problems. Aunt Lily welcomes the family members with fresh flowers in their rooms, guest soaps, and other amenities. This hospitality comes to a halt when Lily realizes that no one is in a hurry to leave.

Lily’s brother Harvey, widowed three times, comes to await the sale of his house. Niece Ginger arrives with her teenage daughter to escape her turbulent marriage. Ginger’s brother Alden, laid off from his job arrives with his wife and four children, to start his own business. There are no rooms left in the house when Harvey’s grandson Arthur, who has lost his job and his girlfriend, knocks on the door. They must use the apartment in the barn.

The confusion, chaos, and crises that develop with a houseful of relatives are compounded by the arrival of a student referred to the Hills by a family friend.

Andy’s studies require him to do

a thesis on the interactions of the family by observing a family and recording their actions.

Although the situations facing each family member are serious, the author entertains the reader with a humorous perspective on family conflict and individual quirks. The family struggles to get along and eventually these struggles bring them closer together, forming strong family bonds. This first novel is a delightful introduction to the Hills.

You will anxiously await the next installment.

*“They, that crew, Lily’s family, had all come for visits the summer past and none of them had gone away again in the fall.”*

SUMMER 2003

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## A WINTER MARRIAGE by KERRY HARDIE

LITTLE BROWN, 2002

Hannie Bennet is a practical woman. Marrying someone you love is nice but financial security is better. Hannie has been married and divorced three times and recently widowed – and she is in the market for a new husband.

This stark, dark novel is the story of Hannie and her latest husband, Ned, an older man who lives on a farm in Ireland. He is looking for companionship and finds Hannie's

*"He's no catch ... He's nearly twenty years older than I am and he wants a wife. He can't have it all ways, he'll have to deal."*

honesty appealing. Hannie assumes that Ned, a former journalist and world traveler, has the resources to provide a comfortable life. She is disappointed by the austere existence on the farm and the less than friendly reception by the area residents. Coupled with increasing behavior problems with the son she brings with her, Hannie's unhappiness grows with each passing day.

The accidental death or possibly the murder of a young woman living in a guesthouse on Ned's farm precipitates the unfolding of untold and tragic truths from the characters' pasts. Painful, tense relationships

dominate this powerful novel. Readers will be challenged and rewarded by this author's insights.

## WATERLOO STATION by Emily GRAYSON

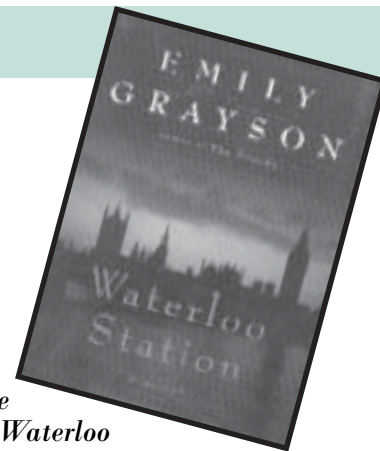
WILLIAM MORROW, 2003

These days it is often difficult to find a pleasant, old-fashioned love story, one without overt sex or violence, but Emily Grayson has again proven herself a master of the "nice-story" genre.

Following up on her previous novels, *The Gazebo*, *The Observatory*, and *The Fountain*, *Waterloo Station* continues the author's graceful and compelling style through this story set in the turbulent World War II era in London. Adventurous American teen Maude Latham takes off for England in 1938 to begin studies at Oxford and to see the world and what it has to offer.

During her stay, she falls in love with her tutor, Stephen Kendall, a married man with an unhappy home life. Further complicating their burgeoning relationship is the beginning of the war. Stephen joins the Intelligence Service of the Royal Navy and Maude leaves Oxford for London and becomes a nurse during the Blitz.

The circumstances of war and cruel twists of fate make contact between the two impossible and for several years both believe the relationship doomed by time and space. *Waterloo Station* gently reminds readers of the strength of true love and its ability to bind two hearts together for all time.



## CRESCENT by DIANA ABU-JABER

W. W. NORTON AND COMPANY, 2003

*"It's the story of how to love"*

Positioned like the Fertile Crescent itself, Nadia's Café sits in the center of Los Angeles' Iranian neighborhood, serving up native dishes to homesick Middle Eastern exiles, as well as to a few Americans.

Sirine, the unattached 39-year-old blond, green-eyed chef, whose secret ingredient is a heavy dose of affection, has every male customer, regardless of age, at her feet. Particularly smitten is Hanif, an Iraqi university professor. As Sirine and Hanif explore the possibilities of shared love, they also share their personal histories. Sirine is the daughter of missionaries, an Iraqi and an American, who died when she was nine. Hanif fled Saddam Hussein's regime to avoid arrest. He later decides to return to Iraq to try to reconcile his feelings of guilt due to the disappearance of the siblings he left behind, and to see his mother one last time before she dies.

The ache of exile permeates the story, as everyone, including the Americans, acutely experiences their individual brand of homesickness, only exacerbated by the tastes, smells, and sounds which envelop the café. Abu-Jaber vividly and poetically evokes Sirine's sensory memories of her native land.



## FRANKLIN FLYER by NICHOLAS CHRISTOPHER

DIAL PRESS, 2002

Franklin, a restless young inventor, owes much to chance, starting with his name. He was born aboard a train, *en route*, on the day its locomotive was abruptly torn from the tracks by a tornado, and dropped into the sea. Rescue workers discovered the infant alone in a sleeping car perched on sand dunes, and journalists on the scene dubbed him Franklin Flyer. Though his mother survived the accident and claimed him from a foundling home, the name stuck. The novel opens minutes before the stock market crash of October, 1929, when Franklin is a young man. Historic events, famous people, and a touch of mysticism loom large as Franklin's fortunes rise due to his revolutionary ideas and inventions. He revels in love and success, but also suffers great loss. At the end of this engrossing saga, it is evident that Franklin's very life is his most rewarding invention.

*"...every man invents, not just his particular work, but his own life, with consequences intended and accidental..."*

## YOU SHALL KNOW OUR VELOCITY by DAVE EGGERS

McSWEENEY'S Publishing, 2002

Velocity is the operative word as author Dave Eggers pilots us on a manic global jaunt, accomplished in only seven days. Will has earned \$80,000 by screwing in a lightbulb: Will's boss, a contractor, used a silhouette of a photo of Will, snapped during the course of a home improvement job. The artwork came to the attention of executives of a light bulb company, who chose the silhouette as their company's logo.

Money tends to make Will anxious; he decides he and his childhood buddy Hand will spend a week (all the time they can spare) distributing the money to deserving poor all across the globe, or as much of it as they can cover in seven days. Not long on forethought, they're thwarted almost immediately; devastated at the prospect of losing an entire precious day of their journey, crossing the International Date

*"How much disbelief, collectively, must be suspended, to allow for tourism?"*

Line. Other problems arise: which poor, exactly, are 'deserving,' and how can Will and Hand make suspicious strangers take money, other than taping it to their livestock? Eggers' story is metaphoric at every turn; there's

unexpected and acute pain amid the high jinks.

If you're pressed for time, or object to Will's habitual reliance on the F-word for emphasis, both the beginning and the end of this book are revealed on the cover, but you'll miss a memorable trip.

## FAMILY HISTORY by DANI SHAPIRO

Knopf, 2003

Dani Shapiro pulls no punches in this realistic and grueling story of adolescent alienation. Once the perfect family, the Jensens - Rachel, husband Ned, and daughter Kate - are suddenly not just at odds, but their lives have been shattered. Though Kate is at the root of the trouble, Shapiro keeps us in suspense as to the nature of the trauma they've suffered which brings the family to the brink of disintegration. Rachel is semi-retired from her job as an art restorer, and husband Ned has moved the family from busy New York City to a bucolic small town in Massachusetts to raise seemingly happy and well-adjusted daughter Kate.

The nightmare begins as she reaches adolescence. Kate becomes a secretive stranger: shoplifting, cursing her parents, keeping bad company. When Rachel becomes pregnant at age 39, and she and Ned again become parents, this time of a baby boy, things smooth out for a time. Kate is on a more even keel, but then her jealousy, or some darker cause, propels her into seemingly unforgivable and irrational accusations, driving a wedge between her parents, and nearly the last nail into the family's coffin.

