

The Six: the Lives of the Mitford Sisters



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Having grown up in a family of six sisters (and two brothers), I understand the influences, cooperation and competition that six sisters often have for each other. The similar interests, wildly divergent ones, pet names shared, and shifting alliances.

The Mitford sisters: Nancy, Pamela, Diana, Unity, Jessica, and Deborah were born between 1904 and 1920, so their youth encompassed the roaring and irreverent 1920s as well as the anxious, and violent pre-war period before WW II. The last of the Mitford sisters, Deborah, died only two years ago.

They had an idyllic childhood on a country estate, and were left mainly to themselves, a nanny and a tutor. They were almost totally home-schooled. They read deeply books from their parent's library and were fascinated by the world of ideas. All except Pamela, who loved farming and developed close connections with animals and the land. Just before dying she sighed and said she wished only for one more hunt. [Read more](#)

Posted by Dory L. on December 14, 2016

[The Six: The Lives of the Mitford Sisters](#)

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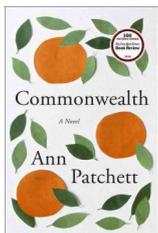
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Commonwealth



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Fifty per cent of all North American children experience the divorce of their parents. Talented author Ann Patchett explores her own family's divorce in this novel, altered, of course, as all fiction is.

A chance meeting at a 1960s christening causes two families to divide and then merge in new ways. The novel jumps around in the lives of the Cousinses and Keatings. Fix Keating is a Los Angeles cop, and Bert Cousins, an attorney who moves to Virginia. When Cousins falls hard for Keating's wife, Beverly, at the christening, two families are forever tied though they end up living across the continent from each other.

The novel proceeds from the perfectly realized christening where many of the guests are cops and the families of cops, and many of the partiers get drunk including some of the children, to one lakeside vacation where the blended children of the two families seek their own adventures while their parent and step-parent laze away in bed until mid-afternoon. [Read more](#)

Posted by Dory L. on December 6, 2016

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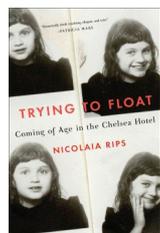
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Trying to Float: Coming of Age in the Chelsea Hotel



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Can't say when the last time I read a book written by a seventeen-year old, but this memoir by a high school student was touching and well-written despite Nicolaia Rips' youth. Growing up in New York's famed Chelsea Hotel gives one a head start, at least when it comes to knowing interesting characters. The Chelsea's fame reached its ascendancy in the 60s and 70s with noteworthy residents: Leonard Cohen, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Patsy Smith, who wrote her own memoir about it, *Just Kids*. First Nicolaia describes how she came into being. Her mom was a globe-trotting artist, and her dad had zero interest in raising a child, but somehow the artist got pregnant, and the couple began a new way of life. Though not immediately.

While pregnant, her Mom traveled through Europe and along the Silk Road in Asia. Her dad, a non-practicing lawyer and writer, stayed in New York and added a psychiatrist's office to his daily rounds of coffee shops. He also denied that he was the father, accusing a gay friend for parenting the child. However, once Nicolaia was born, he came around and warmly embraced being a dad, but still the family remained footloose, decamping for several years in Italy, and then roaming North Africa and India, before returning to NYC and the Chelsea Hotel. [Read more](#)

Posted by Dory L. on October 24, 2016

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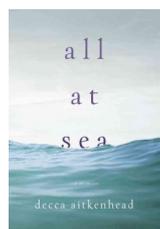
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All at Sea



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This beautiful memoir had me weeping several times. The opening chapter describes in vivid detail the death of the author's partner by drowning on a winter vacation to Jamaica. He died in the usual tranquil bay outside their cottage after he entered the wild surf to rescue their small son, Jake.

Decca, a *Guardian* journalist and author, noticed both her partner Tony and son flailing in the water. She ran to the beach, dove in and swam out to them, whereupon her partner passed their son to her and she swam back pulling her son by the chin. She assumed all was well, and that the morning would just provide an embarrassing story that they would later share about this vacation.

But when she turned to look over the bay, she noticed that Tony was much further out than he had been, and he was fighting both the waves and the current. She almost swam out to him, but a friend stopped her and pointed to three men who were already assisting Tony.

Decca felt reassured, but Tony kept flailing. The men pulled him in, and on the beach, white foam poured from his mouth. A local doctor bent over him, and felt his pulse, but Tony had died. It seemed unbelievable to Decca because most of the time he had not been underwater. This made her recall a conversation that they had shared at a party about how you could drown in a teaspoon full of water. [Read more](#)

Posted by Dory L. on September 7, 2016

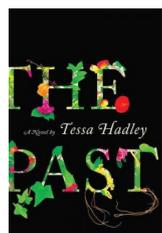
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The Past



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This novel is a dense, rich celebration of an English family, first in the present time, then in the past--the late 60s and early 70s.

In the first half, four siblings: Harriet, Alice, Roland, and Jane meet at the old family homestead near the sea for a family reunion. The house is being sold, and it will be their last time together at their childhood home.

Accompanying them, are children (Jane's), a new South American wife (Roland's--his third), a young friend, and son of a former lover (Alice's), and all alone, (Harriet).

In the siblings' idiosyncratic fashion, Harriet arrives first; she leaves the house locked and goes wandering in the forest. Alice arrives with Kasim, and then realizes, what she has done, brought an eighteen-year old to a place with nothing going on. Roland calls and says there will be delay, and that he and Pilar will arrive on Sunday.

Alice runs through the house, throwing open windows, picking and placing beautiful bouquets in each of the adults' room, while Jane, the mom, practically begins cooking the evening meal as her two children, Ivy and Arthur explore.

Privately, Jane and Harriet discuss whether Kazim is more than a friend to wild, actress Alice. Kazim reads on the porch terribly bored. But on Sunday when Roland, Pilar and Molly, Roland's sixteen year old daughter, arrive. Kazim immediately perks up at Molly's appearance. [Read more](#)

Posted by Dory L. on August 18, 2016

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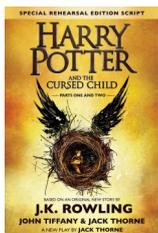
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Harry Potter and the Cursed Child



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Put on your robes, fasten your house tie (Hey to all my Ravenclaws!), and grab a few pumpkin pasties. We're going back to Hogwarts and it's about time. When we last left Harry, Ron, and Hermione they were dropping their children off at Platform 9 3/4 and, "All was well." Unfortunately for Harry and the gang, that wasn't the case for very long.

In this new story from J.K. Rowling writing with playwrights John Tiffany and Jack Thorne, Potter fans get to go back to the wizarding world. Our favorite trio is all grown up with families of their own, important positions in the Ministry of Magic, and newfound adult aches and pains. It's their children's generation who now take center stage. Quite literally, as this new story is a play. The show is currently running in London and will, hopefully, one day come to the US. Until then, we muggles can read the script.

The Cursed Child is a much different story than the original Harry Potter novels, but with all the charm we've come to expect. Reading a script, for those who have never attempted, isn't all that different from reading a novel. It's more condensed since you're watching the action unfold rather than reading long descriptions, but readers will still find themselves immersed in the story Rowling is telling. It's a story of parent child relationships, friendship, redemption, and what it means to be the son of THE Harry Potter. This muggle was happy to check in on old friends and excited to find new favorite characters (I'm looking at you Scorpius Malfoy).

The holds list is long, but worth the wait. Maybe pick up the original novels on [audiobook](#) while you're waiting. Trust me, it's like experiencing the story again for the first time. The narrator, Jim Dale, is that good. And, for those of you who've already experienced The Cursed Child, make sure to stop by The Ground Floor and talk to me about it! I have some FEELINGS that cannot adequately be expressed right now. Because spoilers. Happy Reading!

Posted by Becky F. on August 8, 2016

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