



LOVE LETTERS

Modern Romance Novels Set The Mood For Valentine's Day || BY AMANDA VAN WYK

Move over, Danielle Steel. The romance genre has come a long way since the bodice-ripping days of yore. Today's iterations aspire to higher literary standards, offering complex plots, fascinating settings, well-developed characters and unexpected elements that blur the lines between genres. So, whether you want to get in the mood for Valentine's Day or plan on spending Feb. 14 alone with a good read, these five choices are sure to satisfy.

"Unhinge: A Novel"

By Calia Read

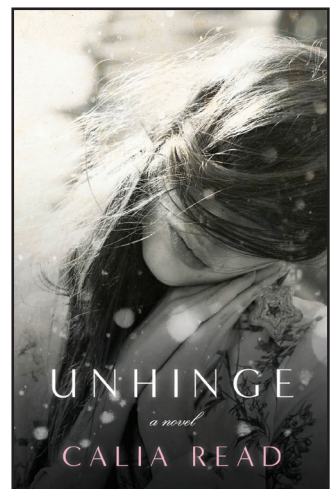
From the confines of a mental institution, a young woman tries to piece together the warped memories of her dark past. She shares a room with her infant daughter; at night, a handsome stranger visits her.

In "Unhinge," the second standalone novel in Calia Read's Fairfax

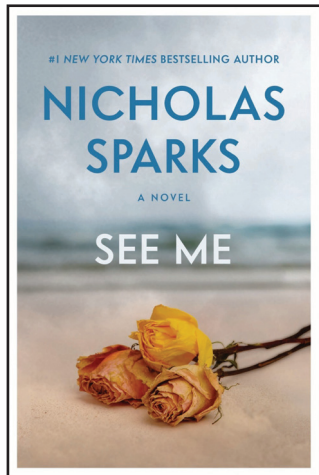
series, Victoria is tormented with visions of her past: a seemingly perfect marriage, ruined by jealousy and deceit, and the eventual death of her husband. To learn more about her personal history by clearing her mind, she stops taking her medication. And Victoria quickly discovers that reality and delusion overlap more than she thought possible.

"They say my name is Victoria. They say I'm twenty-seven. They say I've been in a psych ward for over a year. They say my husband is dead, and that my daughter is too. But, Wes visits me almost every night, and I hold my daughter every day."

Fragments of her story come together bit by bit, compelling the reader to keep digging for more.



On the surface, the bone-crunching zombie splatter of “Pride and Prejudice and Zombies” may seem random, even gratuitous. However, it raises interesting questions about the horrors hidden in the margins of the original text.



“See Me”

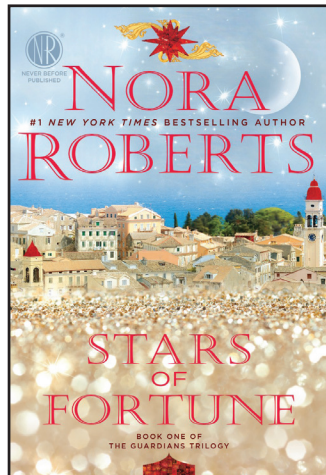
By Nicholas Sparks

Nicholas Sparks, author of 12 No. 1 *New York Times* best-sellers, is a modern-day romance icon. Most of his novels, notably “The Notebook” and “A Walk to Remember,” became even more popular thanks to their successful film adaptations.

In “See Me,” however, Sparks veers slightly from the tear-jerker formula he’s known for and dabbles in suspense to deliver a hybrid-type story. Sparks ignite on a rain-swept road when two people meet by chance. And, just as the unexpected relationship between Colin and Maria begins, chaos ensues.

In an interview with author Tess Gerritsen on Omnivoracious, The Amazon Book Review, Sparks says that thrillers are his favorite books to read, and he explains that “See Me” is different from his other novels, like “The Guardian” and “Safe Haven,” where the suspense stems from obsessive love.

“I wanted to create a threat,” Sparks says, “that emerged as an outside, completely unknown force – all the more disconcerting because the source of the threat could be anyone.”



“Stars of Fortune”

By Nora Roberts

The rate at which *New York Times* best-selling author Nora Roberts produces novels – she has written upward of 200 – is nothing short of spectacular. Her latest, “Stars of Fortune,” is book one of The Guardians Trilogy, “about three couples who join together to create their own family and solve an ancient mystery through the powers of timeless love,” according to the publisher.

In addition to romance, Roberts delves into the realms of fantasy and mysticism as a prophecy lures these six strangers to a Greek island. Compelled by visions, an artist, Sasha Riggs, draws extraordinary paintings of five characters, each representing an archetype with a unique ability and a hidden identity: a magician, an archaeologist, a loner, a fighter and a wanderer.

“Stars of Fortune” centers on the couples’ quest to find three stars and vanquish the forces of evil by combining their inherent powers. Book two, “Bay of Sighs,” will be released in June.

“The Girl You Left Behind: A Novel”

By Jojo Moyes

A compelling story of love and determination by *New York Times* best-selling author Jojo Moyes, “The Girl You Left Behind” is a historical novel featuring a dual timeframe that connects the past and present through a painting.

Part one focuses primarily on Sophie Lefèvre, the subject of a portrait painted by her husband. Sophie lives in occupied France during World War I and is shunned by her fellow townsfolk for consorting with German soldiers. Both Sophie and the portrait are taken by a German commandant, and the latter eventually resurfaces in modern-day London.

In part two, we meet Olivia Halston, a grieving widow desperately clinging to the remaining objects of her deceased husband, including the portrait of Sophie. Olivia meets Paul McCafferty (who works for a company that recovers stolen art) and, for the first time since her husband’s passing, feels romantically drawn to someone.

Unfortunately, conflict arises between the two when the painting’s true worth is revealed.



“Pride and Prejudice and Zombies”

By Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith

It is a universally acknowledged truth that the canon of classical literature consists mainly of books that people praise but don’t read. In 2009, however, the publishing phenomenon known as horror mashups began resurrecting noble literary corpses from their shallow graves in the public domain.

New York Times best-selling author Seth Grahame-Smith’s “Pride and Prejudice and Zombies” – a bizarre juxtaposition of Austen’s 1813 classic and elements of modern horror fiction – retains the original tone, structure and content. Narrative plot points remain mostly intact, while the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, is as memorable and feisty as ever.

On the surface, the bone-crunching zombie splatter may seem random, even gratuitous. However, it raises interesting questions about the horrors hidden in the margins of the original text. Zombies, referred to as “unmentionables” or “dreadfuls,” allude to the rigid class distinctions of Regency society.

Regardless of subtext, Grahame-Smith’s Neo-Austen classic is both entertaining and hilarious. (And the movie adaptation comes out this month.)

