

PAGETURNERS 2010-2011

1. Work Song – Ivan Doig (Oct. 12, 2010)

In 1919, Morrie Morgan lands in Butte, Mont., beholding the area's natural beauty that "made a person look twice." Scoring a job is a top priority, as is getting more face time with Grace Faraday, the alluring widow who runs the boardinghouse where he stays. Things, naturally, are complicated, as the fiendishly bookish Morrie is on the run from Chicago gangsters who feel they've been duped after he scored a windfall from a fixed sports wager. The local "shysters" at the duplicitous Anaconda Copper Mining Company, meanwhile, find Morrie's sudden interest in Butte highly suspicious as they try to bully Grace into selling her property. Morrie lands what might be an ideal job working at the public library with ex-cattle rancher Samuel Sandison, though our sturdy narrator must choose sides when the mining company ups the ante. Drama ebbs and flows as Morrie yields to the plight of union leader Jared Evans, and Morrie and Samuel come to terms with sins from their pasts. Charismatic dialogue and charming, homespun characterization make Doig's latest another surefire winner.

2. The Hospital by the River: A Story of Hope – Catherine Hamlin (Nov. 9, 2010)

The awe-inspiring story of the life and mission of Dr. Catherine Hamlin who, with her husband Reg, established what has been heralded as one of the most incredible medical programs in the modern world. The Hamlins, both Christians, dedicated their lives to women suffering the catastrophic effects of obstructed labor. The awful injuries that such labor produces are called fistulae, and until the Hamlins began their work in Ethiopia, fistula sufferers were neglected and forgotten--a vast group of women facing a lifetime of incapacity and degradation. Catherine and Reg, with their team of dedicated fistula surgeons, have successfully operated on over 25,000 women, and the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital has become a major teaching institution for gynaecologists from all over Ethiopia and the developing world. Set against the backdrop of Ethiopia, this is a moving and utterly compelling account of an extraordinary life.

3. Diamond Ruby – Joseph Wallace

Based on the true story of a lady pitcher who struck out Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig in exhibition play, this debut novel from nonfiction author Wallace (*Grand Old Game*) is a diverting sports tale. In 1923, 18-year-old New Yorker Ruby Lee Thomas is forced to raise her two small nieces, Amanda and Allie, after the 1918 Spanish influenza devastates her family. Blessed (or cursed) with elongated arms that make for blazing fastballs, the southpaw is hired by the Fantasyland Circus Sideshow as Diamond Ruby. The Jewish pitcher draws the violent attention of the Klan, but also the admiration of Babe Ruth (a pitcher early in his career), who teaches her a few new throws, and boxing champion Jack Dempsey. The Brooklyn Typhoons eventually sign Ruby to pitch, where her amazing feats stir trouble with a charismatic gangster angling to fix her games; subsequent clashes and close calls with Prohibition-era hoodlums generate as much drama as her distinctive baseball prowess. Sharply sketched, convincing historical characters like Ruth and Dempsey add to the considerable appeal of Wallace's gritty but fun period baseball tale.

"Comparisons to *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* are not made lightly . . . wonderful, memorable . . . perfect."

4. The Prisoner in the 3rd Cell – Gene Edwards (Feb. 8)

Have you ever felt like a failure as a Christian when God disappointed you? When God let you down? What do you do when God doesn't live up to your expectations? John the Baptist knew who Jesus was. They were cousins, acquainted with each other, maybe friends. Certainly God revealed Jesus in His

glory when John baptised Him! Father, Son and Holy Spirit converge in a moment of spiritual manifestation. But sitting in the third cell of Herod's damp, dark prison, day after day certainly didn't feel like deliverance. Where was this king? The powerful one? Where was the fire? Where was this Jesus? If the "greatest [man] born of woman" had his questions, disappointments, frustrations, how much more might we have the same today? He knew Jesus face to face, as a man knows a friend. Yet, his understanding was rocked by the God who answers many questions but rarely answers "Why?"

5. Half Broke Horses: A True-Life Novel – Jeannette Walls (March 8)

For the first 10 years of her life, Lily Casey Smith, the narrator of this true-life novel by her granddaughter, Walls, lived in a dirt dugout in west Texas. Walls, whose megaselling memoir, *The Glass Castle*, recalled her own upbringing, writes in what she recalls as Lily's plainspoken voice, whose recital provides plenty of drama and suspense as she ricochets from one challenge to another. Having been educated in fits and starts because of her parents' penury, Lily becomes a teacher at age 15 in a remote frontier town she reaches after a solo 28-day ride. Marriage to a bigamist almost saps her spirit, but later she weds a rancher with whom she shares two children and a strain of plucky resilience. (They sell bootleg liquor during Prohibition, hiding the bottles under a baby's crib.) Lily is a spirited heroine, fiercely outspoken against hypocrisy and prejudice, a rodeo rider and fearless breaker of horses, and a ruthless poker player. Assailed by flash floods, tornados and droughts, Lily never gets far from hardscrabble drudgery in several states—New Mexico, Arizona, Illinois—but hers is one of those heartwarming stories about indomitable women that will always find an audience.

6. The Red Tent – Anita Diamant (April 12)

The Red Tent retells the story of Dinah, which is found in Genesis 34. This episode, usually known as the "Rape of Dinah" has been a difficult passage for Bible readers for centuries because of the murderous behavior of Jacob's sons. In Genesis, Dinah does not say a single word; what happens to her is recounted and characterized as rape by her brothers. In Diamante's retelling of the story, Dinah finds her voice. The Red Tent is told entirely from her perspective and the point of view of the women around her.

7. Her Mother's Hope – Francine Rivers (May 10)

Swiss-born Marta Schneider was her Papa's least favored child, and his abuse pushes her to leave home and achieve great things, first in nearby Interlaken, later in England, then Canada, and finally in California, where she and her German husband, Niclas, settle down to raise their four children in the lull between the two world wars. Niclas is a godly and trusting man with a university degree who nonetheless has a powerful desire to work the soil. So it falls to shrewd and ambitious Marta to protect them all from greedy and unscrupulous folk who would take advantage. Romance Writers of America Hall of Famer Rivers' eagerly anticipated, first full-length Christian novel since 2003 is an emotionally rich exploration based loosely on her own family history as it follows world events through the first half of the twentieth century. The first in a two-part saga about four women, Rivers' novel will appeal to readers who enjoy historical fiction and sweeping family sagas with exotic settings. As her compelling characters seek to do what they feel their faith demands, Rivers sets their resonant struggles against dusty streets, windswept Canadian plains, and California vineyards in vivid scenes readers will not soon forget.

Summer Reads

(Pageturners will not meet June-August, but here are three suggestions! We'll discuss all of them briefly at our first meeting of the 2011 season)

1. **Nineteen Minutes** – Jodi Picoult

Best known for tackling controversial issues through richly told fictional accounts, Jodi Picoult's 14th novel, *Nineteen Minutes*, deals with the truth and consequences of a smalltown high-school shooting. Set in Sterling, New Hampshire, Picoult offers reads a glimpse of what would cause a 17-year-old to wake up one day, load his backpack with four guns, and kill nine students and one teacher in the span of nineteen minutes. As with any Picoult novel, the answers are never black and white, and it is her exceptional ability to blur the lines between right and wrong that make this author such a captivating storyteller.

2. **The House at Riverton** – Kate Morton

In her cinematic debut novel, Kate Morton immerses readers in the dramas of the Ashbury family at their crumbling English country estate in the years surrounding World War I, an age when Edwardian civility, shaken by war, unravels into the roaring Twenties. Grace came to serve in the house as a girl. She left as a young woman, after the presumed suicide of a famous young poet at the property's lake. Though she has dutifully kept the family's secrets for decades, memories flood back in the twilight of her life when a young filmmaker comes calling with questions about how the poet really died--and why the Ashbury sisters never again spoke to each other afterward. With beautifully crafted prose, Morton methodically reveals how passion and fate transpired that night at the lake, with truly shocking results. Her final revelation at the story's close packs a satisfying (and not overly sentimental) emotional punch.

3. **The Weed that Strings the Hangman's Bag** – Alan Bradley

Flavia, the precocious, imaginative, and adorable 11-year-old sleuth, returns for her second adventure. Flavia's world is 1950s England—specifically, a very old country house that just happens to have a long-abandoned chemistry laboratory. And Flavia just happens to be fascinated by chemistry—particularly poisons. This helps her solve mysteries because, as Flavia says, “There’s something about pottering with poisons that clarifies the mind.” This time she becomes involved with the members of a traveling puppet show that features the tale of Jack and the Beanstalk. When the puppetmaster is mysteriously electrocuted during the show, Flavia knows it can’t be an accident and eventually finds the murderer. The rest of Flavia’s family are also eccentric, to say the least, and add greatly to the overall fun.