Classic Romances

These books are keepers, entrancing readers today just as they have since their initial publication. Readers, watch your hearts: the course of true love never does run smooth -- nor does it always end happily.

JANE EYRE by Charlotte Brontë
FICTION BRO, LARGE PRINT, OVERDRIVE EBOOK, OVERDRIVE AUDIOBOOK, HOOPLA EBOOK, HOOPLA AUDIOBOOK
Orphaned into the household of her Aunt Reed at Gateshead, subject to the cruel regime at Lowood charity school, Jane Eyre nonetheless emerges unbroken in spirit and integrity. How she takes up the post of governess at Thornfield Hall, meets and loves Mr Rochester and discovers the impediment to their lawful marriage are elements in a story that transcends melodrama to portray a woman's passionate search for a wider and richer life than that traditionally accorded to her sex in Victorian society. – publisher's description

POSSESSION: A ROMANCE by A.S. Byatt
FICTION BYA, OVERDRIVE AUDIOBOOK
Two contemporary scholars, each immersed in the study of one of two Victorian poets, discover evidence of a previously unimagined relationship between their subjects: R. H. Ash and Christabel LaMotte had secretly conducted an extramarital romance. The scholars, “possessed” by their dramatic finds, cannot bring themselves to share their materials with the academic community; instead, they covertly explore clues in the poets' writings in order to reconstruct the affair and its enigmatic aftermath. Byatt persuasively interpolates the lovers' correspondence and “their” poems; the journal entries and letters of other interested parties; and modern-day scholarly analysis of the period. One of the poets is posthumously dubbed “the great ventriloquist”; because of Byatt's success in projecting diverse and distinct voices, it is tempting to apply the label to her as well. Merely to do so, however, would ignore even greater skills: her superb and perpetually surprising plotting; her fluid transposition of literary motifs to an infinite number of keys; her amusing and mercifully indirect criticism of current literary theories; and her subtle questioning of the ways readers and writers shape, and are shaped by, literature. – Publishers Weekly
BET ME by Jennifer Crusie
FICTION CRU, LARGE PRINT
Minerva Dobbs’s mother named her daughter after the Greek goddess. Yet Min, who’s grown up to be a curvy woman who adores carbs, isn’t quite a knockout beauty and, at 33, she shows no signs of getting married anytime soon. So when the dashingly handsome (god-like, in fact) Calvin Morrissey enters Min’s life and starts pouring on the charm, she’s skeptical. As well she should be – it appears Cal has a $10,000 bet with some of his drinking buddies that he can get Min into bed within a month. Statistics-loving Min knows about the bet and figures she can play Cal for a month, use him as a date for her sister’s upcoming wedding and then dump him right before the month is up. Alas, destiny has different plans. As Min and Cal fall for each other, Crusie pulls out the pranks, repeatedly pushing the two together and then tearing them apart. A bubbly cast of characters alternately helps and hinders romance, including Cal’s ex-girlfriend, a psychologist who studies relationships for a living; a matchmaking Italian chef; and Min’s friend Liza, who’ll stop at nothing to make sure Min doesn’t wind up with the conniving Cal. With multiple references to Chicken Marsala, Krispy Kreme donuts and Midwestern brats (a fine contrast to Min’s compulsively thin-thinking mother), Crusie’s latest should delight romance readers with a penchant for sinful foods. – Publishers Weekly

THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT’S WOMAN by John Fowles
FICTION FOW
A pastiche of a historical romance, it juxtaposes the ethos of the Victorian characters living in 1867 with the ironic commentary of the author writing in 1967. The plot centers on Charles Smithson, an amateur Victorian paleontologist. He is engaged to Ernestina Freeman, a conventional, wealthy woman, but he breaks off the engagement after a series of clandestine trysts with the beautiful, mysterious Sarah Woodruff, a social outcast known locally as the forsaken lover of a French lieutenant. The author, who continually intrudes on the narration, presents three different endings, encouraging his readers to reach their own conclusions. – The Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature

THE END OF THE AFFAIR by Graham Greene
FICTION GRE
"This is a record of hate far more than of love," writes Maurice Bendrix in the opening passages of The End of the Affair, and it is a strange hate indeed that compels him to set down the retrospective account of his adulterous affair with Sarah Miles. Now, a year after Sarah’s death, Bendrix seeks to exorcise the persistence of his passion by retracing its course from obsessive love to love-hate. At first, he believes he hates Sarah and her husband, Henry. Yet as he delves further into his emotional outlook, Bendrix’s hatred shifts to the God he feels has broken his life, but whose existence at last comes to recognize. – Publisher’s description

Compiled by Kimberly Burton at NoveList, updated 9/16
WOMEN IN LOVE by D.H. Lawrence
FICTION LAW
D. H. Lawrence composed *Women in Love* while at the height of his powers, and indeed, in its blend of lyricism, psychological revelation, and an eroticism that is never very far from violence, it can still startle and even discomfit readers. In this story of two very unconventional sisters, Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen, and the men they love, Lawrence argues urgently for a new conjunction between man and woman as “two pure beings, each constituting the freedom of the other.” The ardent struggle of human souls coming into being, and into relationship with one another, is at the heart of *Women in Love*, and this wrenching, sometimes painful, thoroughly exhilarating process is brilliantly illuminated in Lawrence’s masterpiece. – Publisher’s description

THE ENGLISH PATIENT by Michael Ondaatje
FICTION OND, LARGE PRINT
Canadian poet/novelist Ondaatje assembles, mosaic-fashion, the lives of four occupants of an Italian villa near Florence at the end of WW II. The war-damaged villa, its grounds strewn with mines, has gone from to German stronghold to Allied hospital, its sole occupants now a young Canadian nurse, Hana, and her last patient, a born victim. They are joined by David Caravaggio, an Italian-Canadian friend of Hana’s father but also a thief used by Western intelligence, and Kip (Kirpal Singh), an Indian sapper in the British Army. So: a dying man and two wrecks—for David has become a morphine addict after his recent capture and torture, while Hana, who coped with the loss of her soldier sweetheart and their child (aborted), has been undone by news of her father’s death. Only Kip is functioning efficiently, defusing the mines. Ondaatje superimposes on this tableau the landscape of the pre-war North African desert, with its strange brotherhood of Western explorers, filtered through the consciousness of Hana’s patient. Though he claims to have forgotten his identity during the fiery fall from his plane into the desert, it seems the putative Englishman is the Hungarian explorer (and sometime German spy) Almasy; but such puzzles count for less than his erudition (his beloved Herodotus is the novel’s presiding spirit), his internationalism (“Erase nations!”), and his doomed but incandescent love affair with the bride of an English explorer—an affair ignited by the desert and Herodotus, and a dramatic contrast to the “formal celibacy” of the love developing at the villa between Hana and Kip, which ends (crudely) when Kip learns of the Hiroshima bombing, discovers his racial identity, and quits the white man’s war. A challenging, disorienting, periodically captivating journey without maps, best when least showy, as in the marvelous account of Kip’s adoption by an eccentric English peer, his bomb-disposal instructor. – Kirkus Reviews

Compiled by Kimberly Burton at NoveList, updated 9/16
THE WILD CHILD by Mary Jo Putney
FICTION PUT
When Dominic Renbourne agrees to impersonate his twin brother, Kyle, and secure Kyle’s engagement to wealthy heiress Meriel Grahame, he is prepared to deal with a woman rendered deranged and mute as a result of her parents’ murder in India and her subsequent abduction. What he finds, however, is an enchanting, fey creature who tranquilly drifts through her own world of flowers and gardens cared for only by her Indian man-servant and a pair of elderly widows. Intrigued and attracted by her social withdrawal, Dominic sets out to help her become a part of the real world and, in the process, falls in love. Skillfully dealing with the issues surrounding mental illness and the lack of women’s control over their own lives in the 19th century, Putney spins another gripping, well-crafted story. – Library Journal

SEDUCTION by Amanda Quick
FICTION QUI
Townsfolk called him devil. For dark and enigmatic Julian, Earl of Ravenwood, was a man with a legendary temper and a first wife whose mysterious death would not be forgotten. Some said the beautiful Lady Ravenwood had drowned herself in the black, murky waters of Ravenwood Pond. Others whispered of foul play and the devil’s wrath. Now country-bred Sophy Dorring is about to become Ravenwood’s new bride. Drawn to his masculine strength and the glitter of desire that burned in his emerald eyes, the tawny-haired lass had her own reasons for agreeing to a marriage of convenience. One was vengeance, and in its pursuit she would entangle Julian in a blackmail plot, a duel at dawn, and a dangerous masquerade. The other reason was dearer to her heart, but just as wild a quest: Sophy Dorring intended to teach the devil to love again. – Publisher’s description

BLUE SMOKE by Nora Roberts
FICTION ROB, LARGE PRINT, CD AUDIOBOOK, OVERDRIVE EBOOK
When an arsonist torched Sirico’s, the Hale family’s Italian restaurant in Baltimore, Reena Hale’s childhood changed forever. As witness to the flames, Reena’s quest to become an arson investigator was the core of her identity. While her career goal is direct, her personal life is extremely tangled. The first man in Reena’s life is her dad, Gib, and every man must measure up to him. John Minger, the inspector who becomes her mentor, saw the cop in the child her logic and observation. Reena’s not so lucky with other men. Her first love, Josh, dies in a fire. Another becomes a prime suspect in an arson. Only when she meets the carpenter next door, Bo Goodnight, does Reena begin to realize that someone has stalked her for years, harming people she loves, and it all goes back to that fateful fire at Sirico’s. Blue Smoke is mesmerizing, weaving in multilayered dangers and strong family ties that wrap irresistibly around one’s heart. Magnifico! – BookPage