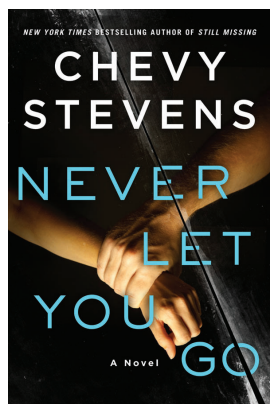


Bad Marriages

Stevens, Chevy. **Never Let You Go**. St. Martin's. Mar. 2017. 416p. ISBN 9781250034564. \$26.99; ebk. ISBN 9781250034571. **F**

In Stevens's sixth novel (after *Those Girls*), we meet Lindsey, a woman who has escaped an abusive husband and created a settled and safe life with her teenage daughter, Sophie. The story of the disintegration of Lindsey's marriage to Andrew, told in flashbacks, explains her need to be independent and her fierce protection of Sophie. When Andrew reappears after a long imprisonment, disturbing things begin to happen to Lindsey. Sophie, who is curious about her father, makes contact with him, and they began to meet secretly. The tension escalates as Lindsey struggles to regain control of her life and escape from the subtle terror that colors her every move. Friends, boyfriends, and a concerned police officer become involved as the danger escalates. The story is told in the alternating voices of Lindsey and Sophie, allowing readers to understand both



characters more fully. The Pacific Northwest small-town setting contributes to the sense of looming disaster as it is continually beset with fog, rain, and snow. **VERDICT** Disturbing, suspenseful, and just a little nerve-wracking, this fast-paced psychological thriller will keep fans of Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* on edge. [See Prepub Alert, 9/26/16.]—Terry Lucas, Shelter Island P.L., NY

Strawser, Jessica. **Almost Missed You**. St. Martin's. Mar. 2017. 320p. ISBN 9781250107602. \$25.99; ebk. ISBN 9781250107626. **F**

"All the wrong people know all the wrong secrets here" says one character in

Strawser's debut, knitting parental abduction with a page-turner of devastating secrets unraveling among friends and spouses. Violet's blessed life goes haywire when husband Finn takes their toddler son, Bear, and abandons her during a beach vacation. Finn draws friend Caitlin into his breakaway from his wife by threatening to expose her marital secrets if she doesn't hide him in the family cabin in Kentucky. But to help a desperate Finn is to betray a grieving mother. Torn between obligations of motherhood and friendship, Caitlin accedes to Finn's demands while strategizing a plan to return Bear to his mother. Alternating time lines and narrators first raise—and then answer—questions in a story than has more twists and turns than the roads in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

VERDICT Fans of smart women's fiction mixed with a fast-paced plot should not miss this startling first novel from the editorial director of *Writer's Digest Magazine*. [See Prepub Alert, 10/3/16.]—Wendy W. Paige, Shelby Cty. P.L., Morristown, IN

focuses primarily on the lives of a small group of privileged girls attending a private school. Though promoted as a novel, it is really a thematically linked collection whose episodic, fragmented structure reads more like a series of short stories. Since the protagonists are somewhat similar, individual character development is subsumed to that of an ensemble cast. Often, a minor character in an earlier episode reappears in a major role in a later one in a temporal shift that may catch readers off guard. For example, Betsy, barely mentioned early on, has moved to Washington, DC, where she is living with an escaped prisoner in the last chapter 20 years later. **VERDICT** By using a cross spectrum of various character types from different walks of life—rebels, teachers, adolescent girls, parents—Pachico, raised in Colombia and now living in the United Kingdom, re-creates this recently violent period of Colombian history, but her debut novel is a disjointed kaleidoscope that fails in integrating all the various components. [See Prepub Alert, 9/12/16.]—Lawrence Olszewski, North Central State Coll., Mansfield, OH

Pagán, Camille. **Forever Is the Worst Long Time**. Lake Union: Amazon. Feb. 2017. 284p. ISBN 9781477818381. \$24.95; pap. ISBN 9781503941618. \$14.95. **F**

When James Hernandez meets his best friend Rob's fiancée Louisa "Lou" Bell in 1988, and she utters the prophetic words "this story ends with loss," he knows two things immediately: Lou isn't like any of the other girls whom Rob has dated, and James is blindingly in love with her. His love of Lou, unfortunately, stops him dead in his tracks. He fails to finish any of the novels that he's started writing, he damages his romantic relationships, and he gives up an academic track for a more middle-of-the-road career. Then Lou and Rob go through a separation, and a one-night stand between Lou and Jim leads to a baby girl, Emerson. James and Lou eventually form a platonic parenting relationship and James marries another, realizing that his life became stuck in his pursuit of perfection. But life isn't always perfect, and it does always end in loss. What matters is love. **VERDICT** Pagán's (*Life and Other Near-Death Experiences*) bittersweet novel, which takes place from 1998 to 2016, deserves a wide readership among women's lit readers.—Jennifer Mills, Shorewood-Troy Lib., IL

Quirk, Matthew. **Dead Man Switch**. Mulholland: Little, Brown. Mar. 2017. 320p. ISBN 9780316259231. \$26; ebk. ISBN 9780316259224. **F**

In Quirk's (*Cold Barrel Zero*) second John

highest-ranking officer of the Republican Army left in the country at the end of the Spanish Civil War. As the novel opens, Escobar is awaiting trial and execution. On July 19, 1936, Escobar, a colonel in the Civil Guard and a man of faith, had chosen to defend the Republic in accordance with his oath to support Spain's legal government. As thousands of armed insurrectionists poured into the streets of Barcelona, he gave the orders to crush the uprising of those who, three years later, would be victorious. The author's take on the Spanish Civil War, told in the words of a soldier who supported the losing side because he believed it was his duty to do so, is powerful in its simplicity and refreshingly unideological. When the novel was

first published in 1983, eight years after the death of Franco ended his 36-year dictatorship, attitudes toward the war were still raw enough to produce an outcry. The translator has provided a helpful glossary of characters and organizations cited in the novel. **VERDICT** Especially appealing to those interested in Spanish literature and history but accessible to all readers.—Jack Shreve, Chicago

Pachico, Julianne. **The Lucky Ones**. Spiegel & Grau. Mar. 2017. 272p. ISBN 9780399588655. \$26; ebk. ISBN 9780399588679. **F**

Set mostly in Colombia between 1993 and 2013 during the periods of guerrilla warfare and infamous drug trade, this work

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