

WOMEN AND MONEY: why we need to take control now

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what to read this fall

Since *Real Simple* launched in 2000, it's been clear that you—our readers—love books. Naturally, we decided to put you to work. This month marks the first installment of reader-penned reviews. Thousands applied for the job, and several dozen were selected. We chose the books, and our talented panelists handled the reading and critiquing. Read on for five reviews (plus seven more at realsimple.com/bookreviews), then look for even more of our panelists' assessments in upcoming issues.

The book: *All Gone: A Memoir of My Mother's Dementia. With Refreshments*, by Alex Witchel (Riverhead, \$27).

Reviewer: Meena Sajwani; age 29; married; New York City.

Meena's assessment: In this warm memoir, Witchel recounts her mother's mental decline and the solace she derived from preparing family recipes. I related to the

author's desire to hold fast to her mother. My mom embodies so much: family, traditions, home. I worry about how I'll cope when she passes away someday. This book was a comfort, reminding me that nothing can ever rob me of her love.

The book: *In Between Days*, by Andrew Porter (Knopf, \$25).

Reviewer: Yael Zoldan; age 37; married with five kids; Passaic, New Jersey.

Yael's assessment: I was shaken by this cautionary tale of what can happen when a family's secrets become larger than the love they share. The novel centers on Elson Harding and his ex-wife, Cadence, as they face their failures as parents and partners when their daughter is expelled from college. It raises many questions: When do children and parents become equals? How far does loyalty go? Can a failed marriage be revived? I wished I could help the characters as they flailed in the darkness, sinking deeper and deeper into the quicksand of alienation.

The book: *Blackberry Winter*, by Sarah Jio (Plume, \$15).

Reviewer: Angelica Martin; age 26; single; Los Angeles.

Angelica's assessment:

This terrific novel alternates between two compelling narratives. The first is set in Seattle in 1933: An impoverished single mother kisses her young son, Daniel, good night and leaves to work the night shift at a hotel. When she returns early the next morning, Daniel is missing. The second plot follows *Seattle Herald* reporter Claire Aldridge in 2010, as she learns of Daniel's long-ago disappearance and vows to bring justice to his family. An intoxicating blend of mystery, history, and romance, this book is hard to put down. Just be sure you don't rush through it, though.

The book: *The Yellow Birds*, by Kevin Powers (Little, Brown and Company, \$25).

Reviewer: Zoe Saint-Paul; age 44; married; Baltimore.

Zoe's assessment: War is no longer a shared burden. There is a chasm between those who fight and those who continue their lives as usual. Written by a veteran (and a poet), this Iraq War novel helps bridge that divide. I came away feeling more connected to the horrors of war and more knowledgeable about how war forever alters both individuals and families.

The book: *The Forgetting Tree*, by Tatjana Soli (St. Martin's Press, \$26).

Reviewer: Savannah Butler; age 28; married with three kids; Conway, Arkansas.

Savannah's assessment:

Soli's novel follows Northern California rancher Claire Baumsarg in the years that follow a terrible tragedy: the murder of her youngest son. While I usually prefer lighter, more optimistic fiction, Soli's elegant prose—filled with loving details, dynamic characters, and lots of intrigue—enchanted me. She mines the depths of a mother's despair and later vividly portrays the grieving process that follows a radical mastectomy. The book is a near pitch-perfect look at a life fully—albeit imperfectly—lived.