



New Fiction for the New Year

by Caitlin Doggart

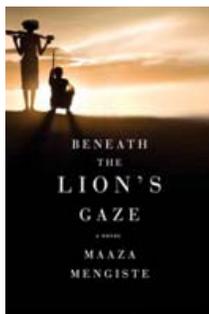
The festivities of the holiday season are over, the ground is frozen, the gray days still short. It is undoubtedly the perfect time of year for curling up, guilt-free, next to a fireplace with a stack of good books.

The following selection lists books that will be new in the early months of 2010. While the list encompasses a variety of settings and styles, the commonality is that each book is a really terrific and absorbing read that will hold its readers' breathless attention until they look up from the last page, blinking their way back into their own lives, to discover the arrival of spring.

BENEATH THE LION'S GAZE

[HTTP://MAAZAMENGISTE.COM](http://MAAZAMENGISTE.COM)

by Maaza Mengiste



Available January 2010 from W.W. Norton
<http://books.wwnorton.com/books/>

This riveting novel focuses on the primacy of family relationships against the violent backdrop of Ethiopia's 1974 Revolution and the following years.

Hailu, a prominent doctor, his two grown sons, Davit and Yonas, and his surrogate son Mickey, experience their country's tragedy and their own family's grief through very different prisms of understanding.

Davit becomes involved in a shadowy resistance movement as Yonus struggles to keep a semblance of normalcy in their household's compound. When Hailu is arrested for questioning after treating an imprisoned girl in the custody of the Derg militia, all three sons become further involved in the gruesome terror overtaking their capital city of Addis Ababa.

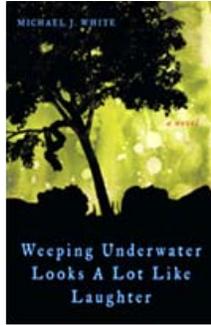
Maaza writes with incredible talent, moving the story forward while focusing on both the major and minor characters. She gives vibrant life to the children in the compound, for example, capturing their naiveté as well as their involvement in the general plot.

This novel displays the best of historical fiction - it makes a time and place come alive through the compelling characters. Although the subject matter is dark and emotionally-gripping, this novel is very hard to put down!

**WEeping UNDERWATER LOOKS
A LOT LIKE LAUGHTER**

<http://www.michaeljwhitebooks.com>

by Michael J. White



Available February 2010 from Putnam
<http://www.penguin.com/>

Michael White, another debut novelist, vividly creates a coming-of-age story set in Des Moines. The narrator, the wry, direct, open-hearted George Flynn, writes from the present-day as he reflects on the formative events of his high school years.

He starts a new school as a junior when his father is transferred for work, and he quickly connects with the Schell sisters. Emily, his peer, is an aspiring actress with a cameo in *The Bridges of Madison County*, and her younger sister Katie, diagnosed with MS at an extremely young age, is a quirky, intelligent, 14-year-old with a poorly-concealed crush on George.

An unlikely accident further connects George with the Schell family, and his adult memories of the aftermath evoke an age of awkward adolescence, and of trying to do the right thing while falling helplessly in love for the first time.

THE BRIGHTEST STAR IN THE SKY

[HTTP://WWW.MARIANKEYES.COM](http://www.mariankeyes.com)

by Marian Keyes



Available January 2010 from Viking
<http://www.penguin.com/>

Marian Keyes continues her creative, often hilarious, storytelling talent with this latest novel. Told from the point of view of an opinionated spirit who enters an apartment house in Dublin, the novel focuses on the residents and their histories, pulling the reader into the long, satisfying story from the first page.

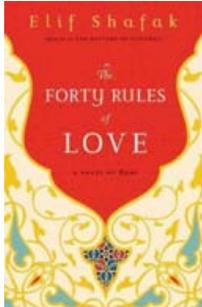
The unnamed spirit is part detective, part mischief-maker, zinging through the floors and gathering information on the apartment residents: Katie is a public relations genius, caring for rock stars and hoping for a gratifying life; Jemima is a psychic who warns her callers to save their money instead of calling her; Fionn, Jemima's hunky son, is visiting the city to star in a gardening TV show; Matt and Maeve are a vibrant and likable newlywed couple; and Lydia is a sassy cabdriver who sublets a room from her two homesick Polish flatmates, Jan and Andrei.

Like a Shakespearean comedy, the stories of the inhabitants become intertwined, and the spirit's insights reveal to the reader the complexity of experiences that hide behind each closed door.

FORTY RULES OF LOVE

<http://www.elifsafak.us/en/roportajlar.asp?islem=roportaj&id=19>

by Elif Shafak



Available February 2010 from Viking

Author Elif Shafak may already be familiar as the Turkish novelist charged by her government in 2006 for “insulting Turkishness” by having a character reference the Armenian Genocide in her novel, *The Bastard of Istanbul*. (Amidst international outrage, charges were eventually dropped.)

Her latest novel alternates between a Northampton housewife named Ella Rubinstein, the manuscript for “The Forty Rules of Love” that Ella is evaluating for a literary agency, and her correspondence with the author.

Ella’s sections remain faithful to her interpretation of events, and the reader feels privy to her exasperation with herself for ignoring the flaws in her marriage and her over-involvement in the lives of her three children, as well as her blossoming self-confidence as she emails the author of the manuscript.

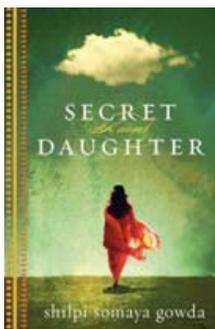
Juxtaposed with her sections are short chapters from the perspectives of a wide variety of characters in the manuscript as they recount the story of Shams of Tabriz, a 13th-century wandering dervish who influenced the mystic poet Rumi.

The short chapters are reminiscent of fairy tales for adults - the elements of a dangerous ancient setting, unexplained powers, and the “rules” of love as they are revealed by Shams throughout the story.

As Ella reads about Sufi concepts of love, her philosophical outlook begins to change, affecting her comfortable suburban life in ways she never would have expected.

SECRET DAUGHTER

http://www.harpercollins.com/authors/36251/Shilpi_Somaya_Gowda/index.aspx
by **Shilpi Somaya Gowda**



Available March 2010 from William Morrow

Debut novelist Shilpi Somaya Gowda has written a beautifully-crafted story of two families intertwined by the adoption of a baby girl, Asha.

The story opens in rural India, where Kavita, living in crushing poverty on fading farmland, gives birth to a child she cannot keep. Her valiant efforts to give her daughter a better life lead to Asha’s childhood in California, raised by a white Canadian woman, Somer, and her Indian husband Kris, both doctors.

Gowda’s storyline skillfully weaves the complex issues of marriage, parenting, and cross-cultural identity into a novel that leaves the reader intimately wrapped up the lives of the characters.

She achieves pitch-perfect literary fiction in her touching portrait of two mothers wanting the best for the child they adore, and the unexpected trajectory Asha’s life takes as she grows up. This is a wonderful book for discussion groups!



Caitlin Doggart worked for both a literary agency and a NYC publishing company before earning a Master's Degree in English Literature from Columbia University.

She opened Where the Sidewalk Ends Bookstore in Chatham with her mother Joanne in May of 2005, and has enjoyed matching books and readers ever since.

