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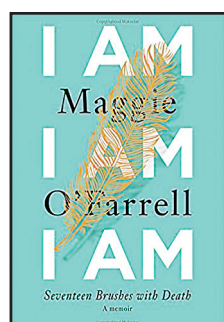
# Mother's Day

## Five books even crazy busy moms will want to read

JORDANA HORN  
Kveller via JTA

So many people tell me that they don't have time to read. I understand the dilemma. Reading is often portrayed as an immersive experience, one that you can't do without a full-fledged commitment of an event-free day and a deck chair.

Well, would-be reader, I'd say that is wrong. I read in five-minute increments wherever I go, and you can, too, with these riveting books easily broken into small, digestible and delicious chunks.



• "I Am, I Am, I Am," Maggie O'Farrell's memoir, is perfect in so many ways.

Among those ways is how suitable it is for those who only have time to read in truncated chunks like commutes or carpool lines: The book is written in a series of 17 short stories about near-death experiences O'Farrell has had over the course of her life.

From the very first gripping tale of a hike, I found myself riveted by how well she marries well-crafted prose with fascinating experiences. O'Farrell takes the reader along the course of her life, whether it is in a near-miss on a mountain hike or submerged beneath a riptide in a deep, night-darkened sea.

The memoir jumps around O'Farrell's life non-sequentially, much like how a parent's mind leapfrogs all over the place in the middle of the night. In choosing to have her stories not be recounted in linear time, the author makes the implicit case that experience is not valuable due to its proximity to the present, but rather due to its proximity to the roots of who we are as people.

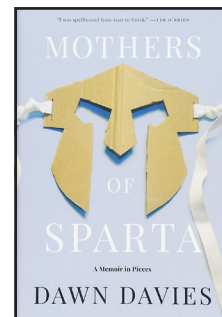
Who we are is determined by where we have been and what we take away from those experiences. From childhood encephalitis to near-drowning to miscarriage to birth, we are a jumbled aggregate of feelings, longings and fear.

That jumble takes its fullest and particularly rich form in her chapter "Daughter," in which she recounts the experience of an unexpected pregnancy turned into a daughter with a long list of allergies, several of which could trigger lethal anaphylaxis. As O'Farrell writes about the effects of living with a child with a life-threatening condition, parental readers will feel their very heartbeat synchronize with hers.

"Your lives are conducted with a constant background hum of potential peril," she writes. "You begin to experience the world differently. You may no longer go for a walk and see a garden, a playground, a farm full of goat kids. You must always be tabulating and assessing risk: that pollinating silver birch, those food wrappers in the rubbish bin, those flowering nut trees, those gamboling dogs, shedding their dander and fur into the air."

Her masterful choice of the second person to reel you into her life and her love leaves you — no pun intended in a book about near-death — breathless.

• "Mothers of Sparta: A Memoir in Pieces," by Dawn Davies, is similar to O'Farrell in that it is a collection of easily readable, hard-to-put-down essays, but radically dif-



ferent in that it is a more humorous and fiercely honest collection.

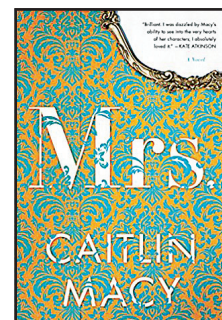
I can't say it better than the reviewer who wrote on Goodreads, "This is the first book I have read that both wrenches your gut with heartbreak and makes you laugh out loud at the humor at the same time." It's that marriage of pain and humor that Davies makes perfectly

in her prose.

Davies tells the story of her itinerant life, moving from place to place as a child, and her tales of finding love and creating a new blended family. She does so with flagrant, fierce honesty, and that honesty resonates with truth and purpose. As she watches her children swimming at night and takes pictures of them, she writes:

"And as you click two simple photos, paper fossils that will one day remind you how they once walked the Earth, you realize you have taken everything for granted. Your time with them. Their brief speck of time as children, the soft faces that turn to you as if you are the sun, the fact that time seems to move so slowly when in fact, it is whipping past you at one thousand miles per hour and why you haven't flown off into space is beyond your comprehension. They will never stay yours, for they weren't yours to begin with."

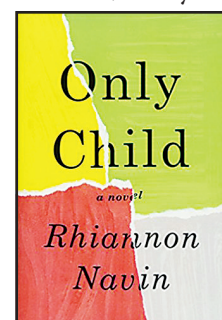
What a beautiful kick in the face that is.



• "Mrs.," by Caitlin Macy, is a contrast to the others. The novel is a wild and crazy ride through the world of Manhattan schools, parents and students.

I have always been fascinated by this world in the anthropological vein of Wednesday Martin's "Primates of Park Avenue": In a world with so much ambition and so much wealth, what could go wrong? A lot, as it turns out.

"Mrs." follows an independent woman as she navigates her way through this world from the vantage point of smart, detached and yet inextricably involved outsider. She has a front-row seat — and even, semi-unintentionally, a role — in the downfall of a prominent and beautiful socialite mother and her Manhattan family. If you liked "Big Little Lies," either the book or the show, you will read this and immediately start casting parts in your head (Jessica Chastain, have your people call my people, please).



• "Only Child," by Rhiannon Navin, is pretty much the antithesis of a light read.

It's an emotionally gripping, riveting book that will seize you and not let go. It's written from the point of view of a 6-year-old survivor of a school shooting, which initially I worried I would find cloying. Instead, after getting past some of my issues with language used ("would a 6-year-old really say that in that way?"), it was a relief of sorts to read things through a child's viewpoint.

After all, personally, I am in a mom's head basically 24/7,