

FICTION

New York Times
best sellers

■ Fiction

- 1. The Da Vinci Code** — Dan Brown. Doubleday, \$24.95
- 2. The Last Juror** — John Grisham. Doubleday, \$27.95
- 3. The Five People You Meet in Heaven** — Mitch Albom. Hyperion, \$19.95
- 4. Ransom** — Danielle Steel. Delacorte, \$26.95
- 5. A Death in Vienna** — Daniel Silva. Putnam, \$25.95
- 6. Angels & Demons** — Dan Brown. Atria, \$17.95
- 7. Ain't She Sweet?** — Susan Elizabeth Phillips. Morrow, \$24.95
- 8. Seduced by Moonlight** — Laurell K. Hamilton. Ballantine, \$23.95
- 9. The Birth of Venus** — Sarah Dunant. Random House, \$21.95
- 10. The Amateur Marriage** — Anne Tyler. Knopf, \$24.95

■ Nonfiction

- 1. Deliver Us From Evil** — Sean Hannity. ReganBooks and HarperCollins, \$26.95
- 2. The Passion** — Tyndale, \$24.99
- 3. American Dynasty** — Kevin Phillips. Viking, \$25.95
- 4. Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them** — Al Franken. Dutton, \$24.95
- 5. The Price of Loyalty** — Ron Suskind. Simon & Schuster, \$26
- 6. Give Me a Break** — John Stossel. HarperCollins, \$24.95
- 7. The Fabric of the Cosmos** — Brian Greene. Knopf, \$28.95
- 8. Blindsided** — Richard M. Cohen. HarperCollins, \$23.95
- 9. Dude, Where's My Country?** — Michael Moore. Warner, \$24.95
- 10. Ghost Wars** — Steve Coll. Penguin, \$29.95

Local
best sellers

■ Fiction

- 1. The Da Vinci Code** — Dan Brown
- 2. The Five People You Meet in Heaven** — Mitch Albom
- 3. Loving Che** — Ana Menéndez
- 4. Blinded** — Stephen White
- 5. The Bookman's Promise** — John Dunning
- 6. The Game** — Laurie R. King
- 7. The Princes of Ireland** — Edward Rutherfurd
- 8. Angels & Demons** — Dan Brown
- 9. The Last Juror** — John Grisham
- 10. The Annunciation of Francesca Dunn** — Janis Hallowell

■ Nonfiction

- 1. South Beach Diet** — Arthur Agatston
- 2. Paper Trail** — Ellen Goodman
- 3. Woman With a Minute** — Barbara Stoker
- 4. The Big Year** — Mark Obmascik
- 5. Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands** — Laura Schlessinger
- 6. The Sexy Years** — Suzanne Somers
- 7. The Price of Loyalty** — Ron Suskind
- 8. The World According to Mr. Rogers** — Fred Rogers
- 9. Infinite Life** — Robert Thurman
- 10. Power of Intention** — Wayne W. Dyer

Information for this week's Denver-area best-seller list is provided by the Tattered Cover Book Store, Borders Books in Englewood and the Boulder Book Store.

'Aloft' quietly down to earth

By Jessica Slater
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Chang-rae Lee's first two novels, *Native Speaker* and *A Gesture Life*, explored the experiences of immigrants struggling to fit in and witnessing American culture from the outside. With his third novel, *Aloft*, Lee has shifted his perspective to that of an insider.

Jerry Battle is a man who "belongs" in every obvious way, born and bred into his suburban New Jersey lifestyle. From this viewpoint, Lee focuses on subtler shades of detachment and intimacy, exploring the dynamics of family relationships and the attempts of a man approaching 60 to make sense of his life.

Jerry's longtime girlfriend, Rita, has bought him a flying lesson for his 56th birthday. He had recently taken early retirement from the family landscaping firm, and she was hoping the lesson would provide a diversion, something to get him out of the house. But after that first lesson, Jerry realized that he had found "the little room, the little space, I was looking for, my private box seat in the world and completely outside of it, too."

The novel begins half a mile above Earth. Jerry is alone, piloting his small Skyhawk plane through calm weather, as he prefers. He is aloft, enjoying the clarity of detachment: "I

can't see the messy rest, none of the pedestrian, sea-level flotsam that surely blemishes our good scene."

But Jerry's preference for fair-weather flying cannot shield him from reality forever. Just as he avoids the "flotsam" of daily life by flying half a mile up, so he neglects the emotional depths of his relationships, resulting in what his daughter Theresa calls his "preternatural lazy-heartedness." Rita leaves him after more than 20 years because she can't stand his emotional distance any longer.

When Theresa arrives from Oregon with her boyfriend to announce their wedding plans, it emerges that things aren't as happy as they seem. Theresa has a difficult decision to make and is ignoring the desperate concerns of her family and friends.

Meanwhile, Jerry's father is resentfully living out his days in an assisted living facility, and his son, Jack, is struggling to keep the family business alive.

Reality is catching up with Jerry. Amid increasing emotional turbulence, he reflects on the death of his wife 20 years earlier, and on the detachment that has characterized

his relationships with those he loves.

Lee paints Jerry's character with just enough modesty and self-awareness to inspire compassion. Readers will cringe at his mistakes because they are the simplest of human missteps: He cares, but doesn't show it until it's too late. When he finally seizes the day, readers will cheer, hoping they might do the same when it matters most.

Part of what makes the novel so successful is that Lee isn't intent on blowing sunshine at us when we know life brings its share of bad weather. He succeeds in portraying the emotional growth of a man in terms that fit his character and culture.

Jerry's reflections are expressed in a mature but modest tone:

"... among the only real things left to us in this life if we're lucky is a shared condition of bemusement and sorrowful wonder that can maybe turn into something like joy."

He learns that flying solo may be a diversion, but it is not a true escape. He experiences the gravity of family, not just as a force to be defied in flight, but as an essential element of his own survival. His family may not

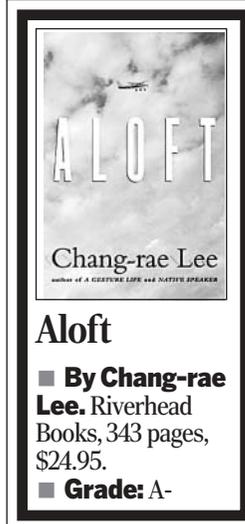
be perfect, but they are there for each other, their bond "predicated not so much on either obligation or love but on a final mutual veto of any further abandonment."

Jerry's narrative voice is low-key and colloquial. At times, this seems to jar with the graceful elegance of Lee's descriptive language, but overall the voices weave together, creating something that is both believable and poetic.

"Below is the eastern end of Long Island, and I'm flying just now over that part of the land where two gnarly forks shoot out into the Atlantic," Lee writes of Jerry. "The town directly ahead, which is nothing special when you're on foot, looks pretty magnificent now, the late-summer sun casting upon the macadam of the streets a soft, ebonized sheen, its orangey light reflecting back at me, matching my direction and speed in the windows and bumpers of the parked cars and swimming pools of the simple, square houses set snugly in rows."

Aloft views suburban American life through the universal prism of a family growing up and growing old together. Without loop-the-loops or skywriting, Lee brings us quietly down to earth, engaging us in "the mystery and majesty of our brief living."

Jessica Slater is technology editor at the Rocky Mountain News.



'Lucky Ones' finds beauty in the ordinary

By Jennie A. Camp
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

In Rachel Cusk's fourth novel, the "lucky ones" of the title are contemporary stay-at-home moms whose hours are dictated by diapers and dishes rather than the demands of an office-led work world.

Cusk's descriptor is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, actually, as it's delivered by a mother whose overbearing, embittered husband envies his wife's seemingly empty hours at home. But the beauty of the novel lies not in its insight into the everyday struggles of marriage and parenthood but in a quiet reverence for the ordinariness of life — particularly motherhood — that is both refreshing and wonderfully understated.

As two mothers attempt, amid the din of four young children, to discuss the newspaper column that one of the mothers writes, for example, Cusk describes beautifully the simple challenge of maintaining a conversation:

"She realized that they were both shouting. It was the children, the noise they made — trying to talk was like swimming in a rough sea; you kept feeling it rising beneath you then hollowing out."

Even in the irritating moments, Cusk's mothers continually return to a love for their children that overshadows all else. When Vanessa moves between her children's rooms in the early morning, for ex-

ample, she confesses to herself that "these were the good moments, the gold":

"Discovering her children thus, Vanessa experienced the pleasure of the treasure hunt: there they were in their beds, like jewels in their caskets, all hers, their finder's. It was difficult to believe, seeing them, as yet un sullied by the business of living, that they had ever tried her patience."

Marriage doesn't fare as well in *The Lucky Ones*, with discontent more the rule than the exception. Yet even marital discourse in Cusk's novel is careful and insightful, rather than harried and common:

"She knew herself well and she knew her enemy. This enemy was not her husband; it was the capacity in herself, of which she was aware, for finding her husband unsatisfactory."

The Lucky Ones is the tale of five lives told in five chapters: Kirsty is a young incarcerated mother about to give birth; Martin is a new father whose ski vacation is clouded by worries of his new life; the narrator in the chapter titled "The Sacrifices" is a wife and sister who longs to find a place for herself as a stepmother; Mrs. Daley is a society woman in her 60s who prefers proper appearances to truth;

and Vanessa is a young mother who watches her marriage turn sour but who loves her two young sons desperately.

Each chapter easily could stand alone as a short story, and the connections among the five are tenuous and add little more to the stories themselves than allowing us rather hesitantly to call Cusk's work a novel. Cusk, who lives in England, is a winner of

the Whitbread First Novel Award and author of *Saving Agnes*, *The Country Life* and *A Life's Work*. Her books frequently explore the joys and challenges of motherhood with an exceptional eye for careful details and the smoothly cadenced voice of a poet.

The only downfall of Cusk's most recent project is the book's rather unconvincing masquerade in the novel form when clearly Cusk has written five exceptionally strong and unforgettable short stories.

Jennie A. Camp's reviews and short stories have appeared in "Prairie Schooner," "Colorado Review" and other publications. She lives in Platteville.

The Lucky Ones

■ By Rachel Cusk. Fourth Estate, 256 pages, \$24.95
■ Grade: A-



Cusk tells an understated tale of five lives.