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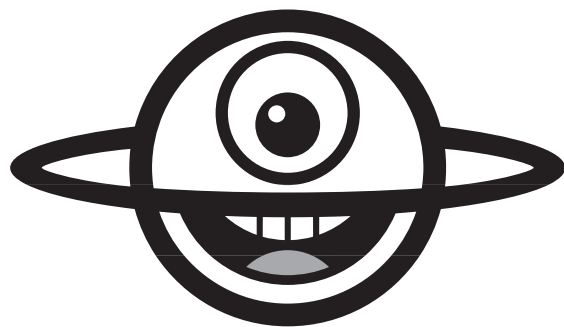
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winter reading 2005-6

"Seven Cups of Water" explores a young woman's brief sexual freedom, described in passionate encounters with her sister-in-law, before she settles into an arranged marriage. Though their relationship is brief, these characters possess immense bravery.

"Mint in Your Throat" is a painfully honest tale by a student who persuades her rapist she is a prostitute. Even though she tries to outsmart him, she ends up being humiliated. This story left me with chills.

The ambitious Kandiah and Vallipuram families move across continents in hope of education and success, reach across marriage beds to reluctantly receive arranged spouses, and trade stereotypes between Eastern and Western cultures. The importance of religion, tradition, education and family is explored whether on the dirt floors of a sweltering and politically turbulent Sri Lanka or in the financially secure but culturally pressured comfort of an American home.

Mohanraj challenges traditional Sri Lankan culture, where the vibrant and resilient female characters wrapped in brightly colored saris serve as the fabric of *Bodies in Motion*, while the men are the gold thread running through it. These stories will leave you with tamarind lingering on your taste buds, the smell of Bougainvillea on your hands and the challenge of breaking free weighing in your heart. — Danica Stiles

CRIMINAL PURSUITS

How I Paid for College: A Novel of Sex, Theft, Friendship and Musical Theater by Marc Acito. Broadway Books, 2005. Paperback, \$9.95. Winner of the 2005 Oregon Book Award for the Novel.

To be fair, there's not quite as much musical theater as there is sex, theft and friendship in Marc Acito's first novel.

There is enough, though, to give the book something of a campy feel, especially when combined with the kooky, teen-movie style episodes of theft and sex, complete with parental interruption and incriminating photos of naked jocks.

Seventeen-year old Edward Zanni is a theater geek about to start his senior year of high school. He's dead set on going to Julliard. Acting is his calling, his reason for being, and, naturally, something his business-minded father — an almost cartoonish Jersey goon — is equally dead set against. He simply refuses to pay for college unless Edward goes to business school.

Thus the scheming begins: blackmail, embezzlement, identity theft and more. Edward's assisted by his former girlfriend, Kelly, his best friend, Paula, and Kelly's new boyfriend, Doug, who's also the subject of Edward's blooming crush. They're joined by cosmopolitan Ziba and Natie, the nerdy-smart kid across the street, who comes up with the best plots for the illicit acquisition of cash.

Acito's voice is clear and cheerily irreverent, and his plotting perfectly screwball, but

somehow Edward's story never lands in laugh-out-loud territory. If over-the-top hijinks are your thing, you'll likely disagree. The story's coming-of-age and coming-out threads are deftly handled. But Acito has a distracting tendency to begin chapters by an anecdote about a character, followed by a paragraph that's simply the character's name, as if the incident defined the person. Hard to explain, and a little hard to swallow.

Still, Edward's pitch-perfect teenage attitude and frank approach to sex are likely to appeal not just to adults, for whom the book is intended, but also teens, who may find Edward and company with their "Creative Vandalism" and outlandish garb kindred souls. — Molly Templeton

MAGICAL REALISM

The Hummingbird's Daughter by Luis Alberto Urrea. Little, Brown and Company, 2005. Hardcover, \$24.95.

You can judge a book by its cover. I thought about buying *The Hummingbird's Daughter* because of a review, but after one look at the cover art I had to have it. The book became my fond companion immediately, and over several weeks a little touch of magical realism colored how I looked at the world.

Luis Alberto Urrea lovingly depicts life on a Sinaloa ranch around the turn of the 20th century, and the birth there of Teresita, a most amazing girl and his actual ancestor. Born of an Indian mother, fathered by the wealthy landlord, Don Tomás Urrea, and midwifed by the resident healer, Huila, Teresita's home is a hovel on the ranch. Her mother abandons her, yet she grows into an uncommon girl and again attracts the attention of Don Tomás's

privileged servant, Huila, who makes Teresita her protégé. The girl comes to live in the big house where a surprised Don Tomás recognizes her as his daughter.

All around the remote hacienda, the Mexican Revolution is fomenting. Targeted by the corrupt Mexican government, the beloved people of Teresita, Los Indios, are the first besides Huila to discover the girl's healing abilities. Like wildfire, she

becomes an icon of the revolution, which puts her entire household and especially her dear father, Don Tomás, in jeopardy.

This exciting, beautifully drawn adventure story never failed to enchant me. Urrea's magnificent grasp of the realities of Mexican life in all its tragic complexity is rendered in deliriously passionate language. Teresita, in crisis, rises at dawn and goes outside:

"She avoided Huila's sacred grove of cottonwoods and found a small holy spot of her own. She prayed, though she was unworthy of God's ear. She waited until hummingbirds began their rounds, and she told them of her sorrows. They buzzed and rang around her

