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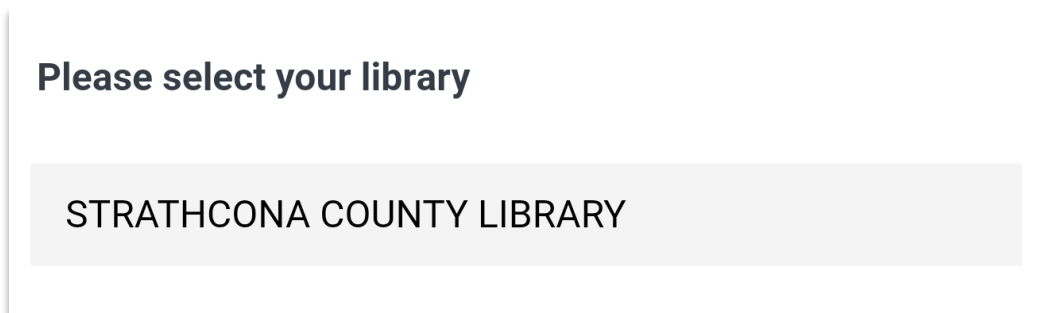
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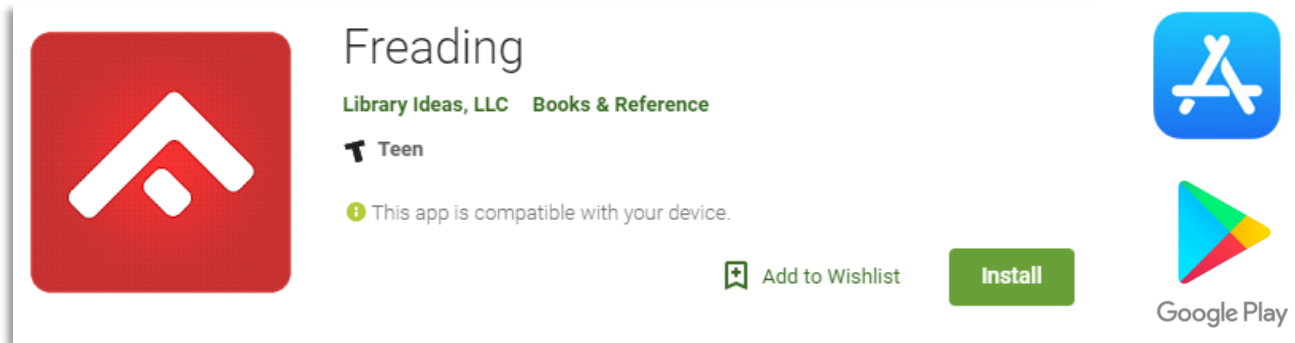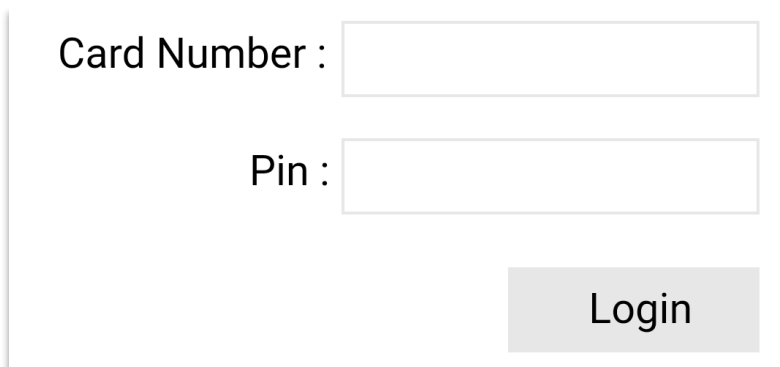

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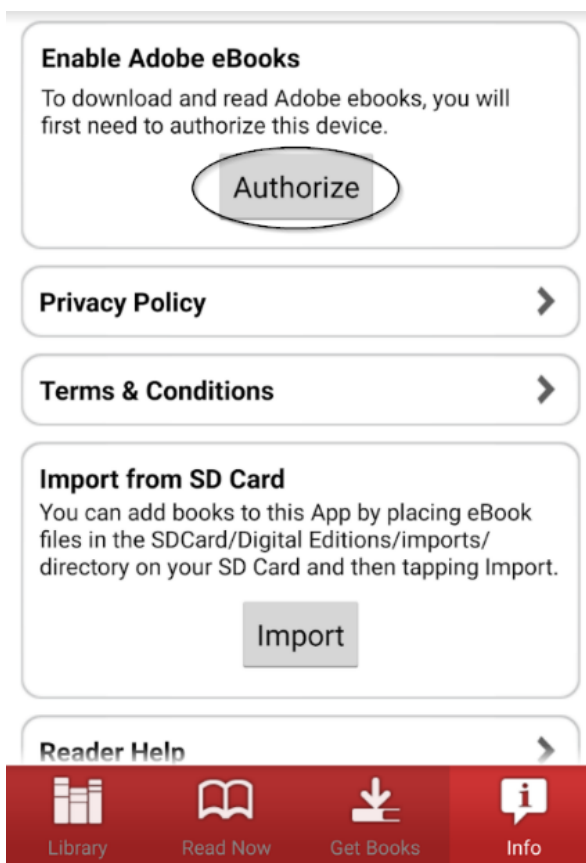
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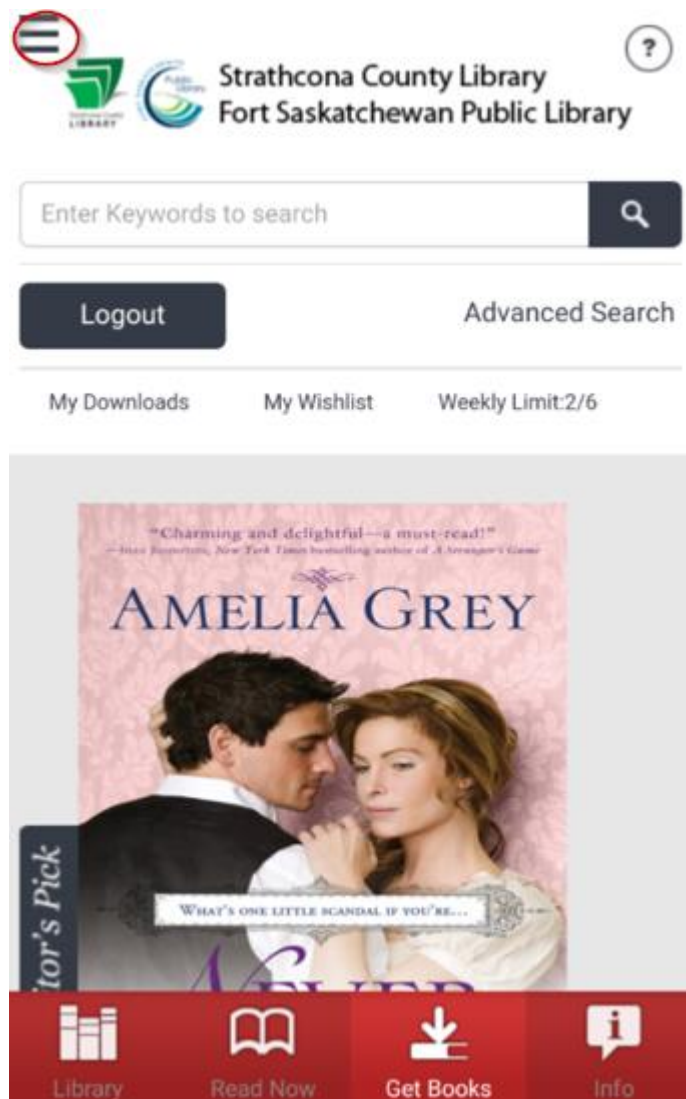
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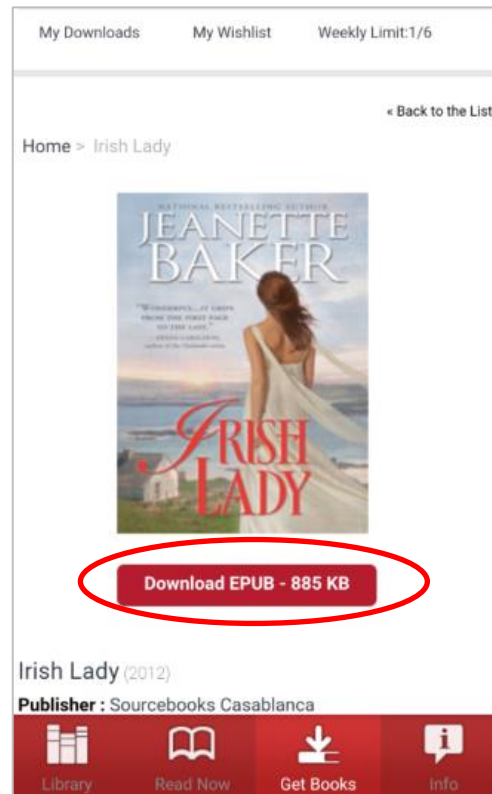
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One

London, England, 1994

His Honorable Lord Justice, James Fitzwilliam, watched in fascinated awe as Meghann McCarthy trailed her fingers across the mahogany bar separating the jury box from the rest of the courtroom. Nearly three weeks had passed since she first stood before him proclaiming herself council for the defense. He knew her, of course. Everyone in London's exclusive legal community knew her. But it was the first time she had tried a case in his courtroom.

Meghann Anne McCarthy was something of a legend in British legal circles. An obscure civics student, of the Irish Catholic pe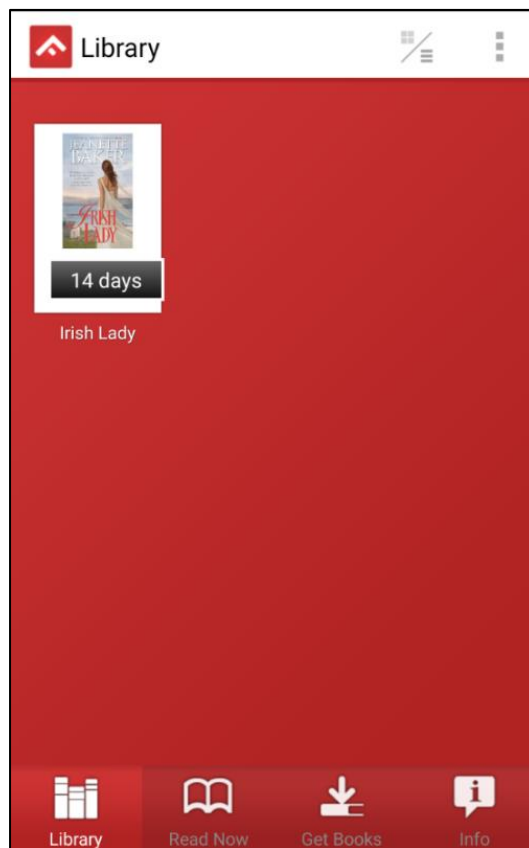rsuasion, she had made the nearly impossible climb from Queen's University in Belfast to the hallowed halls of Oxford University, where she shocked her professors and fellow students, mostly male, wealthy, and titled, by graduating first in her law school class.

Upon commencement she was recruited by the exalted firm of Thorndike and Sutton. Within a year she married the elderly Lord David Sutton and vanished from the judicial world. Five years later, after the death of her husband, she claimed his share of the partnership, redecorated his office, soothed his more conventional clients, and established her own reputation. Now she was regarded as one of the finest legal minds in all of England.

All of which Lord Justice Fitzwilliam was quite aware of before the woman stepped into his courtroom. What he hadn't known, what he couldn't have known, what he would never have believed without seeing firsthand, was the way Miss McCarthy manipulated an entire courtroom, himself included.

It wasn't that the woman was strident or domineering, nor was she abrasive or even dramatic. On the contrary, she was gracious and compellingly civil, combining an unschooled elegance of movement, an understated attractiveness with a voice so perfectly pitched, so filled with expressive understanding and compassion that it

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helpless under her spell.

single objection. Fitzwilliam didn't blame them, not when the senses of every man

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