

Book Group Titles 2023

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Book Group Synopses 2023

Alan, Tom – Hitting the Jackpot

A thirty-something English teacher and amateur linguist, Jack just about makes ends meet—as does his Aussie fitness instructor, soon-to-be ex-wife. She’s finally run out of patience with Jack. What she doesn’t know is that Jack has hit the jackpot: well over two million pounds in lottery winnings. Swearing his brother to secrecy, Jack figures this unexpected fortune will go a long way toward cushioning the blow of his divorce.

But, keeping his win a secret from his wife proves to be a harder task than Jack first imagines, especially as she knows his favourite numbers, so is convinced that he has won and is deliberately trying to cut her out.

Jack's problems deepen when his shiny new BMW is hit by another car - driven by the shaken and disheveled but gorgeous Milly...

Andrew, Kelly – The Whispering Dark

Delaney Meyers-Petrov is tired of being seen as fragile just because she's deaf. So when she's accepted into a prestigious program at Godbole University that trains students to slip between parallel worlds, she's excited for the chance to prove herself. But her semester gets off to a rocky start as she faces professors who won't accommodate her disability, and a pretentious upperclassman, Colton Price, who seems determined to despise her. Colton Price died when he was nine years old. Quite impossibly, he woke at the feet of a green-eyed little girl. When she told him to live, he obeyed. Now, twelve years later, Delaney has stumbled back into his orbit, but Colton's been ordered to keep far away from the new girl - and the voices she hears calling to her from the shadows.

Ashe, Lucy – Clara & Olivia

Surely you would like to be immortalised in art, fixed forever in perfection?

Sadler's Wells, 1933.

I would kill to dance like her.

Disciplined and dedicated, Olivia is the perfect ballerina. But no matter how hard she works, she can never match identical twin Clara's charm.

I would kill to be with her.

As rehearsals intensify for the ballet Coppélia, the girls feel increasingly like they are being watched. And, as infatuation turns to obsession, everything begins to unravel.

Atkinson, Kate – Shrines of Gaiety

1926, and in a country still recovering from the Great War, London has become the focus for a delirious new nightlife. In the clubs of Soho, peers of the realm rub shoulders with starlets, foreign dignitaries with gangsters, and girls sell dances for a shilling a time.

At the heart of this glittering world is notorious Nellie Coker, ruthless but also ambitious to advance her six children, including the enigmatic eldest, Niven whose character has been forged in the crucible of the Somme. But success breeds enemies, and Nellie's empire faces threats from without and within. For beneath the dazzle of Soho's gaiety, there is a dark underbelly, a world in which it is all too easy to become lost.

With her unique Dickensian flair, Kate Atkinson brings together a glittering cast of characters in a truly mesmerizing novel that captures the uncertainty and mutability of life; of a world in which nothing is quite as it seems.

Babalola, Bolu – Love in Colour

Bolu Babalola takes the most beautiful love stories from history and mythology and rewrites them with incredible new detail and vivacity in her debut collection. Focusing on the magical folktales of West Africa, Babalola also reimagines iconic Greek myths, ancient legends from the Middle East, and stories from countries that no longer exist in our world.

A high-born Nigerian goddess feels beaten down and unappreciated by her gregarious lover and longs to be truly seen.

A young businesswoman attempts to make a great leap in her company, and an even greater one in her love life.

A powerful Ghanaian spokeswoman is forced to decide whether to uphold her family's politics, or to be true to her heart.

Whether captured in the passion of love at first sight, or realising that self-love takes precedent over the latter, the characters in these vibrant stories try to navigate this most complex human emotion and understand why it holds them hostage.

Moving exhilaratingly across perspectives, continents and genres, from the historic to the vividly current, Love in Colour is a celebration of romance in all of its forms.

Bailey, Tessa – Happenstance

Elise Brandeis has never won a Pulitzer-and she never will. At least not while she's delivering sandwiches at the Gotham Times, instead of working there as an actual reporter. Her only

shot at seeing her byline in print is to prove to the no nonsense managing editor that she has a nose for news. And she's got just the story to grab her elusive attention. Right after she delivers this turkey on ciabatta.

Chasing down leads brings Elise to Roosevelt Island, but just when the trail of clues begins to take shape, she gets stuck. Literally. On a cable car with three strangers who couldn't be more different. An uptight rugby coach, a construction worker and a former adult film star she pretends not to recognize a little too well.

At first, Elise wants nothing more than to be rescued ASAP.

An hour later, everything has changed. By pure happenstance, four separate journeys have collided in an intense, meaningful way. Suddenly, disentangling their lives feels more impossible than winning that Pulitzer. Good thing Elise is too busy proving herself at work to consider three boyfriends. Nobody has time for that-even if they make giving in feel oh so right. But three heads are better than one and these loners will teach themselves to work together to win Elise over forever...

And more importantly, keep their dirty socks off her floor.

Bailey-Smith, Yvonne – The Day I Fell Off My Island

'The Day I Fell Off My Island' tells the story of Erna Mullings, a teenage Jamaican girl uprooted from her island following the sudden death of her beloved grandmother. When Erna is sent to England to be reunited with her siblings, she dreads leaving behind her elderly grandfather, and the only life she has ever known. A new future unfolds, in a strange country and with a mother she barely knows. The next decade will be a complex journey of estrangement and arrival, new beginnings and the uncovering of long-buried secrets.

Barnes, Simon – The Year of Sitting Dangerously: my Garden Safari

In the autumn of 2020, Simon Barnes should have been leading a safari in Zambia, but Covid restrictions meant his plans had to be put on hold. Instead, he embarked on the only voyage of discovery that was still open to him. He walked to a folding chair at the bottom of his garden, and sat down. His itinerary: to sit in that very same spot every day for a year and to see - and hear - what happened all around him. It would be a stationary garden safari; his year of sitting dangerously had begun. For the next twelve months, he would watch as the world around him changed day by day. Gradually, he began to see his surroundings in a new way; by restricting himself, he opened up new horizons, growing even closer to a world he thought he already knew so well.

Barrow, Laura – Call the Canaries Home

Savannah was four years old when her twin sister, Georgia, went missing from their small Louisiana town, fracturing their family. Twenty-eight years later, Savannah convinces her estranged older sisters, Rayanne and Sue Ellen, to honor the pact they made as children and retrieve the time capsule they buried in their old backyard. But coming home means confronting old ghosts - and their stubborn grandmother, Meemaw. Sifting through the artifacts, they come across a photograph taken on the day Georgia disappeared and spot a familiar woman lingering in the background. While Sue Ellen and Rayanne want to move on with their lives, Savannah is determined to find the woman - and perhaps a clue to the past. When old tensions, rivalries, and memories resurface, the sisters must reconsider what they thought they knew about that fateful day, about each other, and about themselves.

Beckerman, Hannah – The Forgetting

When Anna Bradshaw wakes up in a hospital bed in London, she remembers nothing, not even her loving husband, Stephen. The doctors say her amnesia is to be expected, but Anna feels cut adrift from her entire life.

In Bristol, Livvy Nicholson is newly married to Dominic and eager to get back to work after six months' maternity leave. But when Dominic's estranged mother appears, making a series of unnerving claims, Livvy is sucked into a version of herself she doesn't recognise.

A hundred miles apart, both women feel trapped and disorientated, and their stories are about to collide. Can they uncover the secret that connects them and reconstruct their fractured lives?

Bent, Hannah – When Things are Alive, They Hum

Marlowe and Harper share a bond deeper than most sisters, shaped by the loss of their mother in childhood. For Harper, living with what she calls the Up syndrome and gifted with an endless capacity for wonder, Marlowe and she are connected by an invisible thread, like the hum that connects all things. For Marlowe, they are bound by her fierce determination to keep Harper, born with a congenital heart disorder, alive.

Now 25, Marlowe is finally living her own life abroad, pursuing her studies of a rare species of butterfly secure in the knowledge Harper's happiness is complete, having found love with boyfriend, Louis. But then she receives the devastating call that Harper's heart is failing. She needs a heart transplant but is denied one by the medical establishment because she is living with a disability. Marlowe rushes to her childhood home in Hong Kong to be by Harper's side and soon has to answer the question – what lengths would you go to save your sister?

Boyne, John – All the Broken Places

91-year-old Gretel Fernsby has lived in the same mansion block in London for decades. She leads a comfortable, quiet life, despite her dark and disturbing past. She doesn't talk about her escape from Germany over 70 years before. She doesn't talk about the post-war years in France with her mother. Most of all, she doesn't talk about her father, the commandant of one of the most notorious Nazi concentration camps. Then, a young family moves into the apartment below her. In spite of herself, Gretel can't help but begin a friendship with the little boy, Henry, though his presence brings back memories she would rather forget. One night, she witnesses a violent argument between Henry's mother and his domineering father, one that threatens Gretel's hard-won, self-contained existence. Gretel is faced with a chance to expiate her guilt, grief and remorse and act to save a young boy.

Brooks, Geraldine – Horse

Kentucky, 1850. An enslaved groom named Jarret and a bay foal forge a bond of understanding that will carry the horse to record-setting victories across the South. When the nation erupts in civil war, an itinerant young artist who has made his name on paintings of the racehorse takes up arms for the Union. On a perilous night, he reunites with the stallion and his groom, very far from the glamour of any racetrack.

Washington, DC, 2019. Jess, a Smithsonian scientist from Australia, and Theo, a Nigerian-American art historian, find themselves unexpectedly connected through their shared interest in the horse - one studying the stallion's bones for clues to his power and endurance, the other uncovering the lost history of the unsung Black horsemen who were critical to his racing success.

Based on the remarkable true story of the record-breaking thoroughbred, Lexington, who became America's greatest stud sire, Horse is an original, gripping, multi-layered reckoning with the legacy of enslavement and racism in America.

Burton, Jessie – Medusa

Exiled to a far-flung island after being abused by powerful gods, Medusa has little company other than the snakes that adorn her head instead of hair. Haunted by the memories of a life before everything was stolen from her, she has no choice but to make peace with her present: Medusa the monster. But when the charmed and beautiful Perseus arrives on the island, her lonely existence is blown apart, unleashing desire, love ... and betrayal.

Campbell, Nancy – Thunderstone

In the wake of a traumatic lockdown, Nancy Campbell buys an old caravan and drives it into a strip of neglected woodland between a canal and railway. It is the first home she has ever owned. It will not move again. As summer begins, Nancy embraces the challenge of how to live well in a space in which possessions and emotions often threaten to tumble. And as

illness and uncertainty loom once more, it is this anchored van that will bring her solace and hope. An intimate journal across the span of a defining summer, 'Thunderstone' is a celebration of transformation; an invitation to approach life with imagination and to embrace change bravely.

Cannon, Joanna – A Tidy Ending

Linda lives a nice, normal life, on a nice, normal street with Terry, her perfectly ordinary husband.

Linda's not like everyone else, she keeps herself to herself. But she's good at solving puzzles and there are times she sees things other people might have overlooked.

Because nothing on Cavendish Avenue is quite as it seems. People have started to go missing in the neighbourhood and Linda will soon discover that some secrets can't stay buried forever...

Carr, Toby – Moderate Becoming Good Later: Sea Kayaking the Shipping Forecast

The Shipping Forecast has been described as the UK's national lullaby: a source of dependability and calm in our often-chaotic world, it has charmed millions of listeners and aided generations of seafarers across the decades. No stranger to weathering a storm after living with a rare life-limiting condition and facing the death of his brother, avid kayaker Toby Carr set out to explore the areas of the Forecast. On a journey that took him to the harshest and most tranquil stretches of our sea, Toby found the real people, places and stories behind the familiar names and imagined environments of the well-loved BBC broadcast. From the wildness and peace of the sea, looking back at the land, Toby hoped to gain the strength and balance he knew nature could provide and to discover what anchors us to each other.

Charlesworth, Monique – Mother Country : A story of love and lies

A true story of the passionate and tragi-comic relationship between a mother running from her past in Hitler's Germany and a daughter running towards it.

Inge was German, half-Jewish and a Holocaust survivor, all of which she chose to deny until the very end. Talented and able, charismatic and infuriating, she surged through life constantly reinventing herself. Sent out of Nazi Germany to the souks of Meknés, she fled a freezing attic in war-torn Brussels to land in a council estate in Birkenhead. London offered the escapee a new start until her past caught up with her. Triumph finally came in France where nobody knew who she was – least of all the friends who adored her.

Led by emotions she could barely understand, let alone control, Inge divided, and often she conquered. After her death, deep secrets emerged. Her daughters knew that she had always misled others – but not that they, too, might be collateral damage.

Cocozza, Paula – Speak to Me

When Kurt's phone rings during sex - and he reaches to pick it up - Susan knows that their marriage has passed the point of no return. Since they swapped their family home for an 'executive' newbuild on an estate still under construction, she has felt ever more aware that there is something missing in her life: the absence of any kind of meaningful communication with Kurt, who only has Facetime for Wendy (the nickname she has given to the ubiquitous phone), or her twin boys, with whom she communicates via notes left on the middle shelf of the fridge. This sense of loss becomes increasingly focused on a cache of handwritten letters, from her first love, Antony, mementoes of a time when devotion seemed to spill out easily onto paper. Increasingly desperate, Susan embarks on a journey of discovery that will reconnect her to her younger self, while simultaneously revealing her future.

Cox, Sara – Thrown

Becky: a single mum who prides herself on her independence. She knows from experience that men are trouble.

Louise: a loving husband, gorgeous kids. She ought to feel more grateful.

Jameela: all she's ever done is work hard, and try her best. Why won't life give her the one thing she wants?

Sheila: the nest is empty, she dreams of escaping to the sun, but her husband seems so distracted.

The inhabitants of the Inventor's Housing Estate keep themselves to themselves. There are the friendly 'Hellos' when commutes coincide and the odd cheeky eye roll when the wine bottles clank in number 7's wheelie bin, but it's not exactly Ramsay Street.

The dilapidated community centre is no longer the beating heart of the estate that Becky remembers from her childhood. So the new pottery class she's helped set up feels like a fresh start. And not just for her.

The assorted neighbours come together to try out a new skill, under the watchful eye of their charismatic teacher, Sasha. And as the soft unremarkable lumps of clay are hesitantly, lovingly moulded into delicate vases and majestic pots, so too are the lives of four women. Concealed passions and heartaches are uncovered, relationships shattered and formed, and the possibility for transformation is revealed.

Craven, Margaret – I Heard the Owl Call my Name

When Mark Brian, a young priest, is sent to the Indian village of Kingcome in British Columbia, he finds himself in an astonishing place of salmon runs and ancient totems. Yet amidst the beauty, the old culture is under attack, slowly being replaced by prefab houses and alcoholism. Mark has not long to live, and so he sets about sharing the hunting and fishing, the festivals and funerals, the joys and sorrows of a once proud tribe. Perhaps here he will learn enough of life to be ready to die.

With all the qualities of a legend or fable, *I Heard the Owl Call My Name* is a journey of discovery, and a story about the transforming power of love. Exploring the clash of old and new, it is an outstanding modern classic, both wise and tragic.

Darwent, Heather – The Things We Do To Our Friends

Clare arrives at the University of Edinburgh with a secret. This is her chance for a blank slate - to finally become who she was meant to be. And then she meets Tabitha. Tabitha is charismatic, beautiful and intimidatingly rich. Soon Clare is sucked into her enigmatic circle of friends and their dizzying world of champagne on rooftops and summers in France. Her new life has begun. Then Tabitha reveals the little project they're working on, a project they need Clare's help with. And Clare can't say no. Because they know what she did.

Defoe, Daniel – Robinson Crusoe

Epistolary, confessional, and didactic in form, the book is presented as an autobiography of the title character (whose birth name is Robinson Kreutznaer) – a castaway who spends 28 years on a remote tropical desert island near the coasts of Venezuela and Trinidad, roughly resembling Tobago, encountering cannibals, captives, and mutineers before being rescued. The story has been thought to be based on the life of Alexander Selkirk, a Scottish castaway who lived for four years on a Pacific island called "Más a Tierra" (now part of Chile) which was renamed Robinson Crusoe Island in 1966.

Diaz, Hernan – Trust

Can one person change the course of history?

A Wall Street tycoon takes a young woman as his wife. Together, they rise to the top in an age of excess and speculation. Now a novelist is threatening to reveal the secrets behind their marriage. Who will have the final word in their story of greed, love and betrayal?

Composed of four competing versions of this deliciously deceptive tale, *Trust* by Hernan Diaz brings us on a quest for truth while confronting the lies that often live buried in the human heart.

Erlick, Nikki – The Measure

It seems like just another morning.

Around the world, people wake up, check the news, open the front door.

On every doorstep is a box. Inside that box is the exact number of years that person has left to live.

Whether they open it or hide it under their bed, each person must learn to live in this new world: a couple who thought they didn't have to rush their life together, a doctor who cannot save himself from his own fate, best friends whose dreams are forever entwined, and a politician whose box becomes the powder keg that ultimately changes everything...

Fallon, Jane – Just Got Real

When happily divorced Joni finds Ant via a dating app, neither is entirely honest about who they are.

But when they meet in real life, they fall for each other. Soon they are a happy, steady item. Until Joni discovers Ant is still on the app, still dating other women . . .

Having secret rivals devastates Joni. So she decides to take revenge. But not on them.

Farrell, Kathleen – Mistletoe Malice

The fire is on, sherry poured, presents wrapped, and claws are being sharpened. In a seaside cottage perched on a cliff, one family reunites for Christmas. While snow falls, a tyrannical widowed matriarch presides over her unruly brood. Her niece tends to her whims, but fantasises about eloping; and as more guests arrive, each bringing their secret truths and dreams, the Christmas tree explodes, a brawl erupts, an escape occurs - and their 'midwinter madness' climaxes.

Foster, Kate – The Maiden

Edinburgh, October 1679. Lady Christian Nimmo is arrested and charged with the murder of her lover, James Forrester. News of her imprisonment and subsequent trial is splashed across the broadsides, with headlines that leave little room for doubt: Adulteress. Whore. Murderess. Only a year before, Christian was leading a life of privilege and respectability. So, what led her to risk everything for an affair? And does that make her guilty of murder? She wasn't the only woman in Forrester's life, and certainly not the only one who might have had cause to wish him dead.

Frankel, Laurie – One Two Three: a Novel

Everyone knows everyone in Bourne, but the Mitchell triplets are especially beloved. Mirabel is the smartest person anyone knows, and no one doubts it just because she can't

speak. Monday is the town's purveyor of books now that the library's closed - tell her the book you think you want, and she'll pull the one you actually do from the microwave or her sock drawer. Mab's job is hardest of all: Get good grades, get into college, get out of Bourne. For a few weeks 17 years ago, Bourne was national news when its water turned green. The girls have come of age watching their mother's endless fight for justice. But just when it seems life might go on the same forever, the first moving truck anyone's seen in years pulls up and unloads new residents and old secrets. Soon, the Mitchell sisters are taking on a system stacked against them and uncovering mysteries buried longer than they've been alive.

Gill, Nicola – Swimming for Beginners

Loretta has life under control. She's good at avoiding things that make her uncomfortable: parties, excessive emotion, getting hurt. She's chasing a big promotion and marrying a man whose five-year plan aligns perfectly with hers and certainly does not include children. But then a stranger in an airport asks Loretta to keep an eye on her sleeping six-year-old, Phoebe. She never comes back. Loretta knows that Phoebe's life will change forever from that moment. But so will hers. This strange little person in fairy wings will make Loretta learn to play Rude Trumps, get a swimming cap onto a child's head without involving social services, cut toast into happy shapes - and question everything she knows about herself.

Green, Cate – The Curious Kidnapping of Nora W.

Family matriarch and Holocaust survivor Nora Wojnaswki is about to become the oldest woman in the world, and her family are determined to celebrate in style. Her great granddaughter, Debs, however, is not too happy about being left in charge of the party. It's been a struggle to get the Rabbi to commit to a date and the large Wojnaswki clan can't agree on what food should be served. Only, Debs's problems are just beginning. Because Nora isn't your average centenarian, and she has other ideas.

Greaves, Abbie – The Silent Treatment

A lifetime together. Six months of silence. One last chance. Frank hasn't spoken to his wife Maggie for six months. For weeks they have lived under the same roof, slept in the same bed and eaten at the same table - all without words. Maggie has plenty of ideas as to why her husband has gone quiet. But it will take another heartbreaking turn of events before Frank finally starts to unravel the secrets that have silenced him. Is this where their story ends? Or is it where it begins? With characters that will capture your heart, 'The Silent Treatment' celebrates the phenomenal power of love and the importance of leaving nothing unsaid.

Gutierrez, Katie – More Than You'll Ever Know

Lore Rivera was married to two men at once, until on a baking hot day in 1986, one of them found out and shot the other. A secret double life, a tragic murder. That's the story the world knows. It's not the story that fascinates Cassie Bowman. Carrying the weight of her own family tragedy, true-crime writer Cassie wants to know more about the mysterious woman at the heart of it all, Lore. How did one woman fall in love with two different men? How did she balance the love and the lies? And, in the aftermath of the worst possible ending, how has she managed to go on? To her surprise, Cassie finds that Lore is willing to talk. To finally tell her spellbinding, heartbreaking story - about how a dance became an affair; how a marriage became a murder. As the two women grow closer, Cassie finds she can't help but confess her own darkest secrets.

Hannah, Sophie – Hercule Poirot's Silent Night: the New Hercule Poirot Mystery

It's 19 December 1931. Hercule Poirot and Inspector Edward Catchpool are called to investigate the murder of a man in the apparent safe haven of a Norfolk hospital ward. Catchpool's mother, the irrepressible Cynthia, insists that Poirot stays in a crumbling mansion by the coast, so that they can all be together for the festive period while Poirot solves the case. Cynthia's friend Arnold is soon to be admitted to that same hospital and his wife is convinced he will be the killer's next victim, though she refuses to explain why. Poirot has less than a week to solve the crime and prevent more murders, if he is to escape from this nightmare scenario and get home in time for Christmas. Meanwhile, someone else - someone utterly ruthless - also has ideas about what ought to happen to Hercule Poirot.

Hayward, Lili – A Midwinter's Tail

It's nearly Christmas and committed Londoner, Mina Kestle, is close to signing a deal that will make her career and give her everything she's ever wanted. And then she receives a mysterious letter in the post along with an ancient key, sent by her long-estranged godfather. Davy Penhallow is an artist who lives on the tiny Cornish island of Morgelyn with only his pet cat, Murr, for company. Mina hasn't seen or heard from him in decades, but now it seems he wants her to look after his cottage - and his cat - while he recovers from a stroke in hospital. Mina doesn't know why Davy has written after all these years, but she intends to do what's right. However, the more time Mina spends in the cottage, looking after Murr and remembering the magic of Cornish folklore, the harder it becomes for her to tear herself away.

Hedman, Johanna – The Trio

Thora, August and Hugo come from different worlds. One is an art school dreamer, one a wealthy scion of the old-world elite, and one an ordinary boy from out of town. But over the course of two sky-blue summers in Stockholm, they are drawn together magnetically.

Years later, Hugo is long estranged from Thora and August when their daughter knocks on his door. She has questions about her parents which she believes Hugo can answer - and the memories of those luminous days of youth come flooding back.

Modern yet timeless, poignant and euphoric, *The Trio* is a novel about the path not taken, the people we might have become, and the relationships which shape and haunt us long after they come to a close.

Henderson, Julietta – Sincerely, Me

Danny Mulberry is the definition of a man who 'could do better'. He hasn't spoken to his sister in sixteen years, spends most of his spare time in the local pub and currently lives in his best friend's garden shed.

But when the consequences of one drunken evening draw the attention of the press, a misleading article appears depicting Danny's less-than-perfect lifestyle as something covetable and wise. People start to think this apparently enlightened man could be the one with all the answers, and letters begin to flood in from strangers seeking his guidance.

Wolfie is the teenage daughter of Danny's estranged sister, Lou. She's never met her uncle. But her mother needs help, so when Wolfie sees Danny's picture in the paper, she sets out to find him.

Within a week, Danny goes from being responsibility-free to a big brother, an uncle and an unwitting existential 'guru' to some very lost souls.

Hubbard, Colleen – Housebreaking

Home is certainly not where Del's heart is. After a local scandal led to her parents' divorce and the rest of her family turned their backs on her, Del left her small town and cut off contact.

Now, with both of her parents gone, a chance has arrived for Del to retaliate. Her uncle wants the one thing Del inherited: the family home. Instead of handing the place over, and with no other resources at her disposal, Del decides she will tear the place apart herself - piece by piece.

But Del will soon discover, the task stirs up more than just old memories as relatives - each in their own state of unravelling - come knocking on her door.

This is a story not only about the powerlessness and hurt that run through a family but also about the moments when brokenness can offer us the rare chance to start again.

Huchu, T.L. – The Library of the Dead

Ropa dropped out of school to become a ghostalker - and she now speaks to Edinburgh's dead, carrying messages to the living. A girl's gotta earn a living, and it seems harmless enough. Until, that is, the dead whisper that someone's bewitching children - leaving them husks, empty of joy and life. It's on Ropa's patch, so she feels honour bound to investigate. But what she learns will change her world. She'll dice with death (not part of her life plan) as she calls on Zimbabwean magic and Scottish pragmatism to hunt down clues. For Edinburgh hides a wealth of secrets. And in the process, she discovers an occult library and some unexpected allies. Yet as shadows lengthen, will the hunter become the hunted?

Howrey, Meg – They're Going to Love You

Once a year, ballet-obsessed Carlisle Martin spends a few precious weeks with her father Robert and his partner James at their enchanted apartment in Greenwich Village. Time spent with them is impossibly glamorous, filled with art, dance, beauty, books, and grown-ups who take her seriously as they battle the AIDs crisis and

Then, one summer, a devastating betrayal sees her exiled from their world.

Now in her 40s, Carlisle has forged a successful career as a choreographer, and hasn't seen Robert or James in nearly twenty years, when James calls to summon her to her dying father's bedside.

They're Going to Love You, with its masterfully revealed secret at its heart, asks what it takes to be an artist, and the price of forgiveness, of ambition, and of love.

Johnstone, Doug – The Space Between Us

When three people suffer strokes after seeing dazzling lights over Edinburgh, then awake completely recovered, they're convinced their ordeal is connected to the alien creature discovered on a nearby beach ... an adrenaline-soaked, deeply humane, life-affirming first-contact novel from one of Scotland's most revered authors...

Jones, Cynan – The Dig

Deep in rural Wales, a farmer is struggling through lambing season when he becomes aware that his land is being stalked by a badger-baiter who brings with him the stark threat of violence. Built of the interlocking fates of these two solitary men, this is a searing story of isolation and loss, from a writer of uncommon gifts.

Kelly, Lesley – Dead Man Driving

Two years on from the start of a devastating pandemic, food shortages are becoming critical, and rationing looms. Carlotta Carmichael MSP is organising a high profile meeting of

international Virus ministers. When a lorryload of luxury food for her ministerial dinner gets hijacked, she calls on the unwilling assistance of the North Edinburgh Health Enforcement Team to track it down to save her blushes and prevent the protests flaring into riots. While the lorry proves easy to find, the identity of the dead woman in its hold is less easy to establish. Everyone's hungry. Everyone's scared. And the Health Enforcement Team are driving blind.

Keyes, Daniel – Flowers for Algernon

Charlie Gordon, IQ 68, is a floor sweeper and the gentle butt of everyone's jokes - until an experiment in the enhancement of human intelligence turns him into a genius. But then Algernon, the mouse whose triumphal experimental transformation preceded his, fades and dies, and Charlie has to face the possibility that his salvation was only temporary.

Know, Rowan Jetté – One Sunny Afternoon: a Memoir of Trauma and Healing

For writer and human rights advocate Rowan Jetté Knox, the inspiring story of her family's journey of love and acceptance, when both her child and partner came out as transgender one after the other, was the hopeful beginning to their new lives. Yet in the spring of 2020, Jetté Knox began to experience targeted attacks on social media, and she soon became the subject of a small but very vocal group. 'One Sunny Afternoon' is a searing testament to Rowan Jetté Knox's extraordinary reckoning with her past and present, to find hope in her future.

Larsen, Nella – Passing

Irene Redfield is a Black woman living an affluent, comfortable life with her husband and children in the thriving neighbourhood of Harlem in the 1920s. When she reconnects with her childhood friend Clare Kendry, who is similarly light-skinned, Irene discovers that Clare has been passing for a white woman after severing ties to her past—even hiding the truth from her racist husband.

Clare finds herself drawn to Irene's sense of ease and security with her Black identity and longs for the community (and, increasingly, the woman) she lost. Irene is both riveted and repulsed by Clare and her dangerous secret, as Clare begins to insert herself—and her deception—into every part of Irene's stable existence. First published in 1929, Larsen's brilliant examination of the various ways in which we all seek to "pass," is as timely as ever.

Lindeblad, Björn Natthiko – I may be wrong & other wisdoms from life as a forest monk

At the age of 26, Björn Natthiko Lindeblad abandoned a promising career, gave away all his possessions and left his loved ones to become a forest monk. For seventeen years he lived

according to the rules of the monastery. After returning to Swedish society, he was met with the diagnosis of a progressive, incurable disease: ALS. In 'I May Be Wrong', he shares his hard-won insights into how one can live a more present life, and what stands out as most important when things are coming to an end.

Littlewood, Fran – Amazing Grace Adams

One hot summer day, stuck in traffic on her way to pick up the cake for her daughter's sixteenth birthday party, Grace Adams snaps. She doesn't scream or break something or cry or curl into a ball. She simply abandons her car in traffic and walks away. But not from her life - towards it. To the daughter who won't live with her anymore and has banned her from the party. To the husband divorcing her. Towards the terrible thing that has blown their family apart. Today she'll show her daughter that no matter how far we fall we can always get back up again. Because Grace Adams was amazing. Her husband and daughter once thought so. They and the world might have forgotten. But Grace is about to remind them.

Mackintosh, Sophie – Cursed bread

Elodie is the baker's wife. A plain unremarkable person, largely ignored by her husband, she burns with the secret desire to be extraordinary. One day a charismatic new couple appears in town – the ambassador and his sharp-toothed wife, Violet – and Elodie quickly falls under their spell. All summer long she stalks them through the shining streets: inviting herself into their home, trying to decipher their coded conversations, longing to possess them at any cost. Meanwhile, beneath the tranquil surface of daily life, strange things are happening. Six horses are found dead in a sun-drenched field, laid out neatly on the ground like an offering. Widows see their lost husbands walking up the river in the night, coming back to claim them. A teenage boy throws himself into the bonfire at the midsummer feast. A dark intoxication is spreading through the town, and when Elodie finally understands her role in it, it will be too late to stop.

Moorcroft, Sue – The Christmas Love Letters

The love letters were only the start of the story. Tucked into a crook of the Norfolk coast lies Nelson's Bar - an idyllic village where time seems to stand still. Maddy Austen has called this beautiful spot home all her life, as had her husband Adey - until one snowy night an epic row sent him storming out, never to be seen again. Six years on, and Maddy's life in the village has settled into a gentle pattern with her daughter Lyla and Great-Aunt Ruthie. However, when handsome stranger Raff turns up at Ruthie's door with a handful of long-forgotten love letters, their quiet life is upended as family secrets from the past are unearthed. As Raff and Maddy get to know each other, they grow closer and a love story of their own seems inevitable. But when Maddy receives a mysterious message, she can't help but wonder whether her own past is as distant as she thought it was.

Morgan, Sarah – The Christmas Book Club

Every year, Erica, Claudia, and Anna reunite for their book club holiday. They're bonded by years of friendship and a deep love of books, but there is still so much they keep from each other. At the cosy Maple Sugar Inn, Hattie specialises in making her guests' dreams come true, but this Christmas all she wants is to survive the festive season. Between running the inn and being a single mother, Hattie is close to breaking point. Over the course of an eventful week, Hattie sees that the friends are each carrying around unspoken truths, but nothing prepares her for how deeply her story will become entwined in theirs. Will this Christmas be the end of the book club's story or the start of a whole new chapter?

Morris, Priscilla – Black Butterflies

SARAJEVO. SPRING 1992.

Each night, nationalist gangs erect barricades, splitting the diverse city into ethnic enclaves; each morning, the residents – whether Muslim, Croat or Serb – push the makeshift barriers aside.

When violence finally spills over, Zora, an artist and teacher, sends her husband and elderly mother to safety with her daughter in England. Reluctant to believe that hostilities will last more than a handful of weeks, she stays behind while the city falls under siege. As the assault deepens and everything they love is laid to waste, black ashes floating over the rooftops, Zora and her friends are forced to rebuild themselves, over and over. Theirs is a breathtaking story of disintegration, resilience and hope.

Mundy, Robyn – Cold coast

In 1932, Wanny Woldstad, a young widow, travels to Svalbard, daring to enter the Norwegian trappers' fiercely guarded male domain. She must prove to Anders Sæterdal, her trapping partner who makes no secret of his disdain, that a woman is fit for the task. Over the course of a Svalbard winter, Wanny and Sæterdal will confront polar bears, traverse glaciers, withstand blizzards and the dangers of sea ice, and hike miles to trap Arctic fox, all in the frigid darkness of the four-month polar night. For Wanny, the darkness hides her own deceptions that, if exposed, speak to the untenable sacrifice of a 1930s woman longing to fulfil a dream. Alongside the raw, confronting nature of the trappers' work, is the story of a young blue Arctic fox, itself a hunter, who must eke out a living and navigate the trappers' world if it is to survive its first Arctic winter.

Nugent, Liz – Strange Sally Diamond

Sally Diamond cannot understand why what she did was so strange. She was only doing what her father told her to do, to put him out with the rubbish when he died. Now Sally is the centre of attention, not only from the media and police, but also a sinister voice from the past. As she begins to discover the horrors of her childhood, recluse Sally steps into the world for the first time, finding independence and learning that people don't always mean what they say. But when messages start arriving from a stranger who knows far more about her past than she knows herself, Sally's life is thrown into chaos once again.

Page, Sally – The Keeper of Stories

She can't recall what started her collection. Maybe it was in a fragment of conversation overheard as she cleaned a sink? Before long (as she dusted a sitting room or defrosted a fridge) she noticed people were telling her their stories. Perhaps they always had done, but now it is different, now the stories are reaching out to her and she gathers them to her...

When Janice starts cleaning for Mrs B – a shrewd and tricky woman in her nineties – she meets someone who wants to hear her story. But Janice is clear: she is the keeper of stories, she doesn't have a story to tell. At least, not one she can share.

Mrs B is no fool and knows there is more to Janice than meets the eye. What is she hiding? After all, doesn't everyone have a story to tell?

Patrick, Ed – Catch your breath: the secret life of a sleepless anaesthetist

A gut punch of a memoir by a doctor - and comedian - whose job is to keep people alive by putting them to sleep. Ed Patrick is an anaesthetist. Strong drugs for his patients, strong coffee for him. But it's not just sleep - giving for this anaesthetist, as he navigates emergencies, patients not breathing for themselves and living with a terrifying sense of responsibility. It's enough to leave anyone feeling numb. But don't worry, there's plenty of laughing gas to be had.

Pia, Anne – Language of my choosing: a creative Scots-Italian memoir

How do you choose your nationality? This is a question that Anne Pia often asked herself whilst growing up in Edinburgh. Born to Scottish-Italian parents, she was sent to Catholic School in contrast with her Scots-Italian cousins and spent her days helping out in the family caf in Edinburgh. Tackling themes such as growing up, romantic love and motherhood, Pia's memoir traces her journey as she discovers her place in the world. Studying in France, Pia tries to come to terms with her unconventional family and the two nationalities she bridges. A truly honest book that delves into hard-hitting issues without veering into the sentimental, Pia's memoir will strike a chord with readers of any nationality.

Pitzorno, Bianca – The Seamstress of Sardinia

Born into poverty, the seamstress spends her days sewing in the houses of wealthy families. Her work is simple and honest; taught by her nonna, she skilfully prepares nightgowns, undergarments and children's clothes, leaving the finer work of dressmaking to the ateliers in Paris. Her story weaves in and out of the lives of the people she works for, whose secrets and scandals she is privy to. Some are kind and generous, others blinded by their desire to climb the social ladder. She dreams of freeing herself from the hardscrabble life she has inherited but can't help being pulled back in by the love of the people around her. Set at the dawn of the 20th century, *The Seamstress of Sardinia* follows the girl as she grows into a woman, strives to educate herself and falls in love - always fighting for her independence in a world dominated by men and old social conventions.

Porter, Max – Lanny

Not far from London, there is a village.

This village belongs to the people who live in it and to those who lived in it hundreds of years ago. It belongs to England's mysterious past and its confounding present. It belongs to families dead for generations, and to those who have only recently moved here, such as the boy Lanny, and his mum and dad.

But it also belongs to Dead Papa Toothwort, who has woken from his slumber in the woods. Dead Papa Toothwort, who is listening to them all.

Rekulak, Jason – Hidden Pictures

Mallory is delighted to have a new job looking after gorgeous four-year-old, Teddy. She's been sober for a year and a half and she's sure her new nannying role in the affluent suburbs will help keep her on the straight and narrow.

That is until Teddy starts to draw disturbing pictures of his imaginary friend, Anya. It is quite clear to Mallory and to Teddy's parents, even in his crude childlike style, that the woman Teddy is drawing in his pictures is dead.

Teddy's crayons are confiscated, and his paper locked away. But the drawings somehow keep coming, telling a frightening story of a woman murdered... and they're getting more sophisticated. But if Teddy isn't drawing the pictures anymore, who is? And what are they trying to tell Mallory about her new home?

Rao, Nilima – A Disappearance in Fiji

After a promising start to his police career in Hong Kong, Akal Singh has been sent to the far-flung colony of Fiji as punishment for a humiliating professional mistake. Lonely and embarrassed, he dreams of solving a big case, thereby redeeming himself and gaining permission to leave. When an indentured Indian woman goes missing from a sugarcane

plantation, the inspector-general reluctantly assigns Akal the case. But as soon as Akal arrives on the plantation, he identifies several troubling inconsistencies in the plantation owners' stories, and it seems there is more to this disappearance than meets the eye.

Richardson, Susan – Where the Seals Sing

The Atlantic grey seal is globally rare - there are fewer grey seals in the world than African elephants - and Britain hosts 40% of this world population. Over the course of a year in their lives, Susan Richardson comes to know a colony of seals, watching as it is hit by storms in the autumn pupping season, experiencing sociable winter haul-outs and sympathising as the colony scratch and fidget through their annual moult. Several months later, she nurtures a connection with three cow seals who linger on the beach long after the rest have dispersed to their summer feeding grounds. Her engagement with the seals' lives unfolds against the backdrop of other seasonal observations: adders sliding sidelong from hibernation, choughs foraging for beetles among spring squill and thrift, compass jellyfish navigating the bafflement of waves.

Schwalbe, Will – We Should Not Be Friends

In his last year of university, Will thought he knew everyone he cared to know. A perm-haired, out, gay young man, working at an AIDS helpline in the early days of the crisis, Will found friends and community amongst the theatre students, artists and writers. He also knew who he wanted to avoid: the jocks. Wearing sporty clothes and moving in boisterous packs, the jocks seemed to be a different species entirely, one Will might encounter only at his own peril. All this changed dramatically when Will was brought into a secret society at Yale, aimed to bring together a group of opposites. On his first day, he was faced with Chris Maxey - a physically imposing, loud, star wrestler who seemed to be uncomfortable around Will and embodied everything he disliked and feared. But through months of mandated dinners, and many beers, the two swapped life-stories and forged an unexpected bond that became ballast in each other's lives for forty years.

Shepherd, Nan – The Weatherhouse

The women of the tiny town of Fetter-Rothnie have grown used to a life without men, and none more so than the tangle of mothers and daughters, spinsters and widows living at the Weatherhouse. Returned from war with shellshock, Garry Forbes is drawn into their circle as he struggles to build a new understanding of the world from the ruins of his grief.

Silva, Daniel – Portrait of an Unknown Woman

Legendary spy and art restorer Gabriel Allon has at long last severed ties with Israeli intelligence and settled quietly in Venice, the only place he has ever truly known peace. His

beautiful wife, Chiara, has taken over day-to-day management of the Tiepolo Restoration Company, and their two young children are clandestinely enrolled in a neighbourhood scuola elementary. For his part, Gabriel spends his days wandering the streets and canals of the watery city, parting company with the demons of his tragic, violent past. But when the eccentric London art dealer Julian Isherwood asks Gabriel to investigate the circumstances surrounding the rediscovery and lucrative sale of a centuries-old painting, he is drawn into a deadly game of cat and mouse where nothing is as it seems. Gabriel soon discovers that the work in question, a portrait of an unidentified woman attributed to Sir Anthony van Dyck, is almost certainly a fiendishly clever fake. To find the mysterious figure who painted it—and uncover a multibillion-dollar fraud at the pinnacle of the art world—Gabriel conceives one of the most elaborate deceptions of his career. If it is to succeed, he must become the very mirror image of the man he seeks: the greatest art forger the world has ever known.

Stone, Emily – The Christmas Letter

Every December Holly writes to a stranger who is spending Christmas alone, and every year she receives a letter from another lonely person. Being a part of the Dear Stranger club is a tradition she has come to treasure. Because ever since the accident three years ago, Holly has spent Christmas alone. Usually, the letters go unanswered. That's the point of the club - no one knows who you are so you can write what's in your heart. But this year, when Holly gets a letter from an older woman, Emma, that changes. Not only is the letter full of a grief Holly can relate to, but also Emma mentions a place that Holly knows all too well. Holly knows she has to find the woman who wrote the letter. Because maybe, by helping someone else with their loneliness, she can fix her own. Holly sets out to find the estranged grandson Emma is desperate to reconnect with.

Thompson, Jean – The Poet's House

Carla is stuck. In her twenties and working for a landscaper, she's been told she's on the wrong path by everyone—from her mom, who wants her to work at the hospital, to her boyfriend, who is dropping not-so-subtle hints that she should be doing something that matters.

Then she is hired for a job at the home of Viridian, a lauded and lovely aging poet who introduces Carla to an eccentric circle of writers. At first she is perplexed by their predilection for reciting lines in conversation, the stories of their many liaisons, their endless wine-soaked nights. Soon, though, she becomes enamored with this entire world: with Viridian, whose reputation has been defined by her infamous affair with a male poet, Mathias; with Viridian's circle; and especially with the power of words, the “ache and hunger that can both be awakened and soothed by a poem,” a hunger that Carla feels sharply. When a fight emerges over a vital cache of poems that Mathias wrote about Viridian, Carla gets drawn in. But how much will she sacrifice for a group that may or may not see her as one of their own?

Tsujimura, Mizuki – Lonely Castle in the Mirror

How can you save your friend's life if she doesn't want to be rescued? In a tranquil neighbourhood of Tokyo, seven teenagers wake to find the mirrors in their bedrooms are shining. At a single touch, they are pulled from their lonely lives into to a wondrous castle filled with winding stairways, watchful portraits and twinkling chandeliers. In this new sanctuary, they are confronted with a set of clues leading to a hidden room where one of them will be granted a wish. But there's a catch: if they don't leave by five o'clock, they will die. As time passes, a devastating truth emerges: only those brave enough to share their stories will be saved.

Turner, Sarah – Stepping Up

Beth has never stuck at anything.

She's quit more jobs and relationships than she can remember and she still sleeps in her childhood bedroom. It's not that she hasn't tried to grow up, it's just that so far, the only commitment she's held down is Friday drinks at the village pub.

Then, in the space of a morning, her world changes.

An unspeakable tragedy turns Beth's life upside down, and she finds herself guardian to her teenage niece and toddler nephew, catapulted into an unfamiliar world of bedtime stories, parents' evenings and cuddly elephants. Having never been responsible for anyone - or anything - it's not long before she feels seriously out of her depth.

What if she's simply not up to the job?

With a little help from her best friend Jory (purely platonic, of course ...) and her lovely, lonely next-door neighbour, Albert, Beth is determined that this time she's not giving up. It's time to step up.

This is a story about digging deep for strength you never knew you had and finding magic in things that were there all along.

Van Pelt, Shelby – Remarkably Bright Creatures

After Tova Sullivan's husband died, she began working the night cleaner shift at the Sowell Bay Aquarium. Ever since her eighteen-year-old son, Erik, mysteriously vanished on a boat over thirty years ago keeping busy has helped her cope. One night she meets Marcellus, a giant Pacific octopus living at the aquarium who sees everything, but wouldn't dream of lifting one of his eight arms for his human captors - until he forms a remarkable friendship with Tova.

Ever the detective, Marcellus deduces what happened the night Tova's son disappeared. And now Marcellus must use every trick his old body can muster to unearth the truth for her before it's too late...

Vergheese, Abraham – The Covenant of Water

Spanning the years 1900 to 1977, 'The Covenant of Water' follows a family in southern India that suffers a peculiar affliction: in every generation, at least one person dies by drowning - and in Kerala, water is everywhere. At the turn of the century a twelve-year-old girl, grieving the death of her father, is sent by boat to her wedding, where she will meet her forty-year-old husband for the first time. From this poignant beginning, the young girl and future matriarch - known as Big Ammachi - will witness unthinkable changes at home and at large over the span of her extraordinary life, full of the joys and trials of love and the struggles of hardship.

Weir, Andy – Project Hail Mary

Ryland Grace is the sole survivor on a desperate, last-chance mission - and if he fails, humanity and the Earth itself will perish. Except that right now, he doesn't know that. He can't even remember his own name, let alone the nature of his assignment or how to complete it. All he knows is that he's been asleep for a very, very long time. And he's just been awakened to find himself millions of miles from home, with nothing but two corpses for company. His crew mates dead, his memories fuzzily returning, he realises that an impossible task now confronts him. Alone on this tiny ship that's been cobbled together by every government and space agency on the planet and hurled into the depths of space, it's up to him to conquer an extinction-level threat to our species. And thanks to an unexpected ally, he just might have a chance.

Wells, H.G. – The War of the Worlds

When an army of invading Martians lands in England, panic and terror seize the population. As the aliens traverse the country in huge three-legged machines, incinerating all in their path with a heat ray and spreading noxious toxic gases, the people of the Earth must come to terms with the prospect of the end of human civilization and the beginning of Martian rule. Inspiring films, radio dramas, comic-book adaptations, television series and sequels, The War of the Worlds is a prototypical work of science fiction which has influenced every alien story that has come since, and is unsurpassed in its ability to thrill, well over a century since it was first published.

West, A.J. – The Spirit Engineer

Belfast, 1914. Two years after the sinking of the Titanic, high society has become obsessed with spiritualism, attending séances in the hope they might reach their departed loved ones. William Jackson Crawford is a man of science and a sceptic, but one night with everyone sitting around the circle, voices come to him – seemingly from beyond the veil – placing doubt in his heart and a seed of obsession in his mind. Could the spirits truly be communicating with him or is this one of Kathleen’s parlour tricks gone too far? Based on the true story of Professor William Jackson Crawford and famed medium Kathleen Goligher, and with a cast of characters including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Harry Houdini, *The Spirit Engineer* conjures a haunted, twisted tale of power, paranoia and one ultimate, inescapable truth...

Wharton, Wiz – Ghost Girl, Banana

In 1966, Sook-Yin is exiled from Kowloon to London with orders to restore honour to her family. As she strives to fit into a world that does not understand her, she realises that survival will mean carving out a destiny of her own. Thirty years later, in London, her daughter Lily can barely remember the mother she lost as a small child. But when she is unexpectedly named in the will of a powerful Chinese stranger, she embarks on a secret pilgrimage to Hong Kong to discover the lost side of her identity and claim the reward. But she soon learns that the secrecy around her heritage has deep roots, and good fortune comes at a price.

Wilkerson, Charmaine – Black Cake

Eleanor Bennett won't let her secrets die with her . . .

When Eleanor's estranged children Benny and Byron reunite for her funeral, they receive an unexpected inheritance. First, a traditional Caribbean black cake, to remind them of their roots. Second, the story of a decades-old murder that shatters everything they thought they knew about their mother.

But as Benny and Byron unravel their family's troubled past, will the truth push them further apart?

Or will it reunite them and fulfil Eleanor's final wish?

Wilson, Kevin – Nothing to See Here

Lillian and Madison were unlikely roommates and yet inseparable friends at their elite boarding school. Then Lillian had to leave the school unexpectedly in the wake of a scandal and they've barely spoken since. Until now, when Lillian gets a letter from Madison pleading for her help.

Madison's twin stepkids are moving in with her family and she wants Lillian to be their carer. However, there's a catch: the twins spontaneously combust when they get agitated, flames

igniting from their skin in a startling but beautiful way. Lillian is convinced Madison is pulling her leg, but it's the truth.

Thinking of her dead-end life at home, Lillian figures she has nothing to lose. Over the course of one humid, demanding summer, Lillian and the twins learn to trust each other and stay cool while also staying out of the way of Madison's buttoned-up politician husband. Surprised by her own ingenuity yet unused to the intense feelings of protectiveness she feels for them, Lillian ultimately begins to accept that she needs these strange children as much as they need her. Couldn't this be the start of the amazing life she'd always hoped for?

Worrall, Patrick – The Partisan

It is the summer of 1961 and the brutal Cold War between East and West is becoming ever more perilous. Two young prodigies from either side of the Iron Curtain, Yulia and Michael, meet at a chess tournament in London. They don't know it, but they are about to compete in the deadliest game ever played. Shadowing them is Greta, a ruthless resistance fighter who grew up the hard way in the forests of Lithuania, but who is now hunting down some of the most dangerous men in the world. Men who are also on the radar of Vassily, perhaps the Soviet Union's greatest spymaster. A man of cunning and influence, Vassily was Yulia's minder during her visit to the West, but even he could not foresee the consequences of her meeting Michael.

Wroe, Jo Browning – A Terrible Kindness

It is October 1966 and William Lavery is having the night of his life at his first black-tie do. But, as the evening unfolds, news hits of a landslide at a coal mine. It has buried a school: Aberfan. William decides he must act, so he stands and volunteers to attend. It will be his first job as an embalmer, and it will be one he never forgets.

His work that night will force him to think about the little boy he was, and the losses he has worked so hard to forget. But compassion can have surprising consequences, because - as William discovers - giving so much to others can sometimes help us heal ourselves.

Yagi, Emi – Diary of a Void

When 34-year-old Ms Shibata gets a new job in Tokyo to escape sexual harassment at her old one, she finds that, as the only woman at her workplace, she is expected to do all the menial tasks. One day, she announces that she can't clear away her colleagues' dirty cups - because she's pregnant and the smell nauseates her. The only thing is - Ms Shibata isn't! Pregnant Ms Shibata doesn't have to serve coffee to anyone. Pregnant Ms Shibata isn't forced to work overtime. Pregnant Ms Shibata rests, watches TV, takes long baths, and even joins an aerobics class for expectant mothers. But pregnant Ms Shibata also has a nine-month ruse to keep up. Helped along by towel-stuffed shirts and a diary app on which she

can log every stage of her 'pregnancy', she feels prepared to play the game for the long haul. Before long, though, the hoax becomes all-absorbing, and the boundary between her lie and her life begins to dissolve.