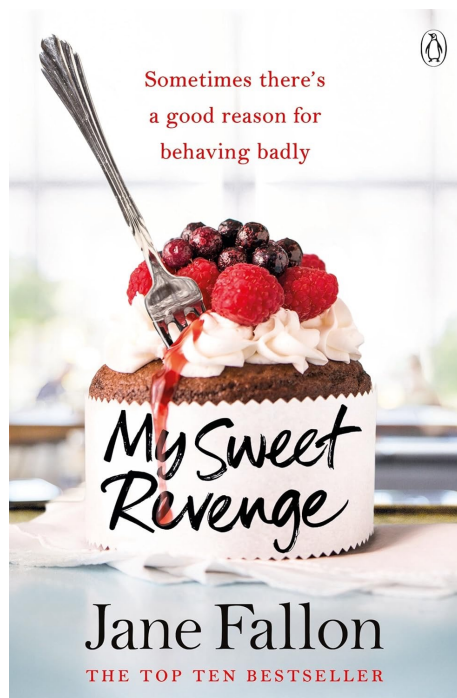


BOOK REVIEWS 2025-26

September - "My Sweet Revenge" by Jane Fallon



In this story we certainly have a mixed bag of characters!

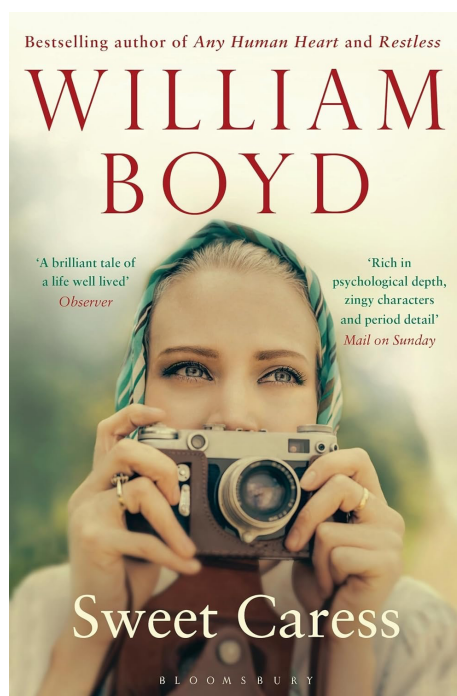
The four main protagonists are Paula, her husband Robert, Saskia and her husband Josh. Three of these characters work on a TV weekly drama 'Farmer Giles', i.e. Robert, Saskia (actors) and Josh (writer). The other character is Paula, who put her acting career on hold to have a family, but never quite made it back.

As the title implies, the story concerns infidelity. It may appear initially as a straightforward chick-lit book, and perhaps it's not grabbing you? Well, we're glad that we read on, as it may surprise you. Indeed there are lies, manipulation, plots and counterplots - and more.

The first part is narrated by Paula and the second part by Saskia.

We agreed that you may form an opinion that some characters are likeable, or not. Each of us had our own views. In conclusion, we decided that it was an enjoyable book - easy to read in a couple of days, which is no bad thing, and we give it 4 stars.

October - "Sweet Caress" by William Boyd



This novel revolves around the main character, Amor Clay. She is reflecting on her life, now living on a remote Scottish island.

The book is broken down in sections, from her childhood (born in 1908) which is touched on briefly. One dramatic event then perhaps changed her attitude to family, friends and relationships.

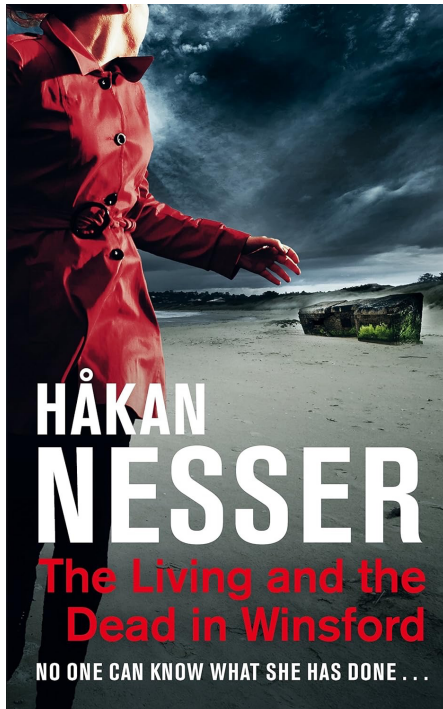
The story concentrates mostly from the 1930s through dramatic events in history. Amor determinedly follows her photographic career through controversy and World War II, in the USA and Vietnam.

As a group we were puzzled at first about the photographs throughout the book - is the book fact or fiction? It appeared to some that the story was formed around the photos.

We were given some insight into Amor's private life and relationships, which are many!! In general, as is the way of it, we had mixed opinions about this book - some really enjoyed it while others tried but were less enthusiastic

It is a 'different' one and an interesting concept.

November - "The Living and the Dead in Winsford" by Hakan Nesser



We were not far into this book when, as readers, we were asking ourselves many questions. What is the main character, Maria, doing and why?

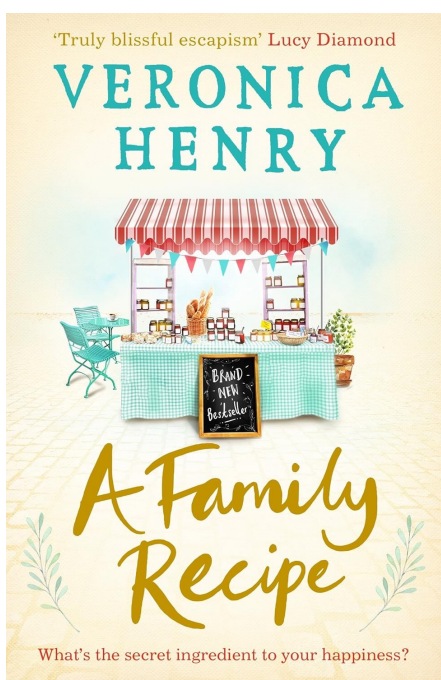
To add to the atmosphere, the descriptions of the remote village of Winsford on Exmoor in the dark days of winter are used to great effect by the author.

The other main character is Martin, an author, who is caught up in a scandal. It is decided that it is best for him to flee Stockholm and write a book disclosing dark events from years before. This also builds up throughout the story, adding more questions.

We agreed that Martin was most unlikeable, but we had a measure of sympathy for Maria. Tempered by what was revealed!

This is a story conjuring up a gambit of emotions within Maria - betrayal, deceit, revenge and paranoia to name but a few. It is a book worth reading in our opinion as it keeps you guessing to the end.

December - "A Family Recipe" by Veronica Henry



This is set in 1942 and 2017.

The dates and characters and their descendants are linked from these time frames. The main characters are Jilly and Ivy, life long friends from circa 1942 right up to 2017. We also have Laura, Jay, Willow and Dom in 2017, and briefly Harry? - in both dates!

As in most stories, they all go through a gambit of emotions, to be enjoyed by the reader.

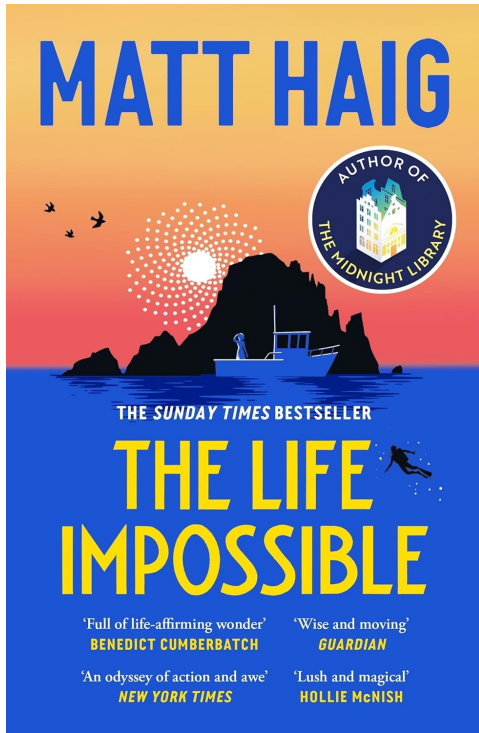
Everything ties up neatly, albeit it in a bit of a contrived way, which we as a group thought made it a pleasant read, marking the title in both senses of the words (in food and in life).

The old recipes in the book for jams and chutneys are a link to the past which conjured up in us all similar

reminiscences of family recipes.

This is a book to enjoy, curled up on a sofa in winter or lying relaxed on a beach in summer.

January - "The Life Impossible" by Matt Haig



Set very briefly in Lincoln, then majority set on Ibiza. Grace (72), a retired teacher, inherited a house on the island from Christina, whom she knew briefly in the UK and did a good deed for.

Grace is in a state of longterm grief and guilt from past tragedies in her life and boldly decides to go to the island to sort out and sell the property, but it doesn't work out that way.

Curious mystical elements occur and characters of intrigue merit investigation, with good and evil and ecological issues also thrown in to the mix.

Some of the group found it difficult to get past the first part, or didn't finish it, where others did.

The short, sharp chapters did make it different, and for once the story didn't revert from past to present continually.

There is no getting away from it that this is mostly a fantasy novel, in the sense that it explores phenomena and mystical elements. Is it, or isn't it a mindful 'lightbulb moment' for Grace?

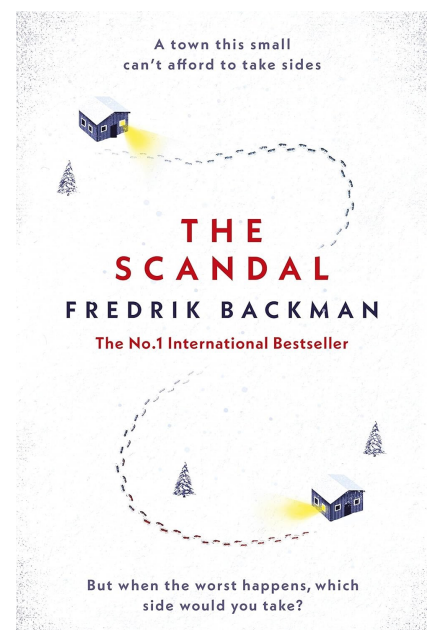
If this book is not 'your bag', so to speak, you may steer clear of it after having a look - or you may give it a go.

February - "The Scandal" by Frederik Backman

This story begins with a 'bang' (forgive the pun). It is set in a northern Swedish town called Beartown, a place that's seen better days, where the residents focus more on their ice hockey teams - indeed, obsession comes to mind.

Backman spends quite a time setting the scene and delving deep into the multiple characters, whom I won't name individually. As a group, we agreed on the ones we liked and disliked.

Emotions are definitely high in this book, which the author deals with so skilfully. Namely, love in its many forms, and loyalty, are the prevalent ones, and the consequences



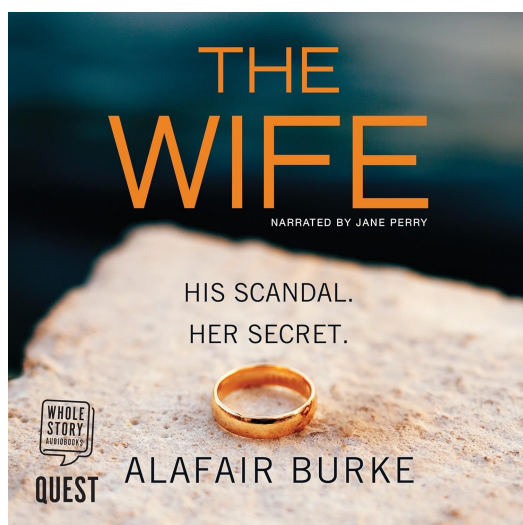
thereof. Also, how you can be driven into circumstances with disastrous results.

Ice hockey is a sport we didn't know much about, but even if sport is not your 'thing', it's part and parcel of this story.

There were moments which we as a group didn't see coming (brutal or otherwise).

We whole heartedly recommend this novel. Please note, this is a trilogy - the other books are "Us Against You" and "The Winners".

March - "The Wife" by Alafair Burke



The story starts with wife Angela and son Spencer, along with husband Jason, living a contented life in the East Hamptons, this being a total contrast from her previous one.

The equilibrium is disturbed by allegations of a sexual nature against Jason.

Out of the many characters in this novel, we as a group especially liked DC Corinne Duncan, the dogged and diligent cop, and the DA, Olivia Randall. There are numerous others, including the main ones, to form your own opinions about. Also, there are so many questions about the motivations of the characters to be asked. The revelations, twists and

turns are a 'joy to behold', although this is perhaps not the best phrase to describe them!

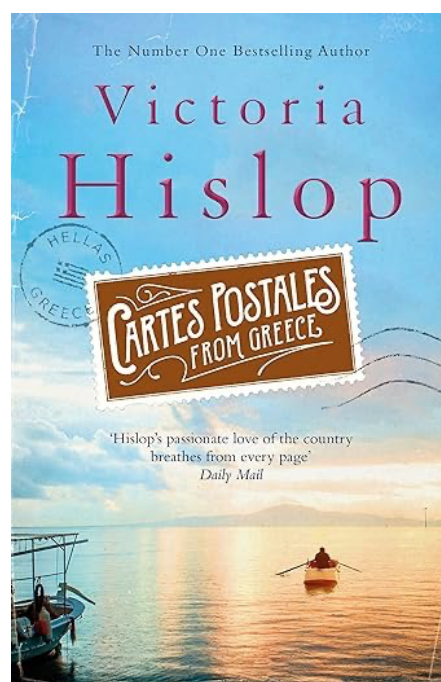
The skill of the author made this one of our outstanding reads. We could give more details of the story, but it would only spoil the reader's journey through it.

April - "Cartes Postales from Greece" by Victoria Hyslop

This book is basically a collection of anecdotes, in most chapters received by Ellie mistakenly from A, with a common thread linking the characters at the beginning and end.

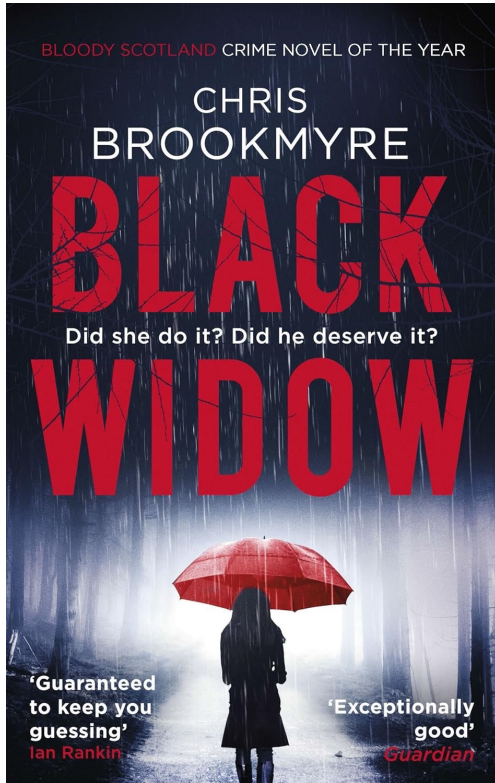
It is a journey through Greece and its islands, coupled with unusual photos, which underpins the Greek character and Greek attitudes to their ancient past and struggles with their financial crises between 2009 and 2015.

Ellie is encouraged by these postcards to leave her mundane job and seek out these places and adventures which may lie ahead. But there are sinister undertones in a lot of the tales too.



The opinions of the group were mixed. A few thought it was pleasant enough and read it to its conclusion. Others thought it was difficult to motivate themselves to continue and they had to try more than once to 'get into it'. Overall, the general consensus was that it was OK, but not what we had come to expect from this author.

May - "Black Widow" by Chris Brookmyre



This story is set in the Inverness area and also at the Inverness Royal Infirmary, with other important settings relevant to the unfolding facts.

It is narrated by the various key characters in different chapters and in three parts, building the tension as it goes. This at first may perhaps be a bit confusing until the reader gets further into the rhythm of the book.

The characters include Diana Jager, Peter Elphinstone, Lucy Elphinstone, Jack Parlabane, PC Ali Kazmi and PC Rodrigues. There are other less important figures to be discovered along the way.

Brookmyre brilliantly keeps you enthralled and guessing with twists and turns to the end.

The group highly recommends this book which is one that will stay long in our memory.