

Shedding light on a mum's secret past

POPULAR FICTION BY WENDY HOLDEN



FROM A DISTANCE
by Raffaella Barker

(Bloomsbury)
£16.99 → £14.99

IN THIS dreamy, poetic novel, full of references to Virginia's Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*, Kit inherits an, erm, lighthouse.

It's been left to him by his fabric designer mother, who he never realised owned it. Mothers, eh? But Kit lives in Cornwall, so why is the lighthouse in Norfolk?

The reader gets some clues as we follow the historical subplot, about Kit's mother, the free-wheeling Felicity. She's one of the St Ives art set and meets demobbed, war-crushed Michael after he arrives in Cornwall on a whim, unable to face his folks in East Anglia.

Almost 50 years later, Kit arrives in Norfolk and starts to make connections. Some of these are very married and probably shouldn't be connecting with him that way.

Step forward Lucia, local yummy mummy and ice-cream maker extraordinaire. Will she melt into Kit's arms? Or are there yet more surprises in store?

A beautifully written, superior romance perfect for a hammock on a sunny day.



Illustration: CHRIS COADY

THE FORTUNE HUNTER
by Daisy Goodwin

(Headline £14.99 → £13.49)

DASHING Bay Middleton is unequalled in the saddle, except by Elizabeth, Empress of Austria, who wears tight breeches under her habit.

The two meet in 1875, when horse-mad 'Sisi' comes to hunt amid the stately homes of England. She ends up pursuing a different quarry from that originally intended.

The Empress, who preserves her legendary beauty with strenuous workouts, veal face-packs and washing her hair in egg yolk, is not used to hearing the word 'No'.

But will Bay, already engaged to photographer Charlotte, manage to resist her? This

enjoyable drama, in which the thrill of the chase contrasts with the languour of the drawing room, is based on real events.

Great cameos from Queen Victoria, John Brown and crazy Prince Rudolph of Mayerling suicide fame.

THE 'A LIST' FAMILY
by Christina Hopkinson

(Hodder £6.99)

WOULDN'T you love to discover their secrets? runs the blurb. Yes! Yes! Who isn't dying to know what really goes on chez the Beckhams, Cambridges and Paltrow-Martins (until recently, anyway. Although even more now, come to think of it).

Well, Anna is about to find out. She's an Oxbridge classics graduate rescued from a life of

High Street chugging to be super-tutor to a super-famous child.

Her new home is a white stucco palace in St John's Wood, with underground swimming pools all the way to Australia. Outside is an army of paparazzi and inside a staff ranging from Janey, the powerful right-hand woman, to well-endowed Wadim the handyman.

It's a great premise and the book's full of spot-on brilliance, from posh children's clothes to the dramatic denouement in the garden.

But novels about the utterly risible are notoriously hard to write and this one doesn't entirely come off. The big reveal is a bit confusing and the moral seriousness slightly overdone. But great fun all the same.

CHILDREN'S FICTION BY SALLY MORRIS



BRILLIANT
by Roddy Doyle

(Macmillan £10.99 → £9.99)

THE BLACK Dog came at night, hiding in the darkness, and stole Dublin's funny bone, their granny said, leaving its people depressed.

So Gloria and Raymond set out one night to chase down the dog and steal back the funny bone so that their unemployed Uncle Ben will smile again. Joined by other children whose families are sad, they confront their fears to destroy the beast using their defiant optimism and courage.

Roddy Doyle's magical contemporary fable conjures up an atmospheric Dublin of talking animals and helpful vampires, a city where the intensity of human emotion is tempered

by a crackling verbal wit and warmth that shines through the swirling black clouds like a ray of sunshine. Brilliant indeed.

using flawed but believable characters to create a highly original narrative.

Age 9+

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SCARLET IBIS
by Gill Lewis

(OUP £8.99 → £8.49)

I LOVE Gill Lewis's books, which explore the bond between animals and children who are suffering emotionally.

Scarlet lives with her dysfunctional mother and her young half-brother, Red, who suffers a range of autism-related problems. He communicates only with her and soothes himself with his collection of bird feathers.

Together they fantasise about visiting Trinidad, where the Scarlet Ibis lives. But when a fire at their flat results in them being sent to separate foster homes, she is determined to rescue him.

This is a gritty, more realistic story than her previous books but she tackles racism, isolation and the importance of acceptance and belonging with great sensitivity and intelligence,



THE GLASS BIRD GIRL
by Esme Kerr

(Chicken House £6.99)

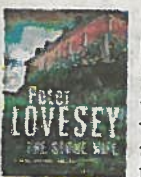
ORPHANED 11-year-old Edie is sent to an old-fashioned boarding school (computers and mobiles are banned, OMG!) by her art dealer cousin Charles, who instructs her to befriend Anastasia, the troubled daughter of his Russian prince client.

Anastasia's possessions constantly go missing — only to turn up again later. Is someone taking them or is Anastasia paranoid? And what is the secret of the headmistress's relationship with Edie's dead mother? This is a rollicking romp of a novel — the first in a series, I hope — with a wonderfully spirited heroine, wickedly unpleasant relatives, teachers with hidden pasts and a fine supporting cast of lacrosse-playing girls.

Kerr's debut is impressive and strikes just the right tone for girls looking for a modern Mallory Towers.

Age 10+

CLASSIC CRIME BY BARRY TURNER



THE STONE WIFE
by Peter Lovesey

(Sphere £19.99 → £16.99)

YOU might think that Bath is a peaceful sort of place, all Regency elegance and ancient monuments. But try seeing it through the eyes of Peter Diamond, head of the CID, who finds murder and mayhem in the most unlikely places.

His latest investigation takes off

a hold-up, shooting dead the successful bidder.

Intrigued? You should be — there are many more shocks to come as two of Diamond's team risk their lives to expose a fatal mix of jealousy and greed. With more violence than we normally associate with Lovesey, this is well up to his high standard of story telling.

It will hold you to the deckchair even if the sun is not shining.



DUFFY
by Dan Kavanagh

(Orion £12.99 → £11.49)

DAN KAVANAGH is best known as Julian Barnes, purveyor of award-winning literary fiction. So what is he doing slumming it with a bisexual former vice cop? Maybe

creation of a top-flight imagination. In this, his first outing, originally published more than 30 years ago, we are pitched into nightlife Soho before prostitution and drugs retreated from the advance of posh restaurants and coffee bars.

As a PI, Duffy is hired to take the pressure off a blackmail victim who risks losing his business to racketeers. But nothing is ever simple in this murky demi-monde and Duffy soon finds himself up against an unholy alliance of corrupt police and organised crime.

What he has to go through to score over his enemies is a test of our nerves as much as his.

SPEEDY DEATH
by Gladys Mitchell

(Vintage £8.99 → £8.49)

who had none of the loveable idiosyncrasies favoured by Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers.

First published in 1929, Speedy Death introduced readers to Beatrice Lestranger Bradley, a Freudian psychiatrist distinguished by her cynical smirk, cackling laugh and 'nasty, dry, claw-like hands'.

But if repulsive to the eye and ear, Mrs Bradley makes up for it with a penetrating deductive mind, one that can see through the lies of a family with a murder to hide.

The surreal note in all this is that the corpse found drowned in a bath, assumed when fully clothed to be a man, turns out to be a woman who had good reason to disguise her identity.

As a further twist, when a second death occurs, it is Mrs Bradley who stands accused. She emerges