

REVIEWS

Books



OUTNOW
A PLACE OF SPRINGS
by Hannah Colby
(Unicorn Publishing Group, £8.99)
★★★★★

A Place of Springs has three themes running through it: the terrible civil war in Bosnia in the 1990s, classical music and a love affair. All are threaded through the narrative, and it makes for a heady and powerful story.

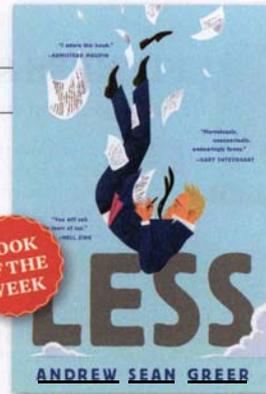
Daniel, a brilliant and charismatic pianist teaching at the conservatoire in Sarajevo, lodges with a family and their beautiful 15-year-old musical daughter Irina. Daniel and Irina are captivated by each other. As the fighting escalates, Daniel returns home to London, but he cannot help but worry about the young Irina still in Sarajevo - so he returns to the war-torn city. Amid the fighting, his perception of himself is dramatically altered. Colby writes about their subsequent relationship with a measured and sanguine wisdom. She manages to give equal sympathy to both protagonists in their struggles to achieve acceptance of the terrible course of events and their changed circumstances. The love story is both tragic and happy. This is Colby's first novel, and her meticulous

research stands as a memorial to the suffering in Bosnia. She has also passed on her love of music, which she helpfully notes down for us, and her life's experience of human hopes and frailties.
Hugh St Clair

NO LIVE FILES
REMAIN by András Forgách (Simon & Schuster, £14.99)
★★★★★

Towards the end of this extraordinary book, Hungarian author András Forgách writes: 'If there is going to be a tragedy, let it be a major tragedy'. Indeed, this is what he may have sensed when he received a call regarding newly released files from secret Government archives, setting in motion events that then turn his world upside down. Informant, denouncer, spy - 30 years after her death, Forgách discovers the devastating truth about his own beloved mother.

Born into a Jewish family in Palestine, Bruria Forgách became a staunch anti-Zionist, moving to Hungary in 1947 to feed her obsessive communist sympathies. After marrying a like-minded communist, she was recruited by the intelligence services. Her husband, also an informant, cracks up under the strain. Spying missions to



Less gets more

LESS by Andrew Sean Greer (Abacus, £8.99)
Despite lampooning the literary world, this fast-paced, wistful and endearingly funny novel won this year's Pulitzer Prize. About to turn 50, Arthur Less is an unsuccessful gay novelist, living in San Francisco, who finds himself suddenly single after his vain, younger boyfriend announces his engagement to someone else and invites him to their wedding. Desperate to avoid the awkwardness of attending, Arthur begins to accept invitations to obscure literary events around the world.

A likeable, insecure character, Arthur spent his youth 'deliriously happy' as the adored lover of a charismatic, famous poet, content to remain in his shadow. Now, with a new novel in the pipeline, timid Arthur struggles with book-signings and literary festivals. As he travels around the globe to escape his problems, Arthur reflects on his 'past loves', 'disappointments' and 'mistakes': even in middle age 'heartbreak keeps its sting.'

From Mexico to Paris and Italy, India and Japan - rather like the heroine of Eat, Pray, Love - Arthur makes new friends, enjoys romantic frissons, splurges on clothes and delicious wine and begins to heal his cracked heart. Although the jumps in time and place make it a little confusing, this is a highly entertaining, bittersweet, quirky, comedy about the unfathomable mysteries of the human heart. Ideal for holiday reading.
Rebecca Wallersteiner

Israel, fake friendships and lies are the staple of her everyday life: taking secret notes on her children, she allows the secret services into her son's flat to spy on neighbours when, in fact, her son is the one

who's of interest. Shocking beyond words, the book includes quotes from the files, going into forensic detail. What stands out are the intricacies of the organisation and surveillance on both

WHICH BOOK BEGINS...

'I write this sitting in the kitchen sink.'

Answer on page 81

BOOKS FILM THEATRE RADIO ART TELEVISION MUSIC

sides, the stench of fear it creates, and the situation's complexity as well as the author's eloquent analysis. 'Immeasurably sad,' is how he describes it. Devastating but utterly gripping.
Elizabeth Fitzherbert

PAPERBACKS
SYMPATHY by Olivia Sudjic (Pushkin Press, £8.99)

★★★★★
Lives ruled by electronic devices; natural disasters; disappearing planes: chillingly, this novel's fractured world is no fictional dystopia, but contemporary realism - a first-person tale of identity and obsession defined by online experiences. Twenty-three-year-old Alice is mixed race and mixed up: adopted at birth, her adoptive father vanished not long after, her mother is emotionally distant, and she is trying to figure out who she is. On a trip to New York to meet her paternal grandmother, Alice stumbles upon Mizuko, a beautiful Japanese writer, and becomes obsessed with her, following her social media feeds and scheming her way into her life. This is a compelling, unflinching dissection of the digital age and its emotional fallout, and in that sense very now - but at its heart is a timeless search for origins and selfhood. Intense and hypnotic, much like its protagonist's obsession.
Juanita Coulson

COFFEE TABLE BOOK



Il Cisternone, Livorno

HALLELUJAH TOSCANA by Marco Paoli (Contrasto, £40) ★★★★★

This is Tuscany like you've never seen it before; a book on the Italian region unlike any others. Think of it as a three-part motet, with images, poems and prose playing surprising harmonies. Although native to the area, Paoli travels through its landscapes with an explorer's eye, on a mission to discover 'the contrasts and contradictions that characterise Tuscan beauty'. The poems of Alba Donati and an essay by Pulitzer Prize winner Michael Cunningham are a perfect counterpoint to his striking black-and-white photography. There are stately villas, and the marble quarries of Carrara in their stark, scarred majesty, but also abandoned buildings and ruins, with their hidden histories and encroaching vegetation. Atmospheric and dreamlike - and poles apart from the Tuscany of tourist brochures. *JC*

JOTT by Sam Thompson (JM Originals, £12.99)

★★★★★
This ode to male friendship revolves around two Irishmen in London: Arthur, a junior psychiatrist, and

his friend, Louis Molyneux, an aspiring author. Arthur is inexperienced and has always felt inadequate compared to Louis. He marries Sarah after she becomes pregnant, but the baby dies, and their

relationship is tested - not only by their loss, but by Louis, who is slipping into madness and for whom Arthur feels responsible. Not a sentence is wasted, as Thompson describes a society that is fast and modern, compared to Dublin and its Georgian ruins and poverty, academia and art. The flowing narrative and nuances of everyday life, paralleled with failure and triumph, is reminiscent of James Joyce.
Lyndsy Spence



ALSO ON THE SHELF



ANTISOCIAL MEDIA: How Facebook Disconnects Us And Undermines Democracy by Siva Vaidhyanathan (OUP, £18.99)

★★★★★
This thoroughly researched and persuasively argued account of social media's noxious effects on the very fabric of society is the first study of its kind: a trenchant analysis of Facebook's unwholesome side effects. It needed saying, and it's supremely well said.
JC



GUESS THE COVER
Answer on page 81

**AUDIO
BOOK OF
THE WEEK**

ESSEX CLAY & OTHER POEMS by Andrew Motion (Audible, £10.99) Twelve years after his prose memoir *In The Blood*, the former Poet Laureate looks back again on events that shaped his life. Autobiographical poetry that derives power from startling sensory imagery and the sound-sense of words. JC

THE LADY'S RECIPE READS

Growing your own or growing bolder - two ways to eat more veg.
By Juanita Coulson

GROW HAPPY, COOK HAPPY, BE HAPPY by Bryony Hill (RedDoor, £20)

What could be more rewarding than cooking with home-grown produce? Bryony Hill, a talented cook, grower and photographer, guides you from garden to table in her warm, engaging style. This beautiful book, illustrated with Hill's images of her garden and eye-catching dishes, is structured seasonally and endorsed by gardening supremo Alan Titchmarsh. There are veggie wonders like a salad of radishes, peppers and beluga lentils, or a crunchy red coleslaw. Meat-eaters will find inspiration for incorporating produce into a crispy pork stir-fry, or Singapore-style prawn noodles. Urban dwellers and the less green-fingered aren't left out, with tips for making the most of what space or skills you have.

#lady
recipe
reads

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THE WICKED HEALTHY COOKBOOK: FREE. FROM. ANIMALS. by Chad Sarno, Derek Sarno and David Joachim (Little, Brown, £30)

The Sarno brothers, leading lights of the plant-based movement, are the brains behind the Wicked Healthy culinary collective, which started in the US and is now gaining traction here. 'Shoot for 80% healthy and 20% wicked and you'll be 100% sexy,' sums up their mission to strip vegan food of its pious, po-faced image. From tapping into mushrooms to evoke the bite and fullness of meat, to innovative cooking, they aim to 'craft humble vegetables into the stuff of food legend.' Whether you are going the whole vegan hog, or trying it a few days a week, this book is the perfect inspiration. Grilled peaches with vanilla spiced gelato: need I say more?

