

November 2019

See What You Made Me Do

by Jess Hill

Once in a while, a book makes such an impression that you feel like telling everyone you meet to read it.

See What You Made Me Do is one of those books. Its subtitle is Power, Control and Domestic Abuse and it took Australian investigative journalist Jess Hill more than four years to write. In reading the book it soon makes sense that the often used term Domestic Violence does not adequately cover the myriad ways in which a perpetrator coerces and controls his (and it's usually his, not her) victim.

I thought I was fairly knowledgeable about domestic abuse and understood that the 'Why doesn't she just leave?' question is naive but I'm ashamed to say that I held some preconceived thoughts and attitudes about violent men and the women who stay. This book sets out clearly and with a multitude of referenced sources the why, where, how and who about this scourge that IS increasing - there is not just an increase in women coming forward.

Often I found myself re-reading sections twice to really absorb new knowledge. The discussion on the differences in approaches by counsellors, police, judiciary and others is not just spelled out in theoretical terms, but is backed up by case notes, interviews and deeply personal stories.

There are stories of male victims and also a reasoned chapter on the differences between male and female perpetrator and victims. It is clear that it is rare for a male victim to fear being killed by their female abuser yet this is often the case for women. This book is a 'must read' for anyone working in policing, family law, health including mental health, domestic and family violence, women's and men's support groups, education (the chapter on the impact on children is harrowing) and men and women who want to understand the nature of power, coercion and control.

This is not a comfortable and relaxed read and there are sections where the response from those charged to protect us are horrifically and sometimes tragically inadequate. You will read things that make you angry, things that make you weep and things that will surprise you.

Most importantly, you will learn something that will challenge your views.....and isn't that a wonderful thing about good writing.

Cheers
Jenny

[Reserve it here!](#)

Thanks as always, Jenny, for taking the time out of your busy schedule for our libraries and the community.

October 2019

The Hollow Bones

by Leah Kaminsky

On the cover of Leah Kaminsky's latest book *The Hollow Bones*, fellow Australian writer Mireille Juchau has written 'In this vibrant, inventive novel, Leah Kaminsky poses knotty questions about the grey zone of collaboration, ambition and political expediency under Nazism'

Yes this book is that... and so much more!

The Wikipedia entry on Ernst Schäfer tells us that he 'was a German explorer, hunter and zoologist in the 1930s, specializing in ornithology. His zoological explorations in Tibet served as a cover for his role in the German secret service. He was also a scientific member in the Ahnenerbe and held the rank of an SS-Sturmbannführer.'

This book is truly fascinating. Leah Kaminsky has woven a rich, detailed and plausible story connecting real people and events and has produced a captivating read. I learned more about Nazi theories of the origins of the Master Race and so much I had never known about things such as the rules around appropriate marriages for SS members including the compulsory training at Bride School of future wives and mothers.

Dotted throughout the book are short chapters written from the viewpoint of those creatures that Schäfer (The Shepherd) has killed. A taxidermy Panda whose voice we hear in most of those chapters, is still on display in a Philadelphia museum. These chapters add a level of poignancy that takes the novel beyond the obvious abhorrence of Hitler's dangerous world views.

I read recently that the secret of an historical novel is to get the balance right and not to overload the writing with the historical facts. Leah Kaminsky gets that balance perfectly.

Whether you read this for a greater insight into an horrific chapter in human history or as a well-written lyrical story, you will not be disappointed.

Cheers
Jenny

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September 2019

Educated

by *Tara Westover*

Wow! Just Wow!

This autobiography is astounding and tells of the strength of family ties, the transformative power of education and the turmoil that results from an awakening of self belief.

Tara Westover is the youngest child of a midwife and homeopathic healer mother and a fanatical conspiracy-theory-filled father. The family, Mormons from Idaho with a deep distrust of government, are driven in their preparations for the end of the world. They aim to be self sufficient with stocks of water, fuel and self generated energy along with ten years supply of food to withstand the cataclysm.

The children's births have not been registered, they've never been to school, are unvaccinated, have never been to a doctor and even their home schooling has been patchy.

The father, Gene (not his real name) is prone to extremely risky behaviour that frequently leads to significant injury to himself or his children yet only on the rarest occasions is medical treatment sought. Chakra adjustment and homeopathic drops and salves are the answer to illnesses and injuries.

This unusual upbringing and an increasingly violent brother, Shawn (also a pseudonym) are regarded as normal by Tara until her world expands when she decides to seek college entry.

Education and her own incredible drive via Brigham Young University opens new doors including into Cambridge University and Harvard and eventually to a PhD. There are significant costs involved and not just monetary as Tara confronts her family's beliefs and relationships.

The names of some family members have been changed but the book has been written with collaborating input from three brothers whose real names are in the book.

Educated is a tell-all story of survival, hard to put down, extremely well written and highly recommended.

Cheers
Jenny

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August 2019

Where the Crawdads Sing

by *Delia Owen*

"That's what nobody understands about me.... I never hated people. They hated me...I learned to live without them". Kya Clark is the Marsh Girl and she will grab your heart. Delia Owens is a wildlife scientist who has written an extraordinary book about isolation, abandonment, the natural world and growing up. *Where the Crawdads Sing* is a wonderful read.

The vernacular of the fringe dwelling Clark family, their minimalist subsistence and the starkness of their surrounds will capture the reader's attention from the first pages. Abandoned in the marshlands of the North Carolina Coast, Kya, the main character, spends one day at school and the rest of her life alone, educating herself about the natural world around her.

Into Kya's isolated world enter two young men, Tate and Chase, with very different motivations. Both are attracted to the wild and strange teenage Kya but while one shares her love of feathers and teaches her to read, the other has other lessons in mind. With deep parallels to the natural world, the human interactions in this book also involve violence and death. But a sudden death together with fear of the unknown lead to community suspicion that Kya is a killer.

This book has been likened to the style of Barbara Kingsolver in that it's embedded in the natural world but it's more than that. It's a mystery and a poignant and painful coming of age story. Read it and get to know Kya. You won't regret it.

Cheers
Jenny

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July 2019

Breaking Badly

by Georgie Dent

Georgie Dent is a daughter of Lismore. Her family still lives here and for several months in her twenties, Georgie also unexpectedly lived her again- unemployed, crippled by anxiety and back with her parents.

I knew Georgie when she was young and still know her family. I had followed Georgie on Twitter and loved reading her strong feminist articles via *MamaMia* and *Women's Agenda* but I hadn't known about Georgie's nervous breakdown.

On the surface Georgie Dent had it all. In her words 'At age 24, my life was almost a cliché. Six years of study were behind me, I was holding down a plum job as a lawyer, I was living with my lovely boyfriend, I had great friends and the world was seemingly at my feet. From the outside it might have looked charmed; in truth it was anything but. I was miserable and chronically ill, my self-esteem was in tatters and I was strung out, constantly panicked and painfully thin.'

This memoir, *Breaking Badly*, is described as a 'must read for anyone who sometimes feels close to the edge'. I endorse that completely.

Breaking Badly is divided into three parts: *Breaking*, *Broken* and *Better*. In the early parts, Georgie's struggle with her undiagnosed mental ill-health is compounded by repeated surgeries for endometriosis, many unsuccessful attempts at managing her Crohn's Disease and culminates in her admission into a psychiatric hospital.

With diagnoses and appropriate medication and therapies, Georgie's mum Jan's earlier words, spoken when things were at their worst 'You will not always feel like this. I know you won't', finally come true.

The chapters in each part are titled and dated from November 2001, until September 2013. In them Georgie chronicles her life from the age of 19 with reflections back to her childhood through to her early 30s.

The chapter title that jumped out at me was 'Perfection is a fast track to misery' (September 2007) and at that stage of my reading, I reflected on the many young people (and some not so young) who are striving for perfection in their exam results, in their body image, in their work ethic and in their relationships with others. 'Anxiety, pressure and perfectionism circling in a perfect storm' as Georgie says.

I can not recommend this book too highly. I am confident that every reader will benefit from this book, whether personally or as a family member, friend, teacher, employer or colleague of someone close to the edge.

Georgie moves from law to journalism and her skill with words is apparent. She writes honestly, with wonderful clarity and this book is very easy to read- even through the very painful bits.

Very highly recommended

Cheers
Jenny

Look for another book review next month!

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June 2019

The Heart's Invisible Furies

by *John Boyne*

The cover of this book has 'Who is Cyril Avery?' written under the title and it's this short question that is really the subject of this big sprawling novel.

Cyril was told throughout his life by his adoptive parents that he's not 'a real Avery' so the story of his parentage is a meandering theme throughout the book but it's intertwined with the Irish history of attitudes to sex and sexuality from the 1940s to the present day that make this book such an epic.

Cyril's teenage mother is literally dragged from her village Catholic Church by the local priest after having been vilified from the pulpit. Her parents send her packing never to darken their door again. Cyril is taken for adoption by the eccentric Maude and Charles Avery, the epitome of the laissez fair parents, and even as a child, he becomes aware of his attraction to the exciting and popular boy Julian.

Societal attitudes to homosexuality are heart wrenchingly portrayed as Cyril attempts to fit in and find fulfilment in rigidly Catholic Dublin. Like Cyril, John Boyne is a gay man who grew up in Catholic Dublin. Like Cyril's mother Catherine, he has no love for the priests who blighted his life and those of many of his peers. The book is not full of hatred however. There is violence, fear and denial in it, but there is also tenderness, love, and hope.

There is also great wit, many laughs, and sparkling dialogue between a large cast of both likeable and loathsome characters.

Throughout the novel, Cyril and his birth mother's lives intersect unbeknownst to either of them. Almost like a double helix, their lives go in their own directions and twist around each other before splicing back together so satisfyingly by the end of the book.

John Boyne has written numerous novels for adults and younger readers. He's won awards for *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and has had his books translated into many languages.

This book, *The Heart's Invisible Furies*, will stay with you. Highly recommended.

Cheers
Jenny

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May 2019

A Woman is No Man

by *Etaf Rum*

'A woman is not a man'- are the words Fareeda snaps at her teenage daughter Sarah who wants more from life than a husband and children. Fareeda, living in Brooklyn in 1990s, does not believe girls need books or college. Even shopping alone at the supermarket risks them becoming 'American', the neighbours thinking less of them and finding a husband more difficult.

This book spans three generations of women and four decades from 1970s Palestine to 2009 Brooklyn.

Teenager Isra's arranged marriage to Fareeda's son Adam sees her flying immediately to live with her husband's family in Brooklyn's multicultural melting pot where she is expected to produce sons and help her mother-in-law keep house.

Eight years after her birth, their first child Deya and her three younger sisters ('burdens') are told that their parents Isra and Adam, have been killed in a car accident.

In 2018, Deya-aged 17, faces the same expectations of a curtailed education, arranged marriage and subservience to her husband as her mother before her.

A mysterious message from a local bookshop owner turns Deya's world upside down and challenges her thinking and destiny.

The chapters jump forward and back as the stories of the three main female characters intersect and we see them wrestle with their pasts and futures.

Belonging, straddling two cultures, domestic violence, women's rights and the importance of books are central themes in this powerful novel.

Author Etaf Rum is the daughter of Palestinian immigrants. She was born and raised in Brooklyn. In the introduction to this book, Etaf writes: 'Where I come from, we've learned to silence ourselves. We've been taught that silence will save us. Where I come from, we keep these stories to ourselves. To tell them to the outside world is unheard of, dangerous, the ultimate shame.'

As readers, we are forever grateful that Etaf Rum has broken that silence and shared this story. *A Woman is No Man* is her first novel and it's brilliant!

Cheers
Jenny

Look for another book review next month!

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April 2019

The Year of the Farmer

by *Rosalie Ham*

Readers of *The Dressmaker* will have looked forward to the next book by Rosalie Ham, *The Year of the Farmer*. They won't be disappointed.

Again, Ham writes a novel that is deeply satirical with fabulous characters, cutting observations of small town life and familiar themes of love, jealousy, corruption and revenge.

In a drought-ridden rural NSW town, Mitchell Bishop has married the unpopular Mandy, after his previous love Neralie Mackintosh up and left for a better life in Melbourne.

Now Neralie is back with a business certificate in hand, as the new owner of the local pub.

Most readers will recognise the significance of the local pub in bringing 'the factions - townies, farmers and riparians' together. Most will also recognise the challenges of drought, financial uncertainty, politics of water allocation and the longtime allegiances and loathings that permeate small communities.

If you've had the dubious privilege of hearing politicians in new Akubras speaking about long term sustainability and economic security, you'll recognise the style and substance of Glenys 'Gravedigger' Dingle, head of the water board-and you will also understand the scepticism of the locals.

Ham captures it all with great humour. As in *The Dressmaker*, that humour is balanced by drama and tragedy. I'm sure you'll enjoy it-and, like *The Dressmaker*, it will translate well to the big screen too.

Cheers
Jenny

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March 2019

Bridge of Clay

by *Markus Zusak*

Rarely does a book grab at my heart and bring tears to my eyes. *Bridge of Clay* is such a book. We've waited 13 years to read Markus Zusak's next novel following the worldwide phenomenon of *The Book Thief*. This one is well worth that long wait. It's a mammoth book of almost 600 pages.

The Clay of the title is the third of the Dunbar brothers who are growing up without their parents. Their mother has died and their father 'the Murderer' has left them.

The novel jumps back in time and to the present day as Zusak gradually fills in the gaps that explain this family, its menagerie and the people who touch their lives. It's a multi-generational saga that will tug at your heartstrings.

The bridge in the title is real but it's also about building bridges between people, particularly Clay as the builder of a bridge with his father on behalf of his estranged family.

Zusak worked on this novel for many years and rewrote many parts numerous times. He has crafted a masterpiece as solid and as beautiful as The Slaves, Michelangelo's famed marble sculpture that is referenced throughout the book. Finding the beauty in the toughness of the Dunbar family takes a master craftsman like Zusak and his main character Clay. The story is told in the voice of eldest son Matthew.

Like some others, I found the first 65 pages pretty tough going. The gaps and unexplained events are confusing but please don't despair. Once the story of Penny, 'The Mistake Maker' starts, there is a more defined shape to the novel and it is easier to follow.

This book will go down in history as one of Australia's great literary masterpieces. Read it, savour it, and love it.

Cheers
Jenny

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February 2019

The Greater Good

by *Tim Ayliffe*

There's nothing like a crime thriller to get the pulse racing and one that's set in contemporary Australia has added interest for me.

The familiar Sydney sites make the novel highly imaginable and ready made for a TV series. Tim Ayliffe is an experienced ABC journalist who has embarked on a new career with his chief protagonist John Bailey. Bailey is a print journalist with a complex past including having been a war correspondent who has been captured and tortured in Iraq. Added to that, is the predictable broken marriage and dependency on alcohol. Despite of, or because of his flaws, Bailey is a compelling and likeable character facing his demons and shortcomings while trying to find the story behind the murder of a high-end prostitute. Of course there are links to politics, power, international espionage, Chinese business interests, and police.

The Greater Good is the first in a trilogy featuring John Bailey. I for one, will be looking forward to the future books.

A good holiday read for those who like crime novels- and who doesn't?

Cheers
Jenny

Look for another book review next month!

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