

By Shauna Bartlett

So good you'll be praying your train home gets delayed

The Aviary Gate by Katie Hickman (Bloomsbury, £12.99)

Historical novels are having a bit of a moment and Hickman has made a name for herself writing riveting, sexy-but-factual history books such as *Courtesans* and *Daughters Of Britannia*. Now she's used her historical expertise to write a novel. The result is a magical, engrossing read that takes us inside a 16th-century harem – and into a world populated by scheming, exotic characters. Coupled with a dual narrative of a 21st-century academic playing detective as she pieces together age-old clues to the whereabouts of a missing girl, this absorbing novel of intrigue and forbidden love manages to be both cerebral and entertaining. With all the intricate detail of historical non-fiction and all the pace of a romantic drama, this really is beautifully written stuff.

GLAMOUR MUST-READ

Petite Anglaise by Catherine Sanderson (Michael Joseph, £12.99)

Meet the latest blog-to-book star (but without the sauce – this is no Belle de Jour). Here, the author opens up about her most private thoughts, giving it an irresistibly voyeuristic feel. Her setting is Paris, but the life she describes is far from glamorous as she recounts the details of a stale marriage to workaholic 'Mr Frog' and the pleasures and pains of motherhood to their daughter 'Tadpole'. When her restless, dissatisfied blog attracts a male admirer, passion is ignited. To add an extra frisson, there's a real-life backstory, as Sanderson was fired after her boss claimed her postings brought the company into disrepute. Having successfully sued for wrongful dismissal and found herself a publisher, she seems to have got her happy ending.

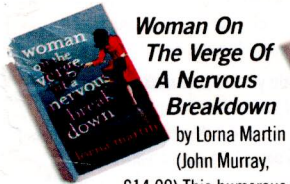
Thanks For The Memories by Cecelia Ahern (HarperCollins, £12.99)

Ahern has a sixth sense for subjects that tap into the most sentimental aspects of our psyche. This time, the idea is that blood donors pass on something of themselves to the recipient – whether it's memories, tastes or feelings. Unhappily married Joyce needs a transfusion when she miscarries her first child, while divorced art lecturer Justin is persuaded to donate blood on a whim. After the procedure, Joyce experiences a weird connection with Justin when she finds she can speak three languages, knows all about art and has strange memories of a blond child. As with all good romances, there's plenty of to-ing and fro-ing as their paths collide and diverge, proving that even serious slush benefits from some good old suspense.

Lifestyle Essentials by Lisa B (Icon Books, £12.99)

Lisa B has plenty of experience of multi-tasking in her roles as model, actress, singer, designer and mother, and this book about attitude and focus is designed to fill you with go-out-and-grab-it attitude. Confident, organised and ahead of the game are all attributes that apply to Lisa, but they could apply just as easily to us if we changed our mindset... or at least that's what she's got us thinking. You'll find tips on health and wellbeing, how to make your home the envy of your friends and how to turn every party into a 'mustn't miss' occasion. And with friends like Yasmin Le Bon and Anya Hindmarch claiming Lisa's the woman whose style they'd most like to steal, we're starting to think she'd make a good role model for us, too.

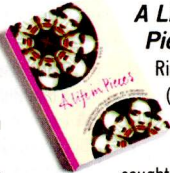
BOOK THERAPY Hit the couch for a gripping peek into other people's lives



Woman On The Verge Of A Nervous Breakdown

by Lorna Martin (John Murray, £14.99)

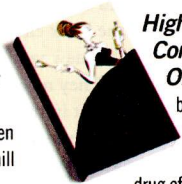
This humorous account of Martin's early midlife crisis will resonate with any professional thirtysomething who suddenly realises they don't have a partner, kids or a mortgage.



A Life In Pieces

by Richard K Baer (Vermilion, £14.99)

When Karen Overhill sought help for depression and memory loss, it unravelled an abusive childhood and a victim who'd created 17 different personalities to shield her true self. A gripping, terrifying read.



High Sobriety: Confessions Of A Drinker

by Alice King (Orion, £16.99)

Drink is the drug of choice for most of us, but as wine writer King's tale shows, it can become an addiction – which is what happened when the bottle took over, destroying both her marriage and career.



Perfect by Emily Halban (Ebury, £12.99)

Halban's raw prose allows a glimpse inside the mindset of an anorexic. Including her diary extracts and letters from family and friends, it illustrates how this disease affects not just the victim but also their entire family.

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