

# Earlsdon Literary Magazine 177

*The newsletter of the AVID Readers Group, based at Earlsdon Library*

**Next meeting:** Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> July 8pm

**Venue:** Earlsdon Library

**Book for discussion:** *Sweet Tooth*—Ian McEwan

## Interesting notes from a rather brief discussion of a very funny book with an extremely long title

### Our June Book

*The Hundred-Year Old Man Who Climbed Out of the Window and Disappeared*—Jonas Jonasson

The kettle was boiling unusually early following the group discussion of this book and it wasn't because we didn't like it. Quite the opposite. The group unanimously agreed that this book, and I won't repeat the title for fear of running out of space, was worthy of all-round praise and worthy of recommendation. The main character, Allan, bumbles from adventure to adventure from the moment he climbs out of that window, meeting world leaders willy-nilly. He starts his career in an explosives factory and ends up seemingly holding the secrets of the atomic bomb. The book's chapters alternate between events in the days following the window escape and those describing Allan's life story that point towards the futility of war.

Humour is the common theme of the book. A number of readers confessed to laughing out loud at different times and the humour really is very dense. Originally written in Swedish, the English version is an excellent translation and was probably very challenging given that

the humour relies upon the nuances of the language used.

It seemed a fiendishly clever idea to place a novel's main character at the centre of different world events, but was it original? The character of Allan certainly bore a resemblance to Forest Gump and some were reminded of the story of Harold Fry that the group read last year. Other possible analogies were to the books *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* by the Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa and *Hopeful Monsters* by Nicholas Mosley.

It's a feel-good book where all the characters seemed to have some redeeming features despite a few of them having a criminal past. The characterisation is good, although the elephant's personality seemed somewhat two-dimensional. Oh how we giggled but there was no time to waste. Tea was being served.

**Ted Richards**

### Next month we will be reading:

*Peaches for Monsier le Curé*—Joanne Harris

The date for discussion of this book is Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> August.

## What to read next

Well, we've got two to start with in the review and I've already added them to my wishlist.

The only other book I am aware of by Jonas Jonasson is *The Girl Who Saved the King of Sweden*. My sister is insistent that it is even funnier than *THYOMWCOOTWAD* and it is certainly similarly absurd: the heroine, Nombeko, starts her life in a Soweto shack and, for a while, her life seems to be going downhill from there. However, like Allan she has a skill – in her case numbers rather than explosives – and a set of unlikely (and somewhat shady) companions that lead her, via a somewhat circuitous route, to the event of the title.

I can be quite cynical about marketing and you only have to look at the cover design and the title to see that *The Little Old Lady Who Broke All the Rules* by Catharina Ingelman-Sundberg was quite clearly translated and published here on the back of the success of *THYOMWCOOTWAD*: its original title was the much shorter *Kaffe med Rån* (*Coffee and Robbery*). I was, however, persuaded to buy it by a bookseller who told me I'd enjoy it more than Graeme Simsion's *The Rosie Project* which I was about to pay for. I took both in the end, and only later thought to be offended by his assumption that I'd respond better to the tale of a group of pensioners who turn art thieves in order to escape their

care home than to the story of a socially inept geneticist dealing with the problem of finding a girlfriend having decided he's of the age where this might be appropriate. Both were funny and both now have sequels; I've read *The Rosie Effect* but not *The Little Old Lady Who Struck Lucky Again!* so you can work out if the boy at the till was right or not. However, silly books about running away from an old people's home are not confined to Scandinavia. The first one of the genre I remember reading is much more local: Christine Coleman is from Birmingham and *The Dangerous Sports Euthanasia Society* also has a protagonist who climbs out of a window, although her adventures are far more personal and the story more poignant as a result.

I'm beginning to wonder if anyone has written a not-silly book that starts with a similar event as Amazon seems to have plenty similar ones to recommend. If you know of any, do send a review for a future edition of ELM.

If you have any other reviews or recommendations, tales of literary events, or anything else you think other AVID readers would find interesting, please send them to Catherine Fitzsimons [cathfitz5317@yahoo.com](mailto:cathfitz5317@yahoo.com).

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