

## ***My Year in Books 2025 - Octavia Karavla***

### ***Little Women by Louisa May Alcott. Christmas 2025.***

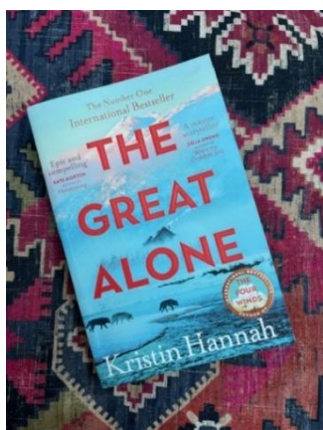


### ***Raising Hare by Chloe Dalton finished on December 11th.***



An utterly beguiling book. At this time of year, a festive, lovely time, but also a time when we feel constant pressure, it is perhaps the perfect book to read. It will slow you down, remind you of the world around you and what is important. How small things can bring even more joy than grand gestures. But, most importantly, how the natural world that surrounds us is a gift in itself. It's a constant that we must all look after and embrace. We must look to the changing of the seasons, the wildlife that adjusts accordingly for its survival, the hedgerows at their finest, dressed in holly and think of all the creatures that are protected within them. I have never read a book so beautifully full to the brim with observations of our countryside but also that has slowed me down enough to stop once more, as I did as a child, lucky enough to be bought up surrounded by such fields and look in awe once more at the intricacies of nature. The hare is mystical and graceful and can teach us so much, as can this incredible little book.

***The Great Alone* by Kristin Hannah finished on December 5th.**



Another extraordinarily good book by Kristin Hannah. I couldn't put it down. Utterly compelling and emotional. Alaska provides a stunning setting but also a life of isolation and endurance. This is a story of survival and love, against all odds.

***A Dog Called Hero* by Katy Birchall finished on November 14th.**



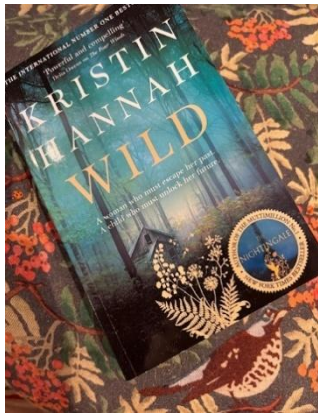
A brilliant mystery story that kept me guessing to the end. For those who love a canine companion but also a seriously gripping adventure, this is a must-read.

***The Horse Dreamer* by Holly Surplice finished on November 10<sup>th</sup>.**



I used to dream of nothing but horses when I was growing up. When I wasn't dreaming about them, I was drawing them or reading stories about them. This book is perfect. As a child I would have slept with it under my pillow. Truly one to treasure and a beautiful gift for Christmas.

***Wild* by Kristin Hannah finished on November 7<sup>th</sup>**



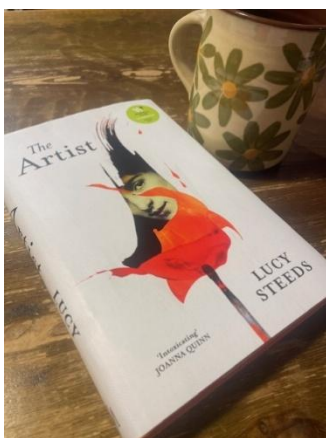
I have loved every book I've read by Kristin Hannah. *Wild* is very different to her historical stories, from which I've learnt so much, but equally as gripping and brilliant. I wept at the end.

***Ghostlines* by Katya Balen finished on October 14<sup>th</sup>**



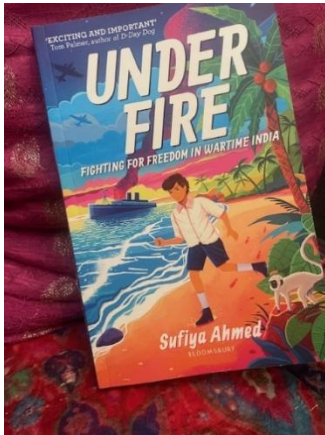
I love the way Katya Balen writes. Her children's adventure stories are always so visceral and heartwarming. Encouraging humans to connect more with animals and the wonders of the natural world that surrounds us.

***The Artist* by Lucy Steeds finished on September 9<sup>th</sup>.**



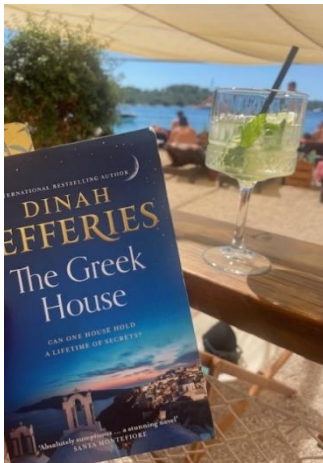
*The Artist* is one of the best books I've read in a long time. A rich, sensory experience. Stunning.

***Under Fire* by Sufiya Ahmed finished on September 22<sup>nd</sup>**



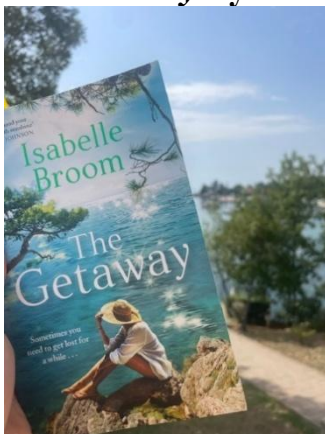
I learnt so much from this heartfelt WW2 middle grade adventure. A very important book, it tells the story of an Anglo-Indian 12-year-old boy and his struggles when he is sent to live in Calcutta with his grandfather under the British Raj.

***The Greek House* by Dinah Jefferies finished on September 18<sup>th</sup>**



I thoroughly enjoyed this book set on the beautiful island of Corfu in the 1930s.

***The Getaway* by Isabelle Broom finished on September 1st**



A Croatian beach read.

***The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig finished on August 21st**



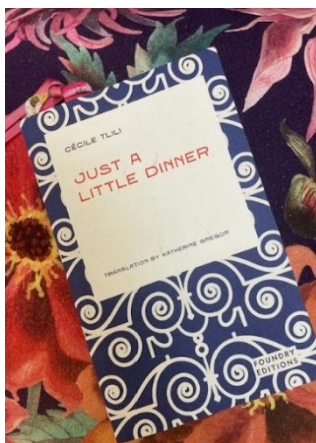
A powerful message for those who may need it most. Don't give up. Our lives hold many possibilities, if only we can cherish every moment where possible.

***So Good to See You* by Francesca Hornak finished on August 12th**



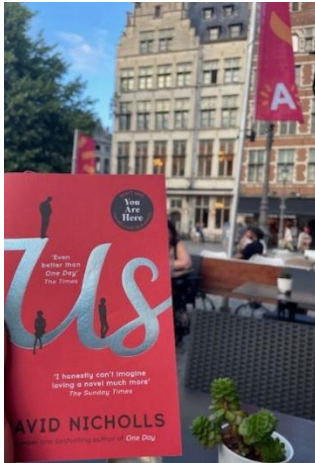
A wedding reunion that will change everything, 'for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health'. Serge, Rosie and Daniel, who met at Oxford University, reignite old friendships but also unforgettable rivalries. Secrets spill over with the champagne and lead to unravelling amongst the revellers, at what promised to be an elegant and happy wedding weekend in a remote chateau in Provence. A really brilliant, funny and clever book. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

***Just a Little Dinner* by Cecile Tlili finished on July 21st.**



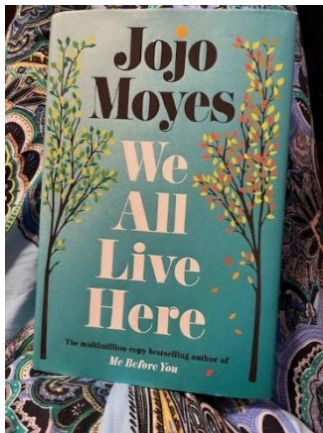
'Just a Little Dinner' is a really elegant little read. A dinner party in a Parisian apartment, one very hot summer evening, where its guest's desires and downfalls, feelings and fears are so vividly portrayed with such accomplished writing. It is also a beautifully produced little book.

***Us* by David Nicholls finished on July 11th**



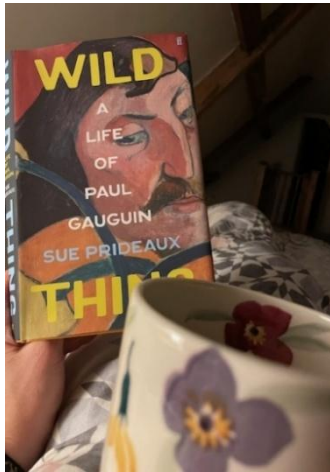
I loved this book. It was very funny and has some cracking characters I really cared about. A seemingly happy couple, one a scientist, one an artist and their teenage son, embark on a tour of Europe. It could be the adventure they need or indeed a bittersweet goodbye to the life they once knew.

***We All Live Here* by Jojo Moyes finished on June 19th.**



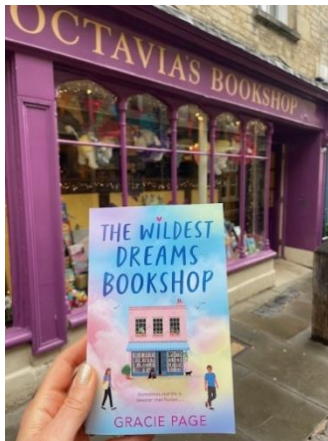
This book was lovely. One of the funniest I've read in a long time but also very moving. Perfect for fans of the new Bridget Jones film.

***Wild Thing* by Sue Prideaux finished on June 5th.**



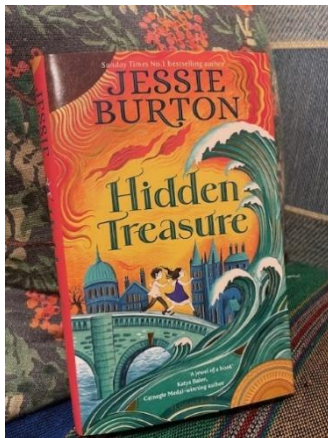
Paul Gauguin has always been my favourite artist. I loved studying him as part of my degree. Even though I mainly read fiction, I really enjoyed 'Wild Thing'. Here he is brought to life once more but this time using new material and family archives to challenge some preconceived ideas about him, his lifestyle and thus artistic influences.

***The Wildest Dreams Bookshop* by Gracie Page finished on June 5<sup>th</sup>**



As a lover of Cornwall and, of course, independent bookshops this was the perfect teen romance. A really sweet story set in a sleepy seaside town. London girl meets surfer boy, and other lovely local characters, whilst helping to save her aunt's eccentric, yet idyllic bookshop.

***Hidden Treasure* by Jessie Burton finished on May 24th.**

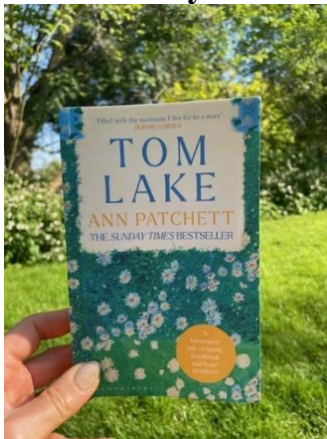


A really, really brilliant children's book by the author of *The Miniaturist*.

***An Italian Girl in Brooklyn* by Santa Montefiore finished on May 22<sup>nd</sup>**



***Tom Lake* by Ann Patchett finished on April 30<sup>th</sup>**



A warm and wonderful book.

***The Girl Who Raced the World* by Nat Harrison finished April 10<sup>th</sup>**



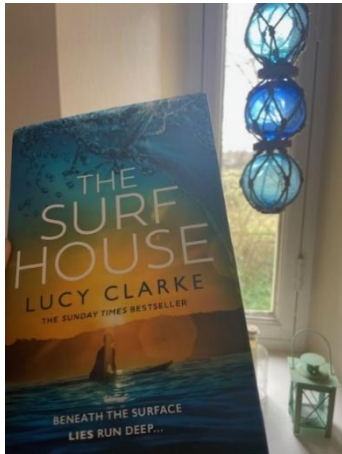
This is one of the best debut children's books I have ever read. Such a gripping, well-written, adventure mystery story. The 'Around the World in Eighty Days' wager takes you on an extraordinary journey across continents and cultures, meeting a host of colourful characters along the way. The intrepid explorers are our heroine, a young girl called Maggie who has lost everything, the loveable Frenchman Passepartout and the kind-hearted, eccentric Phileas Fogg at the helm. It's a must-read.

***The Light Years* by Elizabeth Jane Howard finished on April 6<sup>th</sup>**



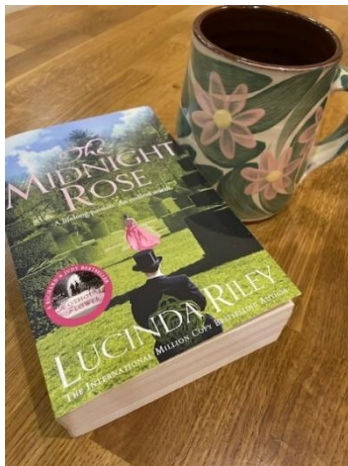
The first in the Cazalet Chronicles. A modern classic family saga set in the halcyon summer of 1937 and in 1938 with the fear of war looming. An elegant, amusing and sometimes quite alarming portrayal of English life for the wealthier set and their household help.

***The Surf House* by Lucy Clarke finished on March 15<sup>th</sup>**



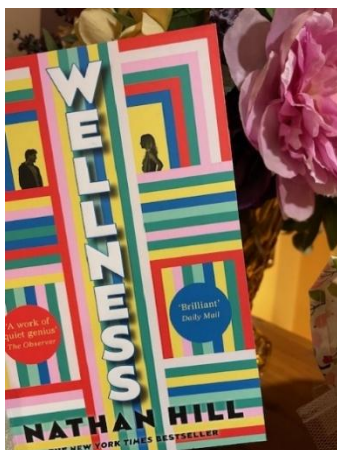
An exceptionally gripping sun-drenched thriller.

***The Midnight Rose* by Lucinda Riley finished on March 8<sup>th</sup>**



Lucinda Riley is best known for her much-loved Seven Sisters series of books. However, I always thoroughly enjoy her stand-alone stories too. *The Midnight Rose* took me on such an incredible journey, historically but also geographically. From a country house deep in the Devonshire countryside to the exotic palaces of India. It is a story of mystery and intrigue and, above all, love.

***Wellness* by Nathan Hill finished on February 5<sup>th</sup>**



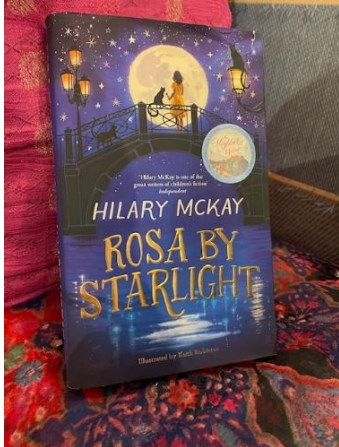
I thought the beginning and ending of this book were really brilliant, but I didn't enjoy the middle bit nearly as much.

***The Blue Hour* by Paula Hawkins finished on January 23<sup>rd</sup>**



This book was very gripping and atmospheric. I could not put it down. On a remote island off the Scottish Borders, there once lived a renowned artist. Following her untimely death, her life, and the lives of those close to her, are called into question because of a particular piece of art she created and bequeathed to an unlikely benefactor. She led a colourful life, led by her heart and her creativity, rather than her head. A life that ended in isolation on her beloved island of Eris. Both her safe haven and her downfall.

***Rosa by Starlight* by Hilary McKay finished on January 11th.**



This is a beautifully illustrated and brilliantly written book. A magical adventure story set in Venice. Our orphaned heroine Rosa is quite an incredible girl. Under the safety of the stars, and with the help of some very special feline friends, she must overcome her awful auntie and uncle and find a life she deserves.

***The Secret Countess* by Eva Ibbotson finished on January 9<sup>th</sup>**



I have always loved Eva Ibbotson's books. *Journey to the River Sea* has long been a favourite of mine. This is the first of her books meant for grown-ups that I have read and it did not disappoint. It is witty yet heartfelt. Her brilliant writing brings this historical romance to life with bells on. With all the trimmings of Russian royalty, gossip and intrigue and wonderful characters, working beneath the stairs in a grand English country estate and with a heroine and Prince Charming worthy of a very happy ending.