

## Book Club

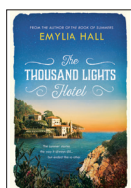


### 5 SKYLARKING by Kate Mildenhall (Legend Press, paperback £8.99, ebook £4.99)

In an isolated community  
in 19th-century Australia,

Kate and Harriet, the daughters of lighthouse keepers, are inseparable despite their differences. Kate, born before her time, is a girl with modern instincts and an intellect beyond her circumstances, desperate to make something of her life. But as the plain friend to the radiant, conventional Harriet and confined by her situation, her options are limited.

Life starts to change as the girls grow up and a newcomer, a fisherman called McPhail, arrives on the cape, sending the girls hurtling towards tragedy. You'll cringe for Kate as she gauchely deals with the maelstrom of adolescent feelings and hurt for her when things go wrong. It's a brilliant story of love and longing where memories are fluid and truths hard to take.



### 6 THE THOUSAND LIGHTS HOTEL by Emylia Hall (Headline Review, paperback £8.99, out 13 July)

Raw with grief from the loss of her mother and unsteady from a deathbed revelation about her father, Kit heads for the island of Elba to meet the man she thought she'd never know or wish to meet. She finds him at the Thousand Lights Hotel, a romantic clifftop bolthole where Valentino looks after his guests with an almost obsessive attentiveness, helped by the unsettlingly good-looking Oliviero. As Kit lets her surroundings and new family unwind her tightly coiled emotions, she finds her history is even more complicated and confusing than she thought.

For all the summery indulgence of the location, this is no saccharine, soft-edged story; indeed the most romanticised part is the rather rose-tinted depiction of a travel journalist's life.

It deals with tragedy, weakness and frailty and delivers an ultimately upbeat message. A great beach read.



### 7 THE CONSTANT SOLDIER by William Ryan (Pan, paperback, £7.99)

In the turbulent months  
before the end of the Second

World War, Paul Brandt, injured in combat and crippled by guilt, finds himself back home, adapting uncomfortably to civilian life.

Then he realises one of the female prisoners working at the nearby SS rest hut for concentration camp officials looks familiar. Good sense – and his twitchy father – tell him to look away, but he can't. As the countdown to the final reckoning begins and people have to decide which way to jump, Brandt has a last chance to redeem himself.

It's the characters that make this book: from tortured SS officer Neumann, aghast at what he's got caught up in, to jumped-up mayor Weber, whose bumptiousness would be comic in happier times, assume sinister proportions in wartime. Chilling, heartwarming and thoroughly compelling.



### 8 THE PINOCCHIO BRIEF by Abi Silver (Lightning Books, paperback, £8.99, out 23 July)

Raymond Maynard isn't like most 15-year-olds. Fiercely intelligent, obsessed with amassing knowledge, socially awkward... and accused of murdering one of his teachers. Equally, Judith Burton isn't like most barristers. Fiercely perfectionist, pathologically direct, socially abrasive... and prematurely retired – perfect for each other.

To Judith's frustration, Raymond – whose inner voice is brilliantly captured – won't say a word to her or to anyone, so she's floundering in the dark. And to complicate matters, a new lie-detecting device, Pinocchio, is to be used in the trial as part of a nationwide scheme. Judith knows more about Pinocchio than she's letting on and doesn't want it in court.

*The Pinocchio Brief* will keep you gripped throughout and has a satisfying twist in the tail. Although lawyers might wince at occasional courtroom stumbles, it remains an exceptionally accomplished debut novel.



### 9 THE HONEYMOON by Tina Seskis (Penguin Books, paperback, £7.99)

It should have been the  
perfect honeymoon – a

luxurious beachside villa in the Maldives with everything planned to the last detail. Only Jemma's husband has vanished overnight. She's terrified people will start linking their late-night row with his disappearance. And what exactly did she drunkenly admit to fellow honeymooner Chrissy?

As the police start to investigate, Jemma's private life is plastered over the tabloids at home and her chequered romantic history laid bare. Small wonder the police are suspicious. This is an engaging story that manages, despite fairly unlikeable characters – Jemma seems to feel the wrong emotions in every situation – to keep you turning the pages. And there's a sucker punch of an ending that you won't see coming. Just don't read it if you're holidaying in the Maldives.



### 10 THE HOPKINS CONUNDRUM by Simon Edge (Lightning Books, paperback, £8.99)

In a draughty seminary in north Wales, stubborn, awkward, tormented Gerard Manley Hopkins experiments with the English language. It's just one of his guilty secrets until he's asked to write a poem in honour of a group of nuns drowned in a shipwreck, and can finally commit his strange brand of poetry to paper.

In the present day, likeable, ever-hopeful loser Tim is struggling to make ends meet at his failing pub, down the road from Hopkins' seminary. When he stumbles on the code-like poetry, he decides to concoct a Holy Grail-style mystery to bring in the punters and restore his fortunes. Until along comes poetry-loving Chloe.

This is a hugely entertaining book that beautifully captures the characters' individual voices and characters. And if Hopkins leaves you cold, Edge's excoriating analysis is an utter delight.