

Parkdale Book Club

June 9 2018 – One Brother Shy

Schedule

Date (10 am on 2nd Saturday)

Now we get the summer off to read next year's selections! And then...

Sept. 8	<i>Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis</i>	-- Lee
Oct. 13	<i>The High Mountains of Portugal</i>	-- Sue
Nov. 10	<i>No Time Like the Present: Finding Freedom, Love, and Joy Right Where You Are</i>	-- Ruth
Dec. 10	<i>The Housekeeper and the Professor</i>	-- Ida
Jan. 12 2019	<i>Mao's Last Dancer</i>	-- Beth, Sharon
Feb. 9	<i>A Fatal Grace</i>	-- Doreen
March 9	<i>The Mother of All Questions</i>	-- Beth
April 13	<i>Medicine Walk</i>	-- Ruth
May 11	<i>A Rhinestone Button</i>	-- Lindsay
June 8	<i>An Unnecessary Woman</i>	-- Lynn

Summer reading

Send me your reactions to books you are reading for a summer newsletter. (I keep trying this – maybe this year it will work.) I just finished *The Dry* by Jane Harper, set in drought-stricken Australia. Such a good debut novel! I enjoyed the writing and the story. The main character reminded me of the protagonists in

Dick Francis's novels -- smart, mild-mannered, standing on the outside. Fortunately, he'll be back.

Before that, another novel by Will Ferguson (419), *The Shoe on the Roof*. This was an unpleasant but good (or good but unpleasant) book that grabbed my interest and made me want to read on to find out what happened. The two Rosanoffs are unsympathetic characters, the one victimized by the other going on

to use medical knowledge to manipulate, trick, and bed as many women as possible, aided by another victim of abuse. I am always creeped out by representations of abuse of power by mental health practitioners — I stopped reading *Crushed* by Kate Watterson because there were no redeeming factors to balance the casual representation of violation of ethical boundaries by a psychologist. But this book explores important questions and issues; it was worth my Saturday.

And before that, *Son of a Trickster*, by Eden Robinson. Magic and myth blend with humour and heartbreak in this story of an Indigenous teenage boy who finds that he can speak with ravens. I experienced it an important exposure to another culture, right here in my Canada. Shortlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize.

Nominations for next year

Already! Ida recommended *The Golden Age*, by Joan London, for next year. From the Calgary Public Library site: Frank Gold's family, Hungarian Jews, flee the perils of World War II for the safety of Australia, but not long after their arrival, thirteen-year-old Frank is diagnosed with polio. He is sent to a sprawling children's hospital called The Golden Age, where he meets Elsa, the most beautiful girl he has ever seen, a girl who radiates pure light. Frank and Elsa fall in love, fueling one another's rehabilitation, facing the perils of illness and adolescence hand in hand, and scandalizing the prudish staff of The Golden Age. ... Elsa's mother Margaret, who has given up everything to be a perfect mother, must reconcile her hopes and dreams with her daughter's sickness. Frank's parents, transplants to Australia from a war-torn Europe, are isolated newcomers in a country that they do not love and that does not seem to love them. Frank's mother Ida, a renowned pianist in Hungary, refuses to allow the western deserts of Australia to become her home. But her husband, Meyer, slowly begins to free himself from the past and integrate into a new society.

With tenderness and humor, *The Golden Age* tells a deeply moving story about illness, resilience and recovery. It is a book about learning to navigate the unfamiliar, about embracing music, poetry, death, and, most importantly, life.

And Ruth mentioned this book when we were talking about nominations for 2018-2019, but it was lost in the shuffle. Fortunately in the discussion today when Sue recommended the movie *The Book Club* (where the book being read is *50 Shades of Grey*) Ruth reminded us of *Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows* by Balli Kaur Jaswal. From CPL website: A lively, sexy, and thought-provoking East-meets-West story about community, friendship, and women's lives at all ages-- a spicy and alluring mix of *Together Tea* and *Calendar Girls*. . . . Nikki lives in cosmopolitan West London, where she tends bar at the local pub. The daughter of Indian immigrants, she's spent most of her twenty-odd years distancing herself from the traditional Sikh community of her childhood, preferring a more independent (that is, Western) life. When her father's death leaves the family financially strapped, Nikki, a law school dropout, impulsively takes a job teaching a "creative writing" course at the community center in the beating heart of London's close-knit Punjabi community. Because of a miscommunication, the proper Sikh widows who show up are expecting to learn basic English literacy, not the art of short-story writing. When one of the widows finds a book of sexy stories in English and shares it with the class, Nikki realizes that beneath their white dupattas, her students have a wealth of fantasies and memories. Eager to liberate these modest women, she teaches them how to express their untold stories, unleashing creativity of the most unexpected -- and exciting-- kind. ...

One Brother Shy

This is the third book by Terry Fallis that we've enjoyed at Parkdale Book Club, thanks to Joan. I started *One Brother Shy* as my reward for finishing the June newsletter on Saturday the 10th last year, and I finished *One Brother Shy* on Sunday June 11. I'd say I read it in one sitting, but several times I had to put the book down because I could no longer see the text through my tears (and there's also that pesky need to sleep.)

Our reactions:

- I could not put this book down
- Laurie, *The Baking Bookworm*: "There is a gaggle of characters that he meets along the way but it's Alex's boss, Simone (who lives at the far end of the humanity spectrum) who you love to hate." Working for myself as I do, I found it incredible that a whole room full of employees put up with Simone's abuse. I tentatively predicted that Simone would somehow be rehabilitated, and was relieved to find that I was wrong – she was canned instead, creating a decision point for Alex.
- What was Simone's problem? This is classic – someone gets transferred in to manage IT who knows nothing about IT (like the very funny British TV series, *The IT Crowd*). It's always a woman who is portrayed as a bad boss. Of course the icy one was French!
- The characters were well developed
- The 'Gabriel' incident? Bullying. Extreme humiliation. But the saving grace of the woman in red – who turned out to be Laura who wanted to write an article on bullying victims...
- Does the effect of bullying last that long? And similarly, does being a bully last that long? I struggled a little with the violent hostility of the bully dying of cancer. It would be too saccharine for him to be reformed, but how did he have the energy for that level of continued bullying so many years later? While he was dying?
- Alex was able to get over the Gabriel incident only after he told his brother. Why? Maybe related to his brother facilitating his being more external? Maybe the identity – being accepted by identical brother is parallel to, leads to, being accepted by self?
- I loved the finding of the father.
- How technology can be positive – facial recognition software allowed him to find his brother – and also negative – the video of the Gabriel incident is on Youtube indefinitely.
- I enjoy Fallis' writing, especially the various Canadianisms throughout. (An outrage! one of the Goodreads reviewers gave the book a low score and said it was too Canadian, "not that there's anything wrong with being Canadian.")
- Always a relief to read a novel with a therapist character that does not make me wince or feel ill.
- Many sweet incidents. One of my favourites was how Matt prepared his staff for Alex's appearance at the office, so they just matter-of-factly said "good morning, Matt; good morning, Alex."
- Abbey was so supportive – obvious how much she cared for him, long before he figured it out.
- It was a good read.
- A friend warned me not to go to the end of the book first, and I'm glad I did not.
- I told my friend, you'll read late into the night and not go to bed – it sounds like a lot of us did that.
- I liked the cleverness of the title. I liked that Fallis says it was inevitable that he was going to write a book with identical twins as it is such a big facet of his identity.
- I liked the internal talk vs what he externalized, especially to his boss. And that changed toward the end of the book.
- Alex could be comfortable if he was acting. Like the effect of wearing a mask.
- Why did they get a DNA test? And it was positive, no plot twist, so why did Fallis include it?
- Ancestry/genealogy – feeling part of something bigger
- I did not like it that Matt faked a lost voice – what an astronomical risk for him to take. And he had lied about this being the only opportunity for a meeting with the angel investor. So Matt lied to Alex, and then they both lied to Sophie.
- When getting into the elevator: "I figured I could cross tachycardia off my bucket list"
- "beyond near asphyxia, the 4-hour trip passed uneventfully in what felt like 8 hours" (malodorous man sitting across from them on the train)
- "when they arrived at the nondescript apartment building, Alex almost nodded off just looking at it. The building must have been designed and built during an architects' strike"
- I was happy we weren't kept in suspense regarding Alex finding his twin.
- A happy ending.
- Not quite as good as *Up and Down*, but an enjoyable read.
- When I read the opening, about Alex' mother having just died, I was worried that it was going to be another book all about death and dying. I was glad that wasn't the main focus.
- Things went a bit too smoothly – a little willing suspension of disbelief required.
- Some of the on-line criticism of the book is that the 'good' characters in this book have good things heaped upon them, and the 'bad' characters get

their punishment – but that’s partly what makes it so satisfying, too

- I did enjoy the way the two brothers developed their relationship and the way all the mysteries were sorted out. The story of “Gabriel” was heart-breaking and I felt such compassion for Alex in having had such a dreadful experience at such a formative time of his life. The cruelty of the perpetrators was awful.
- I didn’t know that Terry Fallis has an identical twin himself. I found the afterward very interesting as Fallis described his relationship with his own brother. That was quite lovely.
- Fallis represented well what identical twins are like.
- Issue of siblings separated when young – secrets in extended families
- Someone in my family found out at 74 years of age that he has a sister
- Impact of being adopted.
- A very satisfying read.
- I agree with the Goodreads review: “One Brother Shy is at once poignant and humorous,

heartbreaking and heartwarming, and readers will not soon forget Alex MacAskill.”

- Just like Alex Woods in “The Universe vs Alex Woods,” Alex MacAskill is someone I’d like to know personally.
- Thanks, Joan, for suggesting another Terry Fallis book. I have enjoyed all the ones we have read, including this one.

In January 2014, CBC aired a six-part television miniseries based on *The Best Laid Plans* earning very positive reviews.

Globe and Mail: “Terry Fallis writes just about the tidiest romantic comedic novels you can find on Earth, let alone in Canada.”

And finally, <https://itunes.apple.com/ca/podcast/one-brother-shy/id1214724915?mt=2>

Use this link to get the podcast for *One Brother Shy*, and to search for podcasts of Fallis’s other books.