

Books of the month

{ Crime and thrillers } Another outing for Lisbeth Salander; plus family mysteries, drug cartels and courtroom drama *Laura Wilson*

The Girl Who Lived Twice (MacLehose, £20, translated from Swedish by George Goulding) is the third instalment in David Lagercrantz's continuation of Stieg Larsson's Millennium series featuring ferocious uber-hacker Lisbeth Salander and crusading investigative journalist Mikael Blomkvist. While Lagercrantz's prose is more serviceable than the peculiarly clodhopping original writing, by this point the main characters have, sadly, become subject to the law of diminishing returns - in particular Salander, who is now just another all-purpose kick-ass heroine; despite the all-guns-blazing ending, there's a half-heartedness to the story of her continued battle with twin sister Camilla. Far more intriguing is the investigation into an ill-fated Everest expedition, although the necessity of shoehorning the narrative into the Millennium framework distances the action, thereby lessening its dramatic impact.

At the start of Lisa Jewell's latest psychological thriller, **The Family Upstairs** (Century, £12.99), Libby, who has just turned 25, inherits a house in Chelsea. Adopted, she has little knowledge of her origins, but now she learns that the property belonged to her family and that she was found there as a baby, alone but for the corpses of her birth parents and an unknown man. Her two siblings, then teenagers, had disappeared. The narrative baton passes between Libby, who is trying to discover more about the past; mother-of-two Lucy, virtually destitute on the Côte d'Azur; and Henry, who tells the story of how his parents became victims of charismatic David Thomson, leader of a micro-cult. The connections between the three gradually become clear. Creepy, intricate and utterly immersive: an excellent holiday read.

Take It Back by **Kia Abdullah** (HQ, £12.99) explores uncomfortable issues around class, gender, religion and prejudice. When Jodie, a 16-year-old white girl with facial deformities, accuses four Muslim teenagers of raping her, who is telling the truth? The boys, who

corroborate each other's stories, come from hard-working immigrant families and have a lot more going for them than pitiful Jodie, who lives on a squalid estate with her neglectful alcoholic mother and is routinely bullied at school. One of the few people who believes her is her lawyer, Zara Kaleel, who has defied her family in throwing over both her marriage and her membership of a prestigious chambers, and now works with victims of sexual assault. The trial becomes a flashpoint and, as battle lines are drawn, Kaleel is branded a traitor to the Muslim community and the truth begins to look ever more complicated. This is a superb legal thriller that fairly crackles with tension.

The second outing for Martyn Waites's Tom Killgannon, **The Sinner** (Zaffre, £18.99), takes place after the courtroom action is over. The former undercover cop, now leading a quiet life in Cornwall under witness protection, is tasked with posing as a prisoner in order to discover where serial child killer Noel Cunningham has buried his two final victims. Once in jail, Tom is in the process of befriending his repulsive cellmate when gangster-turned-prison-kingpin Dean Foley, behind bars as the result of Tom's efforts, recognises him. Not only is Foley out for revenge, but Tom's handlers on the outside have stopped taking his calls ... Pacey but atmospheric, with a palpable sense of claustrophobia and menace.

Former foreign correspondent Tim MacGabhann's debut novel, **Call Him Mine** (W&N, £16.99), paints a picture of Mexico that would not find favour with the tourist board: pollution, drug cartels, lawlessness, missing people and a mountain of dirty money. Journalist Andrew and his photographer lover Carlos are working on a piece about the country's former oil capital, Poza Rica, when they come across the mutilated body of a student activist. Carlos's desire to investigate further gets him tortured and killed. Andrew, grieving and jittery on a diet of coffee and LSD, sets off on a quest for answers that leads him into a web of corruption stretching all the way to the board-



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rooms of America. Strong stuff, but MacGabhann's blend of violent action and vivid, even lyrical description is laced with dark humour and is very readable.

Those who prefer something gentler should pick up **The Case of the Wandering Scholar** (Bloomsbury, £14.99). The second book in Kate Saunders's Victorian series featuring archdeacon's-widow-turned-sleuth Laetitia Rodd begins with a missing person. It's 1851 and Jacob Welland's dying wish is to be reunited with the brother he hasn't seen for 15 years, but eccentric Joshua, who left Oxford University to live the life of a rural tramp, is proving hard to find. Laetitia heads out to the countryside in search of him, but all is not well between Rachel and Arthur Somers, the old acquaintances with whom she is staying, and she soon finds herself with more than one mystery to solve. With a well-crafted plot, an engaging protagonist, and astute nods to the literature and theological squabbles of the period, this is a perfect novel for a summer afternoon.

Laura Wilson's The Other Woman is published by Quercus.

