



THE READING ROOM

Terrific, tantalising tales – book reviews by **Tom Bromley**

TITLE: Harlem Shuffle

AUTHOR: Colson Whitehead

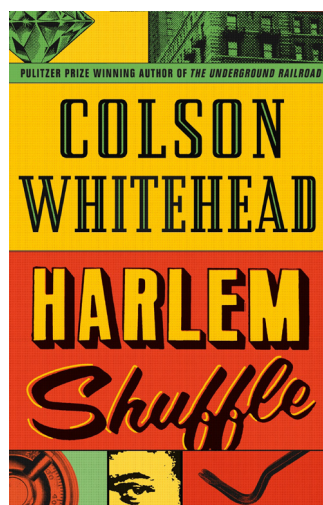
PUBLISHED BY: Fleet

PRICE: £16.99

Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Its successor, *The Nickel Boys* was hailed by Time as one of the books of the decade. Now comes *Harlem Shuffle*, a hugely enjoyable story of crime, family, morality and race set in 1960s New York.

Ray Carney is "only slightly bent when came to being crooked". He sells furniture, most of which is legitimately acquired. His business might be mainly above board, but if his cousin Freddie comes in with a piece of jewellery to sell, he doesn't ask too many questions as to where it came from.

When Freddie asks him to take part in a heist at Hotel Theresa – "the Waldorf of Harlem" – he has the nous to



keep clear. His instinct is right – the heist goes wrong and the gang find a local crime lord on their tail. But Ray, too, is unwittingly drawn in: how far can he keep his respectability intact, while taking advantage of the more nefarious rewards that Freddie's way of life is offering...

TITLE: A Single Rose

AUTHOR: Muriel Barbery

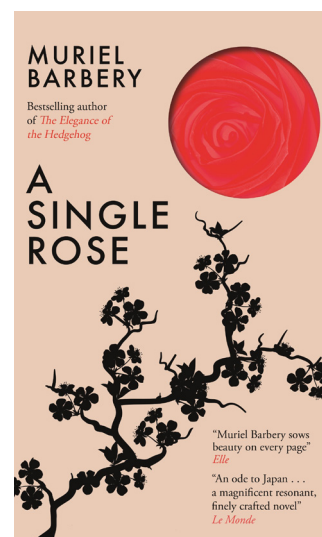
PUBLISHED BY: Gallic Books

PRICE: £12.99

Muriel Barbery is best known for her 2006 novel *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, published in the UK in 2008 and selling ten million copies around the world. If you enjoyed that book, you won't be disappointed with this latest work of fiction.

Forty-something botanist Rose has arrived in Japan, unsure what to expect. The father she never knew has died, and she has been summoned to Kyoto to hear the reading of his will. His father's assistant Paul has been issued with a strict itinerary for Rose. Frustrated at first, Rose begins to find herself seduced by the trips to temples and restaurants, discovering not just about her father's life, but herself in the process.

A Single Rose is one of those short, beautifully distilled books,



elegantly translated by Alison Anderson. The story cleverly intermingles Japanese myths and tales with Rose's own narrative. Rich with atmosphere and character and drawing on themes of grief and second chances, this is a delicate delight.

TITLE: Tenderness

AUTHOR: Alison MacLeod

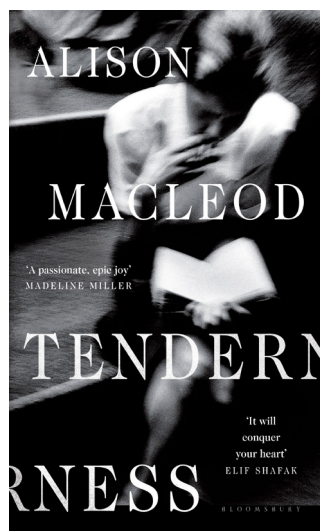
PUBLISHED BY: Bloomsbury

PRICE: £18.99

The South of France, 1930. DH Lawrence, one of the greatest novelists of his generation, is in exile, dying and desperate to return home. But the writing of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* leaves him open to arrest if he steps foot on English soil again. New York, the late 1950s.

As senator John Kennedy is rumoured to be running for the White House, his wife Jacqueline is spotted by the FBI at an obscenity trial against the DH Lawrence novel. And as Kennedy's election battle against Richard Nixon reaches its climax, so too does the infamous trial where the government took publisher Penguin to court, and lost its battle to ban the book from sale.

Tenderness – the original name for DH Lawrence's novel – takes



the reader across the decades to interweave and pull together stories of love and literature, sensuality and censorship. With a powerful mixing of the personal and the political, of fact and fiction, Alison MacLeod's latest novel is a sweeping and immersive literary treat.

TITLE: Next of Kin

AUTHOR: Kia Abdullah

PUBLISHED BY: HQ

PRICE: £14.99

The phone call that Leila Syed received one busy working morning is to change her life forever. It is from her brother-in-law: Leila had agreed to drop her nephew Max off at nursery, but the nursery have rung to say Max never arrived. To her horror, Leila realises she has left him in her car on the hottest day of the year. Rushing down, she knows immediately something is badly wrong... and it all her fault.

Leila had looked after her sister Yasmin when their mother died. Now the two sisters, once so close, find themselves on opposite sides of the courtroom. The police don't believe that a successful businesswoman as Leila would make such a mistake. Is this really just a terrible, tragic accident, or is there more to the incident than meets the eye.



The author of the critically acclaimed *Truth Be Told* and *Take it Back*, Kia Abdullah's *Next of Kin* is of a similarly high standard, mixing tight, tense courtroom drama with a dizzying raft of plot revelations.