



Finding a Good Read

A column to help you find intriguing books

This month the column comes from Kiran Millwood Hargrave, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, who shares some favourite books with Inside Time readers.



Kiran Millwood Hargrave

I love a novella – a short, sharp shock of a book, devourable in a day but whose effects last forever. Conciseness is one of the qualities I most admire in stories – though of course epic tales can be concise in their way, cutting to the heart of the matter over 800 pages. But sometimes, you want to fall into a tale and back out again, like Alice, in time for tea. Here are some of my favourites.



The Hearing Trumpet by **Leonora Carrington** is an uproarious, anarchic, surreal joy of a book, about an elderly woman who is packed off to a bizarre nursing home by her family. It's a short book (perfect if life feels overwhelming), very funny, a bit silly, and excruciatingly tender. Be warned: things get very strange.



The Driver's Seat by **Muriel Spark** is dark and droll and spiky. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* came close to making this list, but this book haunts me still. Described as a 'why-dunnit' by the author, it's a plunge into an idiosyncratic mind and possessed of immense creepiness, humour, and nastiness. It's hard to explain – if you don't mind being disturbed, try it.



The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor by **Gabriel Garcia Marquez** is not a novella but reads like one. A journalistic account of the sole survivor of an accident at sea, it has all the elements of fiction. Awful hardships, redemptive arcs, impossible rescue, the

triumph of the human spirit. It feels almost epic – like *The Old Man and the Sea* on fast forward, only true. Gabriel Garcia Marquez is my favourite writer at a line level, and this is a wonderful example of his journalism.



We Have Always Lived in the Castle by **Shirley Jackson** is another suggestion for fans of darkness. This isn't jump scares and gore, it's a psychologically intense and gripping story told by a young girl – or rather a woman with the voice of a young girl – who tells you almost upfront what she's done. Merricat is one of my favourite narrators, and her voice is funny and strange and sweet and sad. This book is a masterpiece.



Winter Love by **Han Suyin** is a slender sucker-punch. Something of an anti-love story, it follows the passionate and disastrous relationship between two women - one married, one single and living in a grubby boarding house - studying at medical school during WWII. Published in 1952, it feels timeless, written with wit, clarity and an almost excruciating compassion for human frailty. It's also devastatingly sexy.

Kiran Millwood Hargrave is the Sunday Times bestselling author of novels for children and adults including the Geomancers trilogy, a series about the magic of nature, the lure of power and the strength of love. Her books have been translated into more than 30 languages and optioned for stage and screen. They've been short- and long-listed for numerous awards including the Carnegie Medal and Costa Book Award and have won a Betty Trask Award, British Book Awards Children's Book of the Year and Waterstones Children's Book Prize, amongst others. She lives in Oxford with her husband, daughter, and cats.



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