

who had said, 'It's what you need. No distractions, and you won't have to worry about kennels.'

This evidence of her concern had moved Tom. At the same time, he thought, She wants the money. The web of their relations was shot through with these ambivalences, shade and bright twined with such cunning that their pattern never settled.

His jacket hung on the back of a chair. He put it on, then paused: shuffled pages, squared off the stack of paper, touched what he had accomplished. James's dictum caught his eye: *Experience is never limited, and it is never complete.*

When Tom called, raising his voice, the dog went on nosing through leaves and damp grass. It was their last morning there; the territory was no longer new. Yet whenever the dog was allowed outside, he would

*"Tom Loxley had spent two-thirds of his life in a cool southern city. But his childhood had been measured in monsoons, and the first windows he knew had contained the Arabian Sea."*

race to the far end of the yard and start working his way along the fence. Instinct, deepened over centuries, compelled him to check boundaries; drew him to the edges of knowledge.

Afterwards, Tom would remember the dog ignoring him, and the spurt of impatience he had felt. The dog had to be walked and the house packed up before the long drive back to the city. He was keen to get moving while the weather held. So he didn't pat the dog's soft head when he strode to the fence and reached for him.

The dog was standing still, one forepaw raised; listening. Teacoloured puddles sprawled on the track. A cockatoo flying up from a sapling dislodged a rhinestone spray. It was a wet spring even in the city, and in these green hills, it rained and rained.

The dog's paw-pads were shining jet. He sniffed, and sneezed, and plunged into dithering grass. A twenty-foot rope kept him from farmland and forest while affording him greater freedom than his lead.

The man picking his way through rutted mud at the other end of the rope disliked the cold. Tom Loxley had spent two-thirds of his life in a cool southern city. But his childhood had been measured in monsoons, and the first windows he knew had contained the Arabian Sea. Free hand shoved deep in his pocket, he held himself tight against the morning.

Light rubbed itself over the paddocks. It struck silver from the cockatoo and splintered the windscreen of a toy truck threading up the mountain where trees went down to steel. But what Tom took

from the scene was the thrust and weight of leaves, the season's green upswinging. Over time, his eye had grown accustomed to the bleached pigments of the continent where he had made his life. But love takes shape before we know it. On a damp, plumed coast in India, Tom's first encounter with landscape had been dense with leaves. A faultless place for him would always be a green one.

He glanced back at Nelly's house. Afterwards, he would remember his sense that everything—the pepper tree by the gate, the sloping driveway, the broad blue sky itself—was holding its breath, gathered to the moment. The impression was forceful, but Tom's thoughts were busy with Nelly as he had once seen her: astride a sunny wall in the suburb where they both lived, a striped cat pouring himself through her arms.

In the corner of his eye, something blurred. At the same time, the rope skidded through his fingers. His head snapped around to see grey fur moving fast, and the dog in pursuit, the end to which sinew and nerve and tissue had always been building.

Tom swooped for the rope, and clawed at air. On the hillside above the track, the dog was swallowed by leaves.

Birdsong, and eucalyptus-scented air.

A lean white dog, rust-splotched, springing up a bank.

Things Tom Loxley would remember.

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IT HAD begun, seven months earlier, with a painting.

April becalmed in hazy, slanted light. Tom clipped on the dog's lead and they left his flat to walk in streets where houses were packed like wheat. Windows were turning yellow. Dahlias showed off like sunsets. On an autumn evening in the city, Tom looked sideways at other people's lives.

At a gallery he hadn't entered in the four years since his wife left, long sash windows had been pushed up; there were smokers on the terraces with glasses in their hands. Tom tied the dog to the garden side of the ornate iron railings and went up the steps.

A group show: four young artists. Their friends and relatives were congratulatory and numerous in the two rooms on the ground floor. Tom drank cold wine

## New Releases

### Gross Margin

Laurent Quintreau

Harvill Secker



Office life and the corporate world are a rite of passage in today's modern society. In the ever-consuming corporate world with targets to meet, marketing strategies to enforce, and colleagues to deal with, *Gross Margin* sums up the contemporary office dynamic with realism and humour.

The novel is written using Dante's *Divine Comedy* as the backdrop, with slices of *The Office* throughout. It all begins with eleven executives seated around a boardroom. Their inner thoughts and voices make up the novel, while the meeting continues and the boss harangues them about cost cutting, restructuring, and redundancy. Using a stream of consciousness style and little punctuation, Quintreau successfully depicts the worries, concerns and private thoughts of the individual in the corporate world.

*Gross Margin* is a humorous novel about the inner workings of the mind and the absurd nature of the daily grind in contemporary office life.

Shirley Stevenson

### Missy

Chris Hannan

Chatto & Windus



*Missy* is a western novel with startling originality that examines the world of 'flash-girls' and the idiosyncrasies in 1862 America.

In California, Dol McQueen, an abandoned young woman who lives the 'flash-girl' lifestyle, hitches a ride with a group of friends looking for new adventures. Dol takes us on a journey through western America where 'flash houses' and 'flash-girls' are the 1860s equivalents of brothels and prostitutes.

Dol's addiction to opium is vividly explored as she searches for the mother who abandoned her. Unfortunately, for Dol during the course of her journey she saves the life of an unsavoury pimp from the clutches of suicide. The consequences of this relationship have a profound effect on Dol.

*Missy* evokes memories of the many western films, which flourished in the 1950s and 1960s. Chris Hannan has utilised his skill as a scriptwriter to weave a vivid portrayal of the harshness and contrasting beauty of the landscape. A recommended read for spring.

Marion Johnson