

**ONLY IN
Woman's Own**

Richard and Judy's *Book Club*

Richard and Judy's choice this week is a beautifully written story of a woman's memories of sunny Hungarian holidays and family secrets

The Book Of Summers

by Emylia Hall (RRP £7.99, *Headline Review*)



'The Book Of Summers is born of sun-kissed memories of childhood holidays in Hungary,' says its 33-year-old author Emylia Hall, who is the daughter of an English artist and Hungarian quilt maker. 'My father documented our trips with meticulous detail, putting together photograph albums upon our return. I loved poring over these pictures, and imagined how it would feel if my treasured memories



were supplanted by painful recollection and regret. It was from such thoughts that *The Book Of Summers* grew.' Emylia lives in Bristol with her husband and this is her debut novel. Her heroine Beth Lowe has been sent a parcel. Inside is a letter informing her that her estranged mother has died, and a scrapbook stuffed with mementos of the seven summers Beth spent in Hungary after her parents had separated. It brings the past tumbling back into the present...

BOOK OF THE WEEK

AUTHOR CHAT

Join Emylia Hall for a live web chat from 12-2pm on Thursday 19 July. Go to www.richardandjudy.co.uk



Richard's verdict



A book with moments as gentle and warm and languorous as its title, but with powerful running tensions, too. The summers in question are glorious Hungarian ones; brief but intense interludes in the childhood of a little girl, Beth Lowe. Her mother, Marika, is Hungarian; her father, David, is English. Marika longs to return to her homeland. One summer, friends in a remote rural part of Hungary invite the family to stay and Marika is beside herself with excitement. The holiday ends in heartbreak for Beth and her father when Marika refuses point blank to return with them to Devon.

'I absolutely loved it'

'I'm sorry' she tells her nine-year old child. 'Daddy and I don't fit any more... but here, I fit...' A devastated David and Beth make their lonely way back to their lives in England, but Marika insists her daughter be allowed to join her in Hungary every summer. Emylia Hall's descriptions of rural, backwater Hungary speak of a rustic simplicity that has long vanished from our own countryside. This is a story about growing up, and coming to terms with realities over which one has no control. It is a delicate, atmospheric, regretful tale but full of redemption too. I absolutely loved it.

The Richard and Judy Book Club is exclusive to WHSmith. The 10 books contain extra pieces of reading group content, such as questions for discussions suggested by Richard and Judy, inside information on the authors' inspirations and an insight into their life stories. You can watch exclusive interviews with the authors and be part of the Book Club by going to www.whsmith.co.uk/richardandjudy.

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What our panel thought of *The Book of Summers*



Nazreen Mills-Meyer

Nazreen, 40, is married to Philip, also 40. They live in Westerham, Kent, with sons Gabriel, four, and Elliot, two. A bittersweet coming of age story, this really struck a chord with me. Emylia Hall writes beautifully about Hungary and had me reminiscing about my own sun-bleached summers growing up in Cape Town.



Deborah Duffie

Deborah, 32, is from Clydebank, Scotland and lives with her partner Chris, 34. Gorgeous tales of adventure, first loves, danger, and then leaving it all behind to return to the humdrum of life in England with a father who seems content just to keep going. A great read that pulls you along to the end – I wiped away tears more than once.



Lizzy Wheatley

Lizzy, 55, lives with husband John, 53, and their daughter Khadine, 15, in Eastbourne. This book unfurled like a bud slowly blossoming until it reached its full beauty and then started to die. I felt the wonder of the early summers through a child's eyes. I felt I knew the characters personally and really felt all their joy and disappointment.



Karen Parry

Karen is 45 and lives with her 12-year-old daughter Ellen in Staines, Surrey. A story with hidden depths and unspoken feelings, highlighting that sometimes people need to tell the truth and be cruel to be kind. Beth's Hungary is full of artistic colour, flowers, wildlife, good food and wine – I wish I could transport myself there!



Judy's verdict

This is a book within a book. A now grown-up Beth receives a package containing the homemade scrapbook she never knew existed. Her mother entitled it *The Book Of Summers* and to Beth's astonishment, it is full of photographs, mementos and notes Marika compiled every summer her daughter came to Hungary. It starts when Beth was 10 and first reunited with her mother, and finishes when she was 16. After that the pages are blank. No more memories. No more summers.

'A story of shattered dreams'

What happened to so totally estrange Beth from Marika? Why does Beth have issues with her own father, who brought her up alone and always did his best for her? Why does Hungary, which over seven summers Beth came to love, even planning to move there permanently, now represent so much heartache and pain? Slowly, almost fearfully, she begins to revisit her past – all of their pasts – by turning the book's pages. This is a lovely story of a mother's love and shattered dreams. And the power of photographs and forgotten trinkets to mend broken hearts.

If you liked this, you'll love these!

Trespass by Rose Tremain £7.99, Vintage Set in France, this is a novel about disputed territory, sibling love and revenge, by the bestselling author of *The Road Home*.

The Hand That First Held Mine by Maggie O'Farrell £7.99, *Headline Review* A portrait of two women's lives, separated by 50 years. A beautifully written novel about love and motherhood.

When God Was A Rabbit by Sarah Winman £7.99, *Headline Review* A hugely touching – and often funny – coming-of-age novel about what it is to love and be a family.

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