



# Sunriver Books & Music

## October 2022

### Newsletter

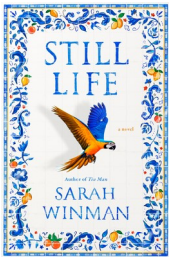
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#### *A Month of Bella Italia!*

Each year we focus for a month on somewhere beyond the boundaries of the USA. This year our Book Clubs chose Italy. Reading books set in other lands allows us to see how people live in a different culture, to gain understanding of the world, to appreciate the beauty of other landscapes. Italy is a gorgeous country! It is a treasure for travelers, filled with history, art, spectacular scenery, culture, and friendly people. Join us in reading books set in Italy. Our Book Clubs will discuss works of historic fiction set in the north and south of the country. There are many great books set in Italy! Here are just a few for your consideration.

The picture is in the Cinque Terre.



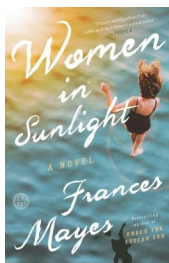
**Still Life** by Sarah Winman. In 1944 Italy was in a losing war, the advancing allies routing the Germans. Not that the Italians were in general keen for the Germans to win, but there was still, even in their eventual defeat, much suffering and death.

Private Ulysses Temper is a young man who has cheated death, several times. He feels lucky, is set to survive this apocalypse. He is on his way to pick up Captain Darnley, a man he would willingly follow through hell, when he spies a lone woman standing by the side of the road.

Evelyn Skinner is 64, she came to Italy as a young woman and fell in love with the country. Her training is art, her hobby bird-watching, she has traveled with a friend from her home in Rome north to Tuscany to volunteer in identifying art the Germans had snatched and return it where it belongs. Evelyn had walked to the road gazing over the vista when Ulysses spots her standing alone.

Ulysses pulls over to see if she might need assistance and a friendship that will last their lifetime begins. Ulysses is an easy guy to like, even though he has his challenges. Not least of which is his wife, a woman not easily put into a box. Evelyn has lived through interesting times and is an engaging character too.

This is one of those books you will cherish! A story so full of joy, sadness, and just the wonder of life that it is a pleasure to read



**Women in Sunlight** by Frances Mayes. Women of a certain age become near invisible, expected to settle down and live quietly. Julia, Susan, and Camille meet at a get together for folks interested in purchasing a condo in a retirement complex. Different reasons brought them; but what they realize is that retirement complex would be an ending when what they want is a new beginning.

Italy becomes that new beginning, an adventure that infuses them with all sorts of new interests and passions. They rent a lovely old home surrounded by a lush garden in Tuscany. One of their first new friends, Kit Raine, is an American author who lives across the way with Colin, an architect. This is a lovely story about three women finding new inspiration and life in a gorgeous setting. A treat to read.

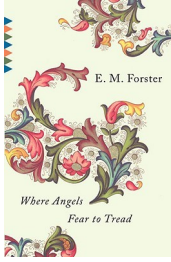


**Enchanted April** by Elizabeth Von Arnim is one of my favorite books. Lottie Wilkens is a young wife married to a lawyer. He is all stiff upper lip British; wanting things done just so and hoping his wife will be an asset to his business. But Lottie doesn't fit well into such a strict and narrow life; a lively woman, she cannot seem to do things right.

It is 1920's Britain, rainy and grey. Lottie stopped at her women's club to read the paper on her shopping rounds. She sees an ad on a house in Italy for the month of April. It starts her dreaming, she thinks if only she could have this little time away, one month, to be on her own and free then she could endure trying to be a better wife, to do things just right. A month in Italy seems so impossible. Where would she come up with the funds for the rental? As she prepares to leave, Lottie sees Rose Arbutnot reading the same ad. Although they do not know one another well, Lottie approaches Rose and the two dream of Italy.

Eventually four unhappy women go to the house in bella Italy. Who can stay unhappy with all the glorious sunshine, blue sea, and fragrant gardens? Italy's enchantment works its magic. Everything in their lives changes and nothing changes. I highly recommend this lovely book. I read it every few years. There is also a BBC movie, but read the book first.

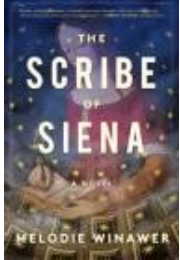
## A Month of Bella Italia!



**Where Angels Fear to Tread** by E.M. Forster. Beware of people with a reputation they regard higher than living beings and a belief in the absolute rightness of their values.

Lilia Harrington, a widow, journeys to Italy with a young traveling companion. The beauty of the landscape and the charm of the people captivate Lilia. She falls for Gino, a younger man, whom her in-laws find highly unsuitable. Her brother-in-law, Peter, travels to Italy to prevent Lilia from marrying Gino and harming their reputations. He arrives too late. Lilia has married her Italian and is bearing his child.

When she dies in childbirth, the Harringtons send Peter to Italy again, to claim the child to be raised as a proper Englishman and protect their public reputations. Foster does a masterful job in portraying the characters and the country.



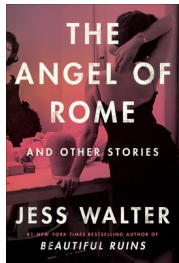
**Scribe of Siena** by Melodie Winawer. A work of historical fiction set in Siena around the time of the plague, a mystery involving powerful men with evil intent, and a love story across the centuries all in this enjoyable novel about a strong-willed woman.

Beatrice is raised by her beloved brother Benjamin. He attains degrees in microbiology and history; she studies medicine becoming a dedicated neurosurgeon. Benjamin's heart condition may have been the catalyst that drew her to be a physician. They have a close bond; she cannot imagine life without him. Beatrice has an extra sense that is both a boon and a danger in her work, her empathy takes her into her patients in such a way that she feels their pain granting her understanding of their condition; it also overpowers and distracts her.

Benjamin falls in love with a city, Siena, and uncovers a mediaeval mystery that may have a bearing on the plague. He tries to lure his workaholic sister away from her New York life for a visit, tells her the guest room is ready, the city gorgeous, and there is a painting he wants to show her. Life gets in the way, three years go by, before Beatrice books tickets for that visit. She is not quick enough, will forever regret not making the time sooner, and Benjamin dies before she reaches Siena.

Bereft she finally arrives at her brother's home in the city he loved where she starts reading his research on the plague years in Siena. As his sole heir she has control of his project, although the estate's attorneys seem determined to have her pass the work on to their candidate, a move she strongly resists. Particularly drawn to the journals of the artist, Gabrielle Accorsi, she goes to the museum to view his paintings, the very painting her brother so wanted to show her, and is startled to see her image in a painting from six centuries ago.

Drawn ever more into the happenings in medieval Siena, one day she falls down the rabbit hole emerging 650 years ago where she meets Gabrielle Accorsi, the artist who painted her visage so long ago. She has arrived ahead of the plague, now she must figure out how to survive in this time period (not an easy task), uncover the mystery her brother was researching, discover how to return to present day, and decide if she wants to return. An interesting story, especially if you enjoy Italy.

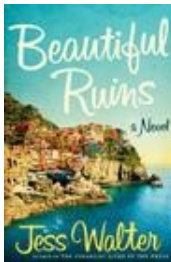


**The Angel of Rome** by Jess Walter is a work of short stories with the title story, a novella, set in Italy. In 1993 Jack Rigel goes to Rome on a scholarship to study Latin. He is from Nebraska, raised by a devout single mother who hoped he would devote his life to the church. Jack is a shy kid, not one of the in crowd, he is hoping that by being in Rome and dressing a bit more hip, he might be able to reinvent himself.

It does not work out the way Jack saw it in his imagination. First of all, he way exaggerated his ability with Latin in applying for the scholarship and is now surrounded by other students far in advance of his ability, a fact that has not escaped the notice of the professor. Then there is the problem of funds. Jack doesn't have much, the stipend he receives for his living expenses is sporadic in arrival and meager in amount. He finds himself lonely, living in a small depressing room, and unable to afford to even feed himself regularly.

Things are about to change for Jack. On the verge of giving up, buying a ticket and going home, Jack runs into two people who will alter everything. Angelina Amadio is an Italian actress with one US film credit in her resume. Not one of her best, but the one Jack watched and was blown away by not only her stunning beauty, but her talent too. Then there is the actor who played Ronnie Tower in the cop drama *Tower & Bridges*. He is best known for the line, "*Here's Trouble*". It fits his personality, could have worked fine as a middle name, because he is well able to introduce young Jack to all kinds of misbehavior. Good for him! Just what the lad needed.

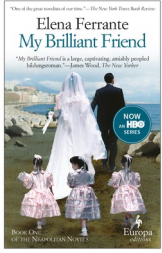
From chance encounters a life is changed, or possibly even redeemed. Good reading.



**Beautiful Ruins** by Jess Walter is absolutely brilliant. Pasquale Tursi takes over his late father's dream of turning their sleepy little inn into a tourist destination for Americans. Nestled at the edge of Italy's Cinque Terre, his village is tiny, remote, and difficult to reach. His farfetched dreams seem to be coming true when a beautiful blond movie actress arrives. It is 1962 and two Titans are setting the world aflame with their passion while portraying another pair of doomed lovers, Anthony and Cleopatra. Pasquale's blond might douse the flames of Burton and Taylor's red hot love affair.

Fast forward to present day Hollywood where a young screenwriter is trying to pitch a storyline to legendary producer Michael Deane's beautiful assistant. But Deane's past is about to catch up with him as Pasquale travels from Italy to Hollywood in search of the actress who changed everything so long ago. Jess Walter is pitch perfect in this beguiling story that spans decades and continents. He uses his settings brilliantly, from Italy to Scotland to Seattle to Sandpoint Idaho. Jess Walter's talent is High Octane.

## A Month of Bella Italia!



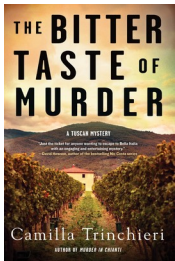
**My Brilliant Friend** by Elena Ferrante is the story of a friendship between two women, Elena and Lily, beginning in childhood. It is set in the 1950's in a working class neighborhood in Naples where it was quite common for the man of the family to impose order (or at least his version of order) by smacking around his wife and kids. Attitudes have, thankfully, changed and it is no longer considered okay to raise a hand in anger or frustration to a woman or child. But this is a story set in a time when it was unusual for a daughter to be educated, schooling was for boys, and the husband's word was law.

It is against these attitudes that Elena and Lily struggle, each intent on living a meaningful life, fierce little girls who battle for their rights while also just doing normal kid type stuff. Most of all it is a story of friendship. This is the first of four novels, following the girls through adolescence to young adults.

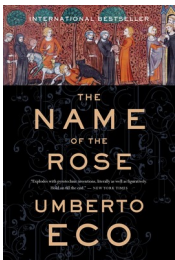


**Good Left Undone** by Adriana Trigiani is the story of four generations of strong women. Matelda has lived in her home, in Viareggio on the Italian coast all her life, as did her mother before her. Matelda is now in her 80's and wondering about her forebearers and how much she has left unsaid to her children and grandchildren. She comes from the Cabrelli family, jewelers of good repute through the generations. On her birthday, she invites her granddaughter Anina, who is engaged and soon to wed, to pick out a piece of jewelry from her collection. As they go through the jewelry, Matelda realizes that each piece has a story, a story that she should pass along to the next generations.

Matelda's mother, Domenica, was a strong woman, a nurse during the WWII. She married twice, . Once to John Lawrie McVickers, a Scottish Captain, and then to her childhood friend, Silvio. Their story is full of drama, the war years, separations and reunions. But there is much Matelda doesn't know either, she never met her Scottish father and doesn't know much about her Scottish ancestors. This is a lovely story about a family, filled with strong women and friendship.

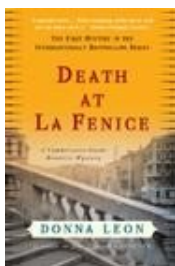


**A Bitter Taste of Murder** by Camilla Trinchieri. Retired NYPD Homicide Detective Nico Doyle has been living in the Tuscan home town of his late wife for a year, still mourning her but finding friendship and a routine the suits him in his new surroundings. He goes almost everywhere accompanied by the dog he rescued. Days he works in the restaurant of his wife's cousins. Working the lunch shift, he meets the man whose homicide he will shortly be helping to investigate. Mantelli is a wine critic with a mean streak, there are many suspects with a motive for murder. This series is set in beautiful country, the characters are likeable, and they dine often on luscious Italian food. A fun series to read.



**The Name of the Rose** by Umberto Eco is set in Sacra di San Michele where in 1327 the Benedictine monks have been accused of heresy. Brother William of Baskerville is sent to investigate the charge, but soon he has several murders to investigate too. All gothic atmosphere, medieval timeframe, full of dark passages, very moody. It was a time when much was believed, little proved, and William is someone who is set on using logic. There is much history, wry humor, and great writing. It is not fast paced, but rather invites you to relish a complicated story, with all of the requisite twists while dishing up an abundance of historic detail. It was made into a movie too, with Sean Connery.

**Death at La Fenice** by Donna Leon is set in one of the most beautiful cities in the world, Venice is a dramatic setting for a mystery. All that moonlight on water, foggy alleys, and quiet canals, the place is positively dripping with mood!



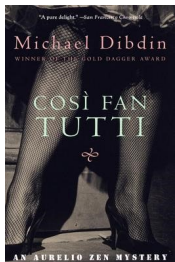
Maestro Helmut Wellauer is a musical genius. Everyone is shocked when he is found dead at La Fenice during intermission. His death is a huge loss to the world of music. It seems incredible such a gifted man would be killed! Gifted he may have been, but quite a few people would find life much brighter and sunnier without Wellauer. Vice Commissario Guido Brunetti must sort through the suspects to find out who stopped the music.

**Earthly Remains** by Donna Leon. Commissario Guido Brunetti employs a rather unusual strategy to prevent a younger officer from a career damaging error. Not thinking of the repercussions, which have him on the way to the hospital wondering now what do I do. Both the doctor and Brunetti agree that a little time away from his job would be beneficial to both his health and mental state. Brunetti is good at his job, but the sadness from the cruelty people visit upon one another takes a toll.



Taking a small leave from the Questura, letting someone else deal with the bad guys for a couple weeks, will give Brunetti time to relax a bit with people who have not committed lethal crimes and recover from his melancholia, or so he believes. Paola, his wife, swiftly arranges a stay at a villa on a quiet island in the lagoon, Sant'Erasmo, belonging to one of her relatives. Paola will stay in Venice with their children and her Henry James novels, while Brunetti takes his Pliny to the island. The caretaker, David Casati, will see to his needs granting him peace and quiet.

Quickly a strong rapport develops between Brunetti and Casati. They spend days rowing to islands in the lagoon tending to Casati's bees. The physical exercise, beauty of the lagoon, and time outdoors are good for Brunetti. A violent storm assaults the island and lagoon; lashing winds, spectacular lightening, driving rain, high waves, rather impressive in its ferocity. The next day Casati cannot be found, Brunetti feels compelled to discover what happened to this man who quickly became his friend.



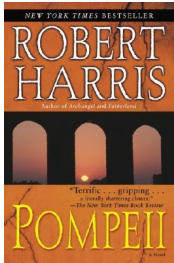
There is so much I enjoy about this series! Venice is one of the most beautiful cities on the planet; Leon's writing captures its romance, blousy glory, and charm. Brunetti is a kind, intuitive man who loves his wife and children, respects his co-workers, and tries to lead a good life. The story goes to dark places, where power can triumph, and the evil good men do is explored.

**Cosi Fan Tutti** is my favorite of Michael Dibdin's excellent Aurelio Zen series. It goes all over Italy as Zen is in the National police thus gets posted many places. In this outing, set in Naples, there are marauding garbage men, lovesick gangsters, and knife wielding sailors. It is a bit more humorous than the other books in the series. **Dead Lagoon** is another favorite, a darker story, perfect for the fog on the canal, dark alleys, moonlight on water of Venice.



Every year our Book Clubs focus for a month on reading books set in a land beyond our borders. This October we are focusing on Bella Italia! History, dramatic landscape, delicious food, culture; Italy has it all! The happy traveler can be sitting one day by the Grande Canal in Venice, strolling amid famous works of art in Florence the next, and hiking in the Dolomites the following. Italy is a wonderful place to visit. All month we will feature books set in Italy, travel to a beautiful country with us on the pages of many great books!

Currently, our Book Clubs are meeting via Zoom. That said, I believe there is a strong possibility that in person Book Club discussions will be added back in October. Zoom discussions will continue, our Zoom Book Club members are a great group! I am also looking forward to meeting with our in-person Book Club members again, they are special too and I miss them. Book Clubs meet on Mondays at 6 PM. Email me at [sunriverbooks@sunriverbooks.com](mailto:sunriverbooks@sunriverbooks.com) if you would like to attend a discussion. Everyone is welcome. The dates mentioned herein are for the Zoom Book Club discussions, if we are able to add back in-person discussions, they would take place the next Monday after the Zoom discussion.

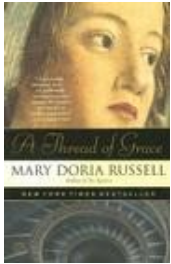


October 3 Mystery Book Club discusses **Pompeii** by Robert Harris, an author known for excellent historic fiction. August 24, 79 AD Mount Vesuvius rained down rocks, fire, and death on the city of **Pompeii**. The story begins two days before the cataclysmic destruction of the city.

Attilius is delighted when he is offered the position of Aquarius in charge of the Aqua Augusta. He comes from a line of distinguished aqueduct engineers and is pleased to accept this opportunity, requiring that he head toward the Bay of Neapolis immediately, as in that minute, to begin the duties of supervising this most challenging aqueduct. The Augusta carries water from the Apennines around Mount Vesuvius to the cities dotting the bay. It traverses difficult terrain over a long distance carrying water to thirsty cities with no other source.

On arrival the young man is presented with more difficulties than the length and terrain of the aqueduct. What happened to the prior Aquarius? Exomnius just vanished. One day he was at work, as usual, the next he was gone without giving any notice. Leaving the aqueduct with no one in charge, hence the need for Attilius to immediately undertake his new duties. And why does the overseer, Corax, take such an instant dislike to Attilius? Before he has time to settle in, a crisis occurs, something wrong with the aqueduct. Somewhere along the line there is a break. If it isn't fixed within the next two days, the reservoir will run dry and the city will be without water.

He needs assistance. He was warned before leaving Rome that the admiral could be difficult. Admiral Pliny is a learned man, the author of many books on the natural world. Attilius will need his help. Of course, little do they know, the condition of the aqueduct will be dwarfed within a couple days by the fury of the mountain.



October 17 Fiction Book Club discusses **Thread of Grace** by Mary Doria Russell. In 1943 Germany's Final Solution was being ruthlessly pursued in the lands they conquered. The world had gone mad, people were being rounded up to die in hideous conditions in concentration camps solely because they were Jewish. This is the story of Jewish people fleeing the Germans over the French Alps into Northern Italy where brave Italians did their best to save them. There are many memorable characters in a novel about a devastating time in history when individuals chose to make a difference, chose to sacrifice to save others, chose to put themselves at risk.

Albert Blum and his 14-year-old daughter Charlotte climb the mountain passes hoping for salvation in Italy. Teen age years are difficult, Charlotte is no exception. But the circumstances thrust upon her by WWII will require she grow up fast or die. Albert, a scholar, is now his child's protector, forced to navigate the dangers surrounding them. Make a wrong choice and the consequences are dire.

The Italians step up to the challenge, sheltering Jewish families and risking death in the process. There are also those whose conscience torments them over acts they committed following orders. Renzo Leoni was a pilot, fighting in Abyssinia, it haunts him. A German doctor is appalled at what his country has become. The novel is populated with memorable characters; partisans fighting the Germans, families trying to escape, individuals putting themselves in harm's way for the greater good.

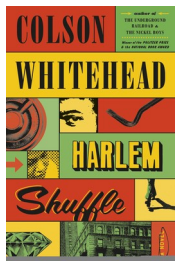
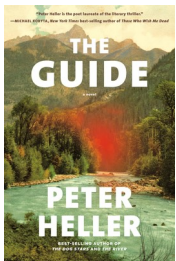
#### Upcoming Book Club Dates for Monday Evenings at 6:00 PM

Everyone is welcome, Meetings are held via Zoom Mondays at 6 PM.  
Times and dates are tentative due to current situation.

#### November

November 7 **The Guide** by Peter Heller **Mystery Book Club.**  
November 21 **Harlem Shuffle** by Colson Whitehead **Fiction Book Club.**

Comment on book clubs, look up future book clubs, or find more information at [Sunriverbooks.com](http://Sunriverbooks.com)



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