



Thanks to everyone who submitted reviews and comments on the latest round of choices we suggested for the Book Club. Also a big thank you for all your messages of support about the Book Club – it is very much appreciated.

Your favourite this time was **Michelle Obama's autobiography Becoming.**

Marion said: "I do not read biographies very often but was tempted by this as we have distant relatives in the US, many of whom we have never met. I was hooked from the first word and was really surprised to hear that she did not come from a privileged background. Although she grew up in a kind of ghetto she survived without the "chip on the shoulder" and I lost myself in her humanity, humility, purpose and admired her values. A staunch supporter of every woman, which was demonstrated by her visit to an English school to talk to the girls whilst on a state visit with her husband. The fascinating insight into political life in the US, which is so perplexing for us here, was told so well. My copy is doing the rounds of friends and the feedback I get is similar to my own views of the book."

Sheila added she thought it was: "A very informative, interesting and at times revealing book. Michelle Obama has had an incredible journey from a very modest, and relatively poor beginning. I liked the insights into American education, college life, and working in the legal sector, but sometimes the detail of the political campaigns was a little tedious, and I couldn't relate to some of it as USA politics are so far removed from ours in the UK. I did find I warmed to Michelle Obama, and especially liked her determination to ensure her daughters had a happy childhood with minimal disruption, although some was inevitable."

Barbara told us: "This one is my favourite in this batch, such an interesting read (although I listened to it on cd instead). I enjoyed having Michelle read it herself I feel it really adds to the story. It is well written, seems very matter of fact and down to earth. I really enjoyed reading about Michelle's childhood and school life. In spite of being in a different country there were so many parallels, I recognised so many experiences and feelings and enjoyed reading her take on them. I liked how much we all have in common. One of my favourite parts was further on once Barack declares his candidacy for president and she goes to her first campaign meeting and realises how much she has in common with the people of Iowa with their lace doillies etc. Just like her aunties. The descriptions of travelling around as the candidate's wife and giving up her job are particularly interesting. There isn't anything I didn't like and listening to it gave added enjoyment and I could knit while I listened."

Alison also listened to the book but had a different opinion about Michelle Obama's delivery. She said she thought it was excellent and added: "I have always admired her from afar and this book really enforced my admiration. Although she came from fairly middle class roots she - and Obama - have worked hard and effectively to be the influencers they are today. As a Black woman in a culture where racism is both covert and overt she has had a lot to overcome. This has made her driven and I would not be surprised if she runs for the Presidency in a few years. She writes movingly about the pressures that arise from being a successful woman trying to bring up a young family - and support a super ambitious husband. The only negative was I listened to the audio book read by Michelle herself - and she has the most terrible reading voice -if I was listening to it when my husband entered the room he walked straight out again as he couldn't bear to listen to her. This does raise some interesting issues about audio books-is the book 's appeal accentuated or diminished by whoever is reading the text?"

However, a different Barbara said: "I read Michelle Obama's book recently and found it interesting but she was a bit too 'goodie goodie' for me - I like a bit of mischief." (!!)

You told us it was hard to say you enjoyed the **Beekeeper of Aleppo** given the harrowing nature of its tale.

Jean said it was compelling and added: I am sure I will go back to this book many times as there are so many incidents and layers. I like the movement between the past and the present and the unfolding of the character Mohammed. The relationship between Afra and Nuri and enduring friendship between Nuri and Mustafa sustains them and gives hope for the future. I was left wondering what happens next. The awful thing is that this is going on all around the world, plus Covid 19. There are those who offer help and those who 'cash in/take advantage' of others in need and distress. I look at news reports with a different eye now."

Rosemary said: "It is perhaps not appropriate to say I enjoyed it as it is harrowing and somewhat disturbing but although it is fiction, this gripping account gives valuable new insight and compassion for the plight of refugees who have tragically lost everything including sadly their children. The story of Nuri and Afra makes uncomfortable reading as we see the depths of their struggle for survival in physically and morally dangerous situations. The book revolves round their changed relationship and their contrasting coping mechanisms. At the beginning we see Nuri as the strong partner and Afra as dependent but it eventually becomes clear that she has a hidden strength and a stronger grasp of reality despite her post traumatic blindness. I did feel that the book finished quite abruptly as we never learn the outcome of their story but it does finish on a note of hope."

Barbara found it "a horrific tale of human endurance and trauma but with some faith in humanity still there." She added: " I did find the way the story was told it was a bit disjointed. I was quite shocked when they became Italian and flew from Madrid to Heathrow but in such desperate circumstances who are we to judge, it was survival. I loved the theme of the calmness of the bees running through it with reassuring

Mustafa but again how terrible when the hives and bees were set on fire in Syria. Certainly a book to make you reflect.”

Another Barbara admitted to finding the book very difficult and upsetting to read. She said: “It was well written but the threat and menace in it were very painful for me, it touched on some very difficult ground not in my own experience but in my parents so I found it a bit too traumatic. I read it a while ago too and as I found it a bit too much quickly put it from my mind so I can't really make any comments on the story.”

Our last recommendation was **Haven't They Grown by Sophie Hannah** and you had some mixed views on this.

Barbara enjoyed this book saying “it was a good fast paced read, ok maybe a little far fetched but very readable and involving. I liked some of the comments on the children, teenagers and parents. Again not one I would have probably picked up myself but that is the point of book clubs to experience things you might not otherwise. I liked the writer's style I recommend this as good holiday reading.”

Alison admitted to not being a fan of the author so was wary of reading it and didn't particularly enjoy it. She explained : “I thought the premise was rather ridiculous. Would Beth and Dom really have been friendly with such an awful man - he was good at hiding his true colours, but to that extent?.... It was a quick read-and I finished it because I wanted to know what happened - I wouldn't recommend it though.”

Graham thought it was “not a bad read” and added: “at times felt it was written to be filmed. It moved along nicely which was just as well, as there were mostly unbelievable characters. And the ending seemed a bit too twee.”

However, Gill loved it, saying: “I found this book almost unputdownable – even at 1am when the eyes gave up! What I liked was that it flowed completely despite the plot twists and turns. I also understood all the characters – it just goes to show that you never really know everyone else even best friends and family. Is there any chance of a sequel to find out what exactly Zannah eventually uncovers?”