



## What We're Reading - 2 July 2021

Lucy Nathan

Opinion - Books Friday, 2nd July 2021

*The BookBrunch team reveals what's on their bedside tables*

### Neill Denny

Finally - some optimism! As a journalist and news junkie negativity, failure, disaster and calamity are my faithful friends. Bad news travels fast, and more importantly sells newspapers. This tendency of the media to focus on the dark side means that we end up with a seriously unbalanced view of the world, in which children are always abducted, wars always break out and harvests always fail. This is the mindset that Rutger Bregman's *Human kind* (Bloomsbury) tackles head on, with a relentless and compelling argument that things are actually a lot better than you think, that people are intrinsically kind and well-intentioned, that society doesn't collapse Mad Max-style under mass bombing, or even during a pandemic (bog roll excepted). And where did I find this glorious paean to the essential goodness of humans? In WH Smith's top 30 chart, hemmed in by grisly crime novels and high body-count thrillers...



### Nicholas Clee



Is it noir, is it gritty, is it funny, is it dirtily poetic? The chances are it's published by No Exit. The press' latest discovery is Lee Durkee's *The Last Taxi Driver*, a wild, sometimes surreal ride to oblivion in the company of Lou, a one-time novelist and writing teacher now driving a collection of drug addicts, alcoholics, psychotics and other misfits to various destinations in north Mississippi. Lou's passengers "are always with me, all my meth heads, plus the guy sniffing his TV dinner, the long-faced farmer covered in grasshoppers, the hundred-year-old man in his hospital gown, the Goth girl, the howling baby, they are all crowded into the back seat of my Town Car like some demented team photo I glimpse,

only for a moment, every time I check the rearview." I don't mean to imply that *The Last Taxi Driver* is just like other No Exit titles you may have read. It's an original.

### Lucy Nathan

*Careless* by Kirsty Capes (Orion) was published in May, and it is a really moving and wonderful book. It's the story of 15-year-old Bess, her experiences in care, and what happens when she finds out she's pregnant after her first relationship. It's a fierce and energetic book, very readable, with characters who all feel incredibly real and full of life. Bess is a brilliant character: brave, lost, full of feelings she can't quite identify but are incredibly vivid. As she battles between having an abortion or following her dream to be a filmmaker, the ways that the care system lets down young people are starkly drawn, and the impact on children of never feeling truly loved. Still, it isn't a bleak book: her relationship with her best friend Eshal is bright and beautiful, and the reader is left with faith that Bess will find her way in the world.





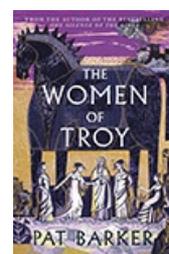
### Jo Henry

Highly recommended in a summer reading roundup in the Guardian recently, I splashed out on a hardback copy of *Early Morning Riser* by Katherine Heiny - and what a treat! Jane, a primary school teacher, moves to Smalltown USA (in fact Boyce City, where I see the author also lived), meeting the charming, good looking but rather feckless furniture restorer Duncan on her first day there. She falls for him - but so, it turns out, has nearly every other woman of a marriagable age in Boyce City - though Duncan is a commitment-phobe. How they navigate their way around this and manage to create a rather eccentric family life is beautifully told. She reminds me very much of Anne Tyler, and I will be seeking

out her earlier books.

### David Roche

*The Women of Troy* (Hamish Hamilton) by Pat Barker continues the story of Briseis after the fall of Troy from the wonderful *The Silence of the Girls*, which was shortlisted for multiple awards. The book opens inside the Trojan Horse and sets the context for what follows. The Greeks have won the war but despite their treasures and spoils, they are becalmed on the beaches outside the city and can't get home. The politics of the peace become as difficult as the battles that have been and gone. Briseis tries to endure while carrying the child of the deceased Achilles, by using her wits and brutally earned experience to win friends and influence others in the enemy camp, as their fragile society starts to disintegrate. The Gods are upset and something has to give... This book is out on August 26 and is as engaging as its predecessor - plenty of time to get up to speed before then. You won't regret it.



Source article: <https://www.bookbrunch.co.uk/page/article-detail/what-we-re-reading--2-july-2021>