

# THE BODECIA BOOK CLUB REVIEW

## **Forgive Me by Amanda Eyre Ward**

**Harper Perennial Publishers £6.99 ISBN 9780007233861**

Nadine Morgan travels the world as a journalist, covering important events, following dangerous leads, and running from anything that might tie her down. Since an assignment in Cape Town ended in tragedy and regret, Nadine has not returned to South Africa, or opened her heart—until she hears the story of Jason Irving.

Jason, an American student, was beaten to death by angry local youths at the height of the apartheid era. Years later, his mother is told that Jason's killers have applied for amnesty. Jason's parents pack their bags and fly from Nantucket to Cape Town. Filled with rage, Jason's mother resolves to fight the murderers' pleas for forgiveness.

As Nadine follows the Irvings to beautiful, ghost-filled South Africa, she is flooded with memories of a time when the pull toward adventure and intrigue left her with a broken heart. Haunted by guilt and a sense of remorse, and hoping to lose herself in her coverage of the murder trial, Nadine grows closer to Jason's mother as well as to the mother of one of Jason's killers—with profound consequences. In a country both foreign and familiar, Nadine is forced to face long-buried demons, come to terms with the missing pieces of her own family past, and learn what it means to truly love and to forgive.

There are some big themes in the book - motherhood, forgiveness, the dilemmas faced by the professional woman – all skilfully examined in a very enjoyable read.

The book looks into the Truth and Reconciliation Hearings which brought home a clear, non-judgemental picture of the inequities of apartheid and the evil done by both black and white in the name of 'right' or 'freedom'. There are some wonderful word pictures of South Africa and the stark reality and somewhat gruesome images of the farm where horrific tortures took place.

*Out of the 7112 petitioners that went in front of the Amnesty Committee of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission seeking amnesty for violence crimes during the apartheid era, 5392 people were refused amnesty and 849 were granted amnesty.*

Jason's mother is reluctant to speak to Nadine but the father hands her some excerpts from his son's diary. Intercut with Nadine's story are diary excerpts, flashbacks, articles and phone calls, which cleverly toys with our sense of time, so that by the end, we have seen Nadine in three different decades (and three very different phases) of her life. We enjoyed reading these flashbacks but all of the group got pulled up short almost at the end of the book when we realised how Amanda Eyre Ward had carefully, almost unkindly lead us astray and allowed us to make false assumptions. We got confused, asked others what had happened and laughed out loud at being caught out so skilfully. We all found ourselves going to go back again and see where we had missed the clues.

A high point was where Nadine got through to Jason's mother, Sophie to talk to her son's killer's mother. Nadine has read in Jason's journal that he had felt alone in the country and to ease his parents pain said to Jason's parents that they were lovers. We felt at this point of the book was Nadine calculating and unfair or was she sincerely trying to put his parents at rest that he had lived his life? It indicates in the book that his father understood what Nadine was doing and was aware of the lie although left his mother happy with the story. This is also what turned her round to speak with Tholake.

At the beginning of the book we understand Nadine's relationships with her step-mother and her best friend from school Lilly. Her step-mother longs for her acceptance but Nadine can not find a place for her to replace her mother. Nadine and Lilly's relationship is one of Lilly has always been there for her, to listen to her dramatic adventures as a journalist, until Lilly herself finds herself more involved as a full time mum. Something Nadine does not understand but deep down something she is jealous of and what she longs for. We are also introduced to Dr Duarte who become Nadine's lover and who she leaves to go back to South Africa, she puts the emotional ties behind the scent of a front page story.

The ending left us wanting to know more – although all agreed that it was a great ending to the book. You'll have to read it!!

We gave *Forgive Me* **7.7 / 10**, which currently stands as top on our books reading list.

The book we are now reading is **The Palace of Strange Girls by Sallie Day**.

**Don't forget the first rule of Book Club!**