



Summer in February

Jonathan Smith

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While making a speech attacking modern art, Sir Alfred Munnings is taken back 40 years to a special time and place. Major Evans, listening to him on the radio, is also flooded with memories, and wonders how everything changed in both their lives.

Summer in February Details

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Author : Jonathan Smith

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From Reader Review Summer in February for online ebook

Toni Allen says

If you're interested in art and enjoy discovering more about the personal lives of artists then you'll enjoy Summer in February. Although this is not a biography Jonathan Smith did extensive original research in order to write the most convincing story about Alfred Munnings, world famous painter of horses, and his life in the artistic community in Lamorna, Cornwall, at the beginning of the 20th Century.

Summer in February is a snapshot in time, covering only a few years prior to the outbreak of WW1 and revolving around the love triangle between Munnings, Florence and the estate manager Gilbert Evans.

Jonathan Smith evokes a wonderful sense of scene. When reading the book you can smell the tang of the sea air mingled with the artist's turpentine. All the characters are well portrayed and by the end of the book you feel that you know them all personally, their desires, their motivations and their passions.

Summer in February has now been made into a film starring Dominic Cooper as AJ Munnings, Dan Stevens as Gilbert Evans and Emily Browning as Florence Carter-Wood. It's due to be released in 2013.

Erika Schotty says

I saw the movie first, and it seemed to be missing a piece of the story, which left me intrigued to read the book. I didn't understand Florence's character; why she made the decisions she did; and I was hoping the book would give more insight. It did not, as the story is told through the men (mainly Gilbert), switching between first and third person. This lack of detail on Florence makes more sense in the book, as the men would not be able to know everything she is thinking or feeling, but it made me lack empathy for Florence. I only felt it for Gilbert, whose character I love. Overall, I found the book to be an enjoyable read.

Trelawn says

This is the story of the artists colony at Lamorna, Cornwall in the early 20th century. While giving a general view of the artists, the story centres on the love triangle between the great artist Alfred Munnings, fellow artist Florence Carter Wood and Captain Gilbert Evans. Having read Churchill KBO by the same author I have to say I really enjoy his style. He makes historical figures come to life on the page. That sounds cheesy, I know, but when reading his books you can hear Churchill blustering away or Munnings drunkenly quoting Poe as though you were in the room with them. This is both engaging and disconcerting but makes for entertaining reading. Would certainly recommend this.

Ann says

took a little while to get into but I loved the characters except for one. To think that this is a true story written from a diary makes it even more heart rendering/frustrating and also made me want to do research on the characters.

Maha Maged says

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Emma says

I read this book a while ago. It is set in the valley where my mother lives. My Great Aunt Ella Naper and her husband Charlie where part of the Lamorna School of artists and life long friend of the Knights. I enjoyed reading this tragic story especially as I grew up hearing the names of many of the protagonists.

Damien Mosley says

Beautiful and delicate. I just finished it and am filled with that wave of loss and tragedy that exudes a truly beautiful book. Have I used beautiful twice? Well perhaps that is because it is the most apt description. From the Cornish coastal setting to the gentle build and affection the book brought out in me. What it does so well is know how to build and then not to linger. To move the story on and not dwell when love has been achieved. And though I normally do not like a sad ending, it was done with such tenderness that it was the only way.

Cathy says

This is a beautifully written book about real people and gives a fascinating insight into the Cornish art community of the 1920's. The author deals with a tragic situation very sympathetically. This isn't the sort of book I would usually read but I am very glad I did.

Mary says

Lovely descriptions of the Cornish landscape.

A sad and tragic story of the artists in Lamorna.

I really felt for Captain Evans who's love for Florence which could never be shown after her marriage to Alfred Munnings.

Would love to see the film.

If you love art and paintings , this is based on actual people from the turn of the century.

erica says

I loved reading this book. The older I get the more I notice whether I pick up a book because I think the subject is interesting or whether I like the writing style and won't be able to put it down. Summer in February is a perfect example of why one should never have to choose between the two. The format isn't 100% linear and Smith never has to spell out the obvious pieces. He trusts the reader with the plot and characters- clearly a well structured book. Still, it is highly readable, with brief, dreamy scenic passages and engaging plot and intriguing characters. As an artist, I was immediately inspired by Munnings' opening speech. Perhaps the best thing about this book, which I've yet to encounter before, is that the artists read- they speak and act- as artists. Too often, stories about artists get it wrong and the characters and their words are a cliché of what non-artists imagine. This book had the perfect balance of entertainment and artistic substance for me.

Christine says

A sad but thoughtful book. I wanted to shake the main characters to stop them making such a mess of their lives. Based on a true story of AJ Munnings and some of his fellow artists in Cornwall in the early 1900's just before the WW1. Florence is tragic and naive but everyone loves her. A slow book but enjoyable in a mellow way.

Rebecca Foster says

I knew very little about this novel when I picked it up in a charity shop 3 for 95 pence deal. From the ads for the 2013 film adaptation with Dan Stevens, I had in mind that this was an obscure classic. It was in fact published in 1995, but is inspired by real incidents spanning roughly 1909 to 1949. It's set among a group of Royal Academy-caliber artists in Lamorna, Cornwall, including Alfred Munnings, who went on to become the academy's president in 1944–9.

The crisis comes when Munnings and Captain Gilbert Evans, a local land manager, fall for the same woman. A love triangle might not seem like a very original story idea, but I enjoyed this novel particularly for its Cornish setting ("From dawn to dusk it had rained non-stop, as only Cornwall can"; "The sea was slate grey and the sky streaky bacon") and for the larger-than-life Munnings, who has a huge store of memorized poetry and is full of outspoken opinions. Two characters describe his contradictions thusly: "I can see he's crude and loud and unpolished and Joey says he cuts his toenails at picnics but..."; "he's one in a million, a breath of fresh air, and he's frank and fearless, which is always a fine thing."

The title refers to the way that love can make any day feel like summer.

(The cover image is *Morning Ride* by A.J. Munnings.)

For more information on Munnings, see [here](#).

For more information on Gilbert Evans, see [here](#). (Beware spoilers!)

Tweedledum says

Summer in February explores the relationships between a group of artists living and working at in and around Lamorna Cove near Penzance during the early art of the C20. This group included Alfred Munnings and Laura Knight both of whom were to receive high honours for their work with Munnings being knighted and rising to become President of the RA while Laura Knight was the first woman artist to receive an OBE. When the author began to discover and explore the tragedy of the death of Munnings' wife, who committed suicide in July 1914, but who is hardly mentioned in either Laura Knight's autobiography or that of Munnings, he uncovered the extra-ordinary story that Smith tells with deep sensitivity and empathy in this book. Personally I found it a riveting read.

Having joined the artists' community with her brother, Florence Carter-Wood (Blote) entered into marriage with Alfred Munnings entirely of her own free will, appearing to have become fascinated enough by him to agree to an engagement. Yet, bizarrely enough, she first attempted suicide on her wedding night itself, having previously obtained the poison to do so. She survived this attempt and both her friends and husband thought that she had moved on. A film has been made of the book and the film attempts to shed some light on the *raison d'être* behind Florence's first suicide attempt but surely this must remain pure speculation. Perhaps this is why people love novels. In a novel the author can explain human actions in a myriad of ways. But in reality suicide can rarely be fully comprehended or understood and always leaves those who knew and loved the victim deeply emotionally scarred. Often they spend many years searching hopelessly for answers.

Part of the author's skill in this book is that he makes no attempt to explain or give answers for the prurient reader. He presents the facts as they were known and understood by Florence's friends and husband in an oblique and delicate way and makes no assumptions nor forces us to any conclusions. We may infer that the tragedy of her death clearly weighed heavily on the lives of those who loved her and were closest to her. Indeed their silence on the subject powerfully suggests this. They forbore to speculate, to justify, to excuse or to condemn. We may infer that Florence's naivety and strict upbringing ill-equipped her for the roller coaster of emotions she experienced when she moved to Lamorna, but in the end, we, observers almost from another universe, so distant does the early C21 seem from the motives and mores of the C20, can no more know the answers than they could.

Instead Jonathan Smith invites us to enter into their world, to feel and see the excitement, the frustrations, the longings, the restrictions of the members of that community. And what a rich community it is. Rich in spirit, in creativity, in *joie de vivre*. Entering into the world we feel the tragedy, the grief, the loss in part....only in part.... And we wonder how those who were so close to Florence bore it. The suicide of one beautiful young woman on the eve of WW1 was perhaps quickly subsumed into the greater tragedy of that hideous conflict. But it may be that it also spurred those people on to a greater sense of purpose and focus in their lives.

Lauren says

Mostly just a drawn-out love triangle, *Summer in February* is set in an early twentieth-century artist colony. Based around actual people, Florence Carter-Wood, the woman at the center of the triangle, is little more than the Edwardian version of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl. She's not developed enough as a character in her own right, so we're given no insight into her choices or thoughts, leaving her as a beautiful-but-blank canvas

on which the men of the story can craft their own narratives.

That could actually work as a story, but there's no awareness to indicate that Mr. Smith intended that sort of comment. Instead it feels like it's a story about men and their relationships – and even that's flimsy – and, oh yeah, how women muck everything up. Silly women! Book: Not recommended.

As for the film adaptation, the cast's talent is woefully underused, and none of the characters are sufficiently developed to explain their actions. Also not recommended.

Lucie says

The movie is going to wreck me. WHY.

Anyhow, it was so interesting to learn about artists in that era and to be able to see a little of their closed world. I really liked Gilbert but that's no surprise for he is portrayed by Dan Stevens in the movie. However, I really can't stand Alfred Munnings. I know this is fiction, so please someone tells me I shouldn't dislike him that much. Because in the book, I can't.

Moreover, I thought it was clumsy to have the book start in 1949, with only two chapters at that time, and the rest in the 1910s. Of course the whole story was set around that time BUT it would have given me more closure to end the book on a chapter set in 1949. It feels a bit unfinished to me.

It was a decent historical novel but not the best. It's inspired by real events and while I knew how it would end because of it, I still cried. I'm quite excited to see the movie *whispers* because of Dan Stevens.
