



The Angel Makers

Jessica Gregson

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"Like Tracy Chevalier in *Girl with the Pearl Earring*, Gregson excels at developing strong, complex female voices; a swift plot; and a story that will hold readers from beginning to end.*Booklist*

When the men of a remote Hungarian village go off to war in 1916, the women left behind realize their lives are much better without them. Suddenly, they are not being beaten; they have time for friendships; they even find romance with the injured Italian soldiers staying just outside of town.

For Sari, an intelligent girl who's always been an outcast (her fellow villagers suspect her of being a witch because of her medical knowledge), it's the first time in her life she's had friends. When the men return at war's end, the freedom Sari and the others have enjoyed is suddenly snatched from them, and they realize they need to do whatever it takes to hold onto it. Sari puts her medical knowledge to use to off her husband. Then she helps one of her friends. And another. When the word spreads, she realizes her problems are only beginning.

This creeping and hugely readable first novel is based on a true story.

The Angel Makers Details

Date : Published December 6th 2011 by Soho (first published February 6th 2007)

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Author : Jessica Gregson

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From Reader Review The Angel Makers for online ebook

Danni The Girl says

Not what I expected at all. This one was a very pleasant surprise.

I really like Judit. She was a very enjoyable character.

I wish Marco and Sari lived happily ever after that's what I would have liked, but it turned from a love story into a sinister almost horror story, something that would be really good if American Horror Story took on, could make it really evil and twisted. I liked this, read it within 24 hours

Jamie Hughes says

According to the information I read before I selected this book, it is based partially on fact. Apparently, there actually was a village in Hungary where a midwife not only provided arsenic to kill abusive husbands but also sons, mothers-in-law, and anyone else who got in the way of a woman's will. The "true story" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ange..._of_Nagyr%C3%A9v) is much more straightforward than the novel, which has a cast of colorful characters and a very sympathetic protagonist.

The plot is focused; very little happens in the way of action and scope. However, moving the "camera" around sparingly allows readers to drink in what's there with great depth. That's what I was hoping for, but while Ms. Gregson mentions the vastness of the landscape around the village and how awe inspiring/terrifying it is quite often, she never fully describes it in any detail. I never got a sense of the place. The people, in contrast, are more well-drawn, their emotions detailed, and their thoughts and motivations deconstructed. The women are painted much more sympathetically than the male characters, and other than a handful of Italian soldiers in the prison, most of them are loathsome. I just feel like there was a lot left on the table with this one that could have given it greater oomph with regards to the story. A good read, sure, but not as great as it could have been.

Danny says

Sari didn't set out to be a murderer. But it turned out to be the only way. No, not the only way. There is always a choice, she would tell you. She chose to be a murderer. That just wasn't the plan at the beginning.

When the men of a Hungarian village leave to fight in World War I, their wives and girlfriends are left behind to cope with the absence. The days don't seem to be that much different until a group of Italian POWs are housed near the village. Now the women go to the makeshift prison to do washing and cooking, to barter what they can in exchange for a slightly better life. Perhaps it is inevitable that mixing lonely Hungarian women and lonely Italian soldiers leads to a few affairs. But soon it is common knowledge that many of the women are carrying on with the soldiers. Some of the women are happier than they've ever been.

But then the men begin to return, and they can tell that the village isn't the same. When Sari's fiance comes back and discovers what's been going on he makes her life a living hell. She makes a choice, and with the

help of her friend Judit she poisons him. She thinks she's gotten away with it, too, but then the first of the village women shows up asking for her help with her own problems. Soon, Sari is providing poison for many women in the village, and husbands and other family members are dropping left and right.

Will the authorities take notice?

How did this happen in a tiny village?

What forces would cause women to kill the men they married?

This isn't a very good review, but I'm tired, so you'll have to deal.

What I will say is that I would have given it more stars if I didn't feel like it was obvious that this was a novice novelist. Her phrases and descriptions are good, but the Point of View is all over the place, which seemed distracting at times.

Still, it was enjoyable and claims to be based on a true story, so...creepy.

Elspeth G. Perkin says

While all the ingredients were there to create a dazzling retelling of a story that is based on actual events, it just fell flat on its delivery. My regrets of requesting this book began within a few chapters. I had an impression that Ms. Gregson didn't know exactly what to do with her main character, she is described several ways a few chapters and contradicts this all the next. This flip-flopping of personalities and traits gets rather annoying and delayed me really caring what happened to the main character. The other characters were just as maddening, and by the end I wanted it just to be over with.

The lack of history details was puzzling, we are supposed to feel the time period and imagine ourselves in 1914 and several years after but I kept stopping and thinking, this story could be set any time. Not once did I read any event or could pin-point the time period. I'm sorry but that is a big pet peeve of mine, I read historical fiction to learn and experience another period in history and I didn't learn or experience anything from *The Angel Makers*.

What I really found the book lacked for me was self-examination of the characters. I wanted to know the ultimate "why?" of the character's actions. I wanted to come away after reading maybe understanding something of the dark side of the pushed human mind but my hopes were dashed and only were answered with the continued anachronisms, unexpected filthy language and yet another descriptive domestic abuse/rape scene from this book. There seemed to be more interest and fixation on abuse and rape than anything else.

In the end, *The Angel Makers* started out with such a captivating premise but then loses its way a few chapters in resorting to tawdry gimmicks, lack of consistent characterization and historical details that caused me to roll my eyes and curse myself for being tricked into requesting (*from my local library) and reading yet another mislabeled title disguising itself as Historical Fiction.

Viviane Cordeiro says

Quando a WWI explodiu, em 1914, o mundo se encontrava em um misto de perplexidade e emoção perante o ativismo feminino: o movimento sufragista ganhava força, muitas mulheres começavam a se posicionar nas lutas de classe e gênero, mas nada disso parecia importar em uma pequena aldeia na Hungria. É assim que somos apresentados a Sari, protagonista da brilhante obra de Jessica Gregson, que vive em uma aldeia húngara com seu pai, um Wise Man que domina a arte das poções herbais. Após seu falecimento, Sari vai morar com a velha curandeiro Judit que a acolhe como se fosse uma amada familiar. Como em outros vilarejos da época, o casamento é organizado por familiares, e Sari se vê em vias de casar com Ferenc, o filho mais jovem de uma das famílias mais abastadas do vilarejo e que aparenta realmente gostar dela, contrariando toda a aldeia que aparenta viver em receio eterno por terem a garota “amaldiçoada” na vizinhança. Com o início da guerra, todos os homens do vilarejo são convocados a lutar e as mulheres se vêem em uma situação até então desconhecida: subitamente elas não são mais espancadas pelos maridos, começam a sentir uma estranha sensação de liberdade nunca antes vivida e até mesmo as chamadas párias sociais, como Sari, tornam-se companheiras e confidentes, criando um laço emocional até então inexistente entre elas. A recém descoberta liberdade é aflorada pela chegada de prisioneiros de guerra Italianos que são mantidos em um campo na vila e começam a se relacionar com as mulheres da aldeia. Com a iminência do fim da guerra e o retorno a uma vida pautada em humilhações e agressões, as mulheres começam a pensar em possibilidades para fugir do martírio o qual elas vivem no casamento, decidindo assim se livrar dos maridos, nem que pra isso fosse necessário matá-los, um por um.

‘The Angel Makers’ é baseado na história real do vilarejo de Nagyrév na Hungria, e Jessica Gregson fez um ótimo trabalho em retratar a vida destas mulheres que recorreram a um crime e chocaram toda uma sociedade em sua busca pela liberdade.

Amy says

Some of my favorite books are novels that are based upon true events or actual people, so I am always drawn to book blurbs that say they are based upon a true story. The Angel Makers by Jessica Gregson is a page turning, thoroughly engrossing read that is inspired by actual events. Set in Hungary just before the First World War, The Angel Makers tells the story of Sari, a young orphaned girl that is often ostracized by the other villagers. Unusual to begin with Sari lives with the old crone midwife of the village and is often accused of being a witch. Her salvation comes in the form of her engagement to a boy from one of the wealthiest families of the village. Before the two can marry war breaks out and most of the men of the village are called to fight. Surprisingly, the absence of the men is liberating for the women of the village and Sari even makes friends in the camaraderie that naturally occurs when the town must all pull together to survive. War often brings many unintended consequences, and when a group of Italian prisoners of war are being held near the village many of the women experience their first and only true experiences of love and desire. Thus when the war ends and the men of the village return many of the women of the village are reluctant to revert to their positions of submission. A sinister plan develops and many of the men suddenly fall ill and die. Soon however it is not just the abusive husbands that fall victim to sudden death but also those that are burdensome or meddling, men and women alike. The Angel Makers is a riveting read, made all the more powerful due to the fact that it is founded in actual events. In Sari, Gregson has created a strong, independent woman that readers will find complex and very realistic. The Angel Makers is a compelling,

unforgettable read.

Katharine Ott says

"The Angel Makers" - written by Jessica Gregson and first published in 2007 by Legends Press. Read via Kindle. One might think that Gregson has a vivid imagination, to write a story of a small town in Hungary where the women, after their damaged menfolk return from the wars in the early 1900s, decide to remove said menfolk from their lives permanently. And her imagination works just fine to flesh out the story featuring Sari, who's "clever, and outspoken, and difficult" and who fights to prevent herself from being "crammed inexorably into the prefabricated mould out of which most village women seem to step." She partners with Judit, a crotchety, elderly sort of medicine woman who has a reputation as "an angyalcsinalo, an angel maker, an abortionist." But surprisingly, this book is based on a true story which makes what these women did even more shocking. Gregson has done a fine job of portraying the powerful emotions swirling around the tiny village and I recommend the book as a "truth is stranger than fiction" story - you'll gasp as you read how "Sari and Judit were doling out death from that little wooden house."

Cindi says

Review originally posted on my blog : <http://utahmomslife.blogspot.com/2011...>

Sari is a young apprentice to the local midwife in an isolated Hungarian village when the men, including her fiance, are called away to fight in World War I. For most of the women, who have arranged marriages, having their husbands away is a relief. Before long many of the women, including Sari, begin relationships with the Italian prisoners that are kept at a nearby POW camp. But the war ends and the consequences must be faced. The Italian men leave and the village men return. However, the women are not ready to return to the repressed and abused lives they lived before the war.

Desperate to escape her cruel fiance, Sari uses poison to slowly end his life. An abused friend and then another ask Sari for help and soon the village and Sari are engulfed in a macabre conspiracy of murder.

The Angel Makers by Jessica Gregson is a novel based on a true story. During the years following World War I as many as 300 people were murdered in the village before investigators from outside finally figured out what was really happening. In her novel, Gregson, elaborating on the known facts, shows a decidedly human view of the story--at once sympathetic and outrageous.

As much an ethical discussion on the value of life and of personal choice, The Angel Makers is a mesmerizing and horrifying novel. Like many who met her, I found myself entranced by the character of Sari and I appreciated the descriptions of the village and the life.

My only complaint with the novel was the excessive use of foul language.

Lady says

April 2017

“The Angel Makers” by Jessica Gregson

Genre: Historical Fiction

4.5/5

Pros:

There are so many things this book did right.

So, to get the basics out of the way: the stage of a pre and post WW2 Hungarian village that deals with a world-altering historical event, and proceeds in spectacular human fashion to make it far more complicated than it needs to be, is well developed, and stands out as not only a vivid and relatable world, but as the metaphorical catalyst that will turn each of the women in this village into the hideous creatures who become starved for power and desperate for control over their own lives.

(That was a mouthful, I know.)

There is so much to unpack in this book, it's like a buffet! I loved each one of the characters, and felt like I could not only deeply sympathize with the women, but also the men of the village, too. It's not too much of a stretch to say that even the anti-heroes and antagonists are tough to label as “villains” or “bad guys” because the author has a way of shining a light on the vivid and pitiable situations each of these women find themselves in. But, it also doesn't drag me (as the reader) too far down into the muck, either. There are those stories who stop at nothing to drag their audience through the same shit as their characters (perhaps thinking this would generate more of an emotional reaction from the audience?) but (for me, only) doing that would only be a distraction, serving only to sever my ties from the character's word. It was a wonderful balance to strike between the two methods, and the results created a narrative that was so easy to slip my imagination into, all I had to do was click on my kindle and bam! There I was.

The pacing was excellent, too. The author doesn't uselessly drag out each character's emotional and logical growth, parceling out vivid (yet concise) scenes that show rather than tell, but there was a huge emotional growth for our MC to go through, so this book ends up covering several major events over about ten years or so. Make no mistake, this book has a lot of story to tell. But even with all these events to cover, the story never slows down or becomes dull. In fact, the closer you get to the end, the more things start happening, until finally, you get this ending that kind of comes out of nowhere, yet truthfully, couldn't have ended any other way.

Non-Cons:

I had to see what others said about this book to find much of anything wrong with this story at all. It took me a long time to get out of the haze of “this book is so good!” to even start to see the cracks and flaws – and honestly, I couldn't find much.

One critique mentioned that there was a lot of sex and profane language, and that it wasn't necessary and (for this person) a huge deal-breaker. But I disagree; showing things like sex, violence, and a curse word or two (honestly, there really wasn't much cursing and no smut) showed how down-to-the-marrow human these characters were. After the men got scooped by the war, the women talked openly with each other about how horny they were, and their desires “to fuck someone, anyone, even you girls!”, and how, after their men return, they are bloodied and bruised and sexually molested (again, not in extensive detail, but enough to get the point across). This went a long way to not only ground the characters, but make them extremely relatable and drive their motivation.

Another critique was that the backgrounds and settings weren't described in-detail enough. True, the author doesn't take a paragraph and a half to describe what the river looked like, or the forests, or the houses or even the village itself. But I don't think they have to. Don't get me wrong, it's not like that description would have

bogged down the narration at all, but the story isn't in what these places looked like, but rather, how the people looked while living in them. So, as a result, we get scant details here and there. "Flowers began to bloom as the village entered spring" kind of vague. All the detail is saved for the characters inner turmoil. How they wrestle with their faith and their viewpoints on the sanctity of life and one's right to take it or prolong it. What situations life creates for you, and the ones you create for yourself – and the consequences those choices bring. How mistakes happen so easily, and how justifications come springing up even easier. How intoxicating power is, and how quickly one loses control, and starts being controlled, instead. And to show that, the author had to go into the characters, and use their descriptive talents to bring out these deliciously complex attitudes and perspectives.

The only thing I ended up noticing was that if you took the story out of it's historical context, and move the characters to Beverly Hills, then this kind of story can easily be turned into a soap opera. And again, I don't count that as a negative because soap operas are an extremely entertaining kind of storytelling. And adding it's historical context and moral dilemmas just serves to give it an appropriate weight and tone.

Rating: 4.5/5 – Fascinating Trip Through History

tl;dr: the book handles large, complex thoughts and feelings over fascinating and true historical events with masterful ease. I couldn't put it down. Well worth your time!

R.S. Carter says

I wanted to read this novel because it was based on a true story. A group of women conspired together in a small village in Hungary and over a period of a decade or so, murdered hundreds of people. Mostly men. The main conspirators sign the death certificates and furnished the arsenic to make the deaths look like a horrible illness. These women did so because of regular abuse. But death came so easy. It soon spread to include burdensome parents, nasty in-laws and maybe even some troublesome children.

THIS ACTUALLY HAPPENED.

The Angel Makers retells the story taking some liberties to create central characters, fictitious back stories and lots of embellishments. Overall, it was an interesting read. But I was hoping it would have been a little more factual.

Ricki Treleaven says

This week I read *The Angel Makers* by Jessica Gregson. The novel is based on a true story, and it is one of the most chilling historical stories I have ever read (not involving an oppressive government). If you are interested, google *The Angelmakers of Nagyrev* for more information.

The story begins in 1914, shortly before the beginning of World War I, in the tiny, remote Hungarian village of Faluscka. Fourteen year old Sari Arany's father, Jan, is a talto, or wise man. He is very well-respected in their village, but not Sari. Wise women tend to be feared, and since her mother died during Sari's childbirth, rumors have surrounded Sari her whole life. Sari has been promised to Ferenc, the eighteen year old heir from the wealthiest family in the village. That was the custom in Hungary at the time: Girls' parents chose their husbands for them. Before Jan dies suddenly from a heart issue, Sari promises him that she will wait until she is eighteen before marrying Ferenc. World War I intervenes before Ferenc can persuade Sari to

break her father's promise, and he goes off to fight. Sari does not live in her father's old house because it would not be proper, so she moves in with Judit, the village's midwife and rumored to be a witch.

About two years into the war, the army commandeered Ferenc's family's estate to use as a prisoner of war camp. The army holds many Italian prisoners there, and the army gives them far more freedom than is seemly. By this time, the women of the village have become accustomed to making their own way and not answering to overbearing, sometimes abusive, husbands. Many of the women have affairs with the prisoners, and many of the women are not happy when the war ends.

Sari has a relationship with an Italian named Marco. He was a history professor before the war, and Sari befriends him initially because she has a true love for learning. As Sari's services as a nurse are needed at the prison, Sari has the opportunity to meet with Marco, and their relationship deepens. At the end of the war, Ferenc comes home, and he is not the same young man he was before the war. He is abusive and cruel to Sari, and he forces her hand. She decides to kill him with arsenic to protect something precious to her, and her actions start a series of events that spiral crazily out of control.

I enjoyed *The Angel Makers* overall, but I must warn you that Gregson drops tons of f-bombs, and she is overly fond of the word discomfited. When writers overuse words, it is a distraction to me. I also found it difficult to sympathize with Sari in spite of the book's theme of choices and feminine empowerment. Still, Gregson's plot moves steadily along, and I could not put the book down. I read it in two days even with my very busy schedule this week.

Tara Chevestt says

They say the road to Hell is paved with good intentions.. and having read this which is based on a true story, I'd say they may be right.

It's a novel about the abuse of power and how what can be a good thing in one's hands can become something else, something evil in another's.

Sari is a teenager branded as a slight "witch" because she has the power to use herbs and such to help with wounds, illness, and pregnancies. She feels ostracized by her little town and so when the wealthiest boy agrees to marry her when she becomes a certain age, she feels lucky. But he goes to war first, WW1 to be exact and while the men are gone from this small town, the women go a little stir crazy and trouble brews when some Italian POWs show up. You get the picture.. Eventually the women get used to men being gone, even Sari.

Marco, a handsome Italian POW makes Sari start to think about some things. "..you're happy for people just to tolerate you because of the person you've married?" Does she want to be liked for simply being Ferenc's wife when he comes back? Does the town respect her for her or just because of Ferenc? She's left little time to ponder because Ferenc does come back and he's not the same man. None of the men are the same. Every man is changed by the war.. wounded.. afflicted with nightmares.. And the women don't like them, have gotten used to not having them around.. prefer it even..

But some are downright abusive and what starts as good intentions.. kill this man, save a baby.. kill this man, save a woman.. ends up being greatly abused and Sari realizes the town never respected her at all and they

may just try to blame her for it all.

Extremely well written, suspenseful at some parts, shocking in others. Lots of things happened that I didn't foresee. I couldn't predict this one at all. I could also see from "both sides of the fence" in this one. I didn't like what some of the characters did at times, but I could also understand. It takes a skilled writer to pull this off. I also enjoyed the conflicting emotions that Sari had about what she was doing at different parts of the story.

Love, sex, intrigue, murder, war.. this book has it all.

Favorite quote: (Judit's views on religion)"I have no respect for anything that only wants to stop people from doing things."

Theresa says

Slight spoilers-----

The slight spoilers I give do not effect readability, nor do they reveal any plot twists or plot build/ups that cannot be gleaned from the book description.

As I read this novel one minute I loved it and the next I hated it with a visceral disgust. I've decided to give three stars as a good average for what I was feeling. The book is based on a true story and sometimes truth truly is stranger than fiction! I often had to remind myself that these horrible things indeed did happen. The evil actions were at the true core of my dislike of the book therefore I'm not judging the plot harshly. If I didn't know there was a town in Hungary where the woman killed all the men I'd say it was outlandish and unbelievable. I'd give the book two stars for a silly premise and be done. However, I made myself read through the immediate distaste and try to imagine what the situations were like. While I can never be fully immersed in the same details and life experiences that plague the lives of these ladies. I can say I somewhat understand. Please don't think I believe what they did was forgivable though. No matter how bleak a situation there is ALWAYS a choice. These women chose the evil deeds and paid the price.

However, another big issue still was not the subject matter but the language the author chose. The vernacular and dialogue had a decidedly British lilt. People in Hungary do not talk like this, especially in the rural plain in 1918. For instance, the author had an annoying habit of having the characters say things like, "Right, well let's go" when something needed to be done abruptly. As I said, decidedly British. I expected to see a Tally ho old chap somewhere in the dialogue but thankfully it never fell to that level. I realize the author is English and she is going to write to that audience but she at least could have been aware she was using slang. Also the author certainly had a potty mouth (haha). There was talk of sex and things sexual but her female characters sounded like a platoon of drunken Marines. F this and f that, are you going to F him?, we were F'ing like rabbits. I think but I can't be certain that the author chose these words as a tactic to try to show that these were coarse country women. I don't agree with the usage. I'm certainly no prude but I simply didn't think it was necessary had she employed better character building in her descriptions. What I really believe is she underestimated the intelligence of her audience. We certainly could have figured that these were not sophisticated socialites taking tea in a metropolitan city without her stooping to this level.

Still....with all of these issues I'm going to recommend this book to anyone who likes historical fiction, especially with an Eastern European setting. If you do love EE fiction you know the available books can be

sometimes hard to find. That is if you are not offended by the language I described as it is pervasive throughout the entire book and cannot be avoided. The most redeeming factor to this book is that the story behind it is fascinating! I do hope those of you who read it will at least do a bit of research into the true story. Better yet pick up a non-fictional account and read it too.

BrocheAroe says

Both shocking and encouraging of sympathy, *The Angel Makers* is a haunting novel that will slyly seduce you.

Taking place in an isolated village in Hungary, the story revolves around Sari Arany, first as a young girl, then as a woman, and her place in village life. Her father is the village medicine man and seer; her only friend is the feared village midwife and herbal woman. Before her father dies, he arranges (with her permission) for Sari's engagement to Ferenc, the son of the wealthiest family in the village. It is a surprise to most, for because her mother died soon after her birth, Sari is thought to be unlucky and treated with scorn and suspicion by the villagers. It doesn't help that Sari is peculiar - beautiful, piercing eyes, more learned than most women, and surprisingly forthright with her speech and actions. Despite this, it is seen to be a good match, and when her father dies sooner than expected, Ferenc assumes they will marry immediately instead of waiting for Sari's 18th birthday. Yet Sari stands firm, and instead chooses to live with Judith, the herbal woman, to learn about being a midwife prior to marriage.

But soon the war comes to Hungary, and the men must go off to fight. Suddenly, the women of the village find themselves living in a strange new world where they don't worry about when food is on the table, where they have time to make new friends, where they begin to feel more free in thought and action - no longer worried about a harsh rebuke from a husband or father. When a POW camp sets up nearby, they also feel free enough to get jobs (and lovers) at the camp. Sari slowly becomes more accepted in the village, making a few particular friends, learning more about herbal medicine and midwifery, occasionally receiving letters from Ferenc about his dreams of home.

Then the war ends. The village men begin to return. The POWs leave. And the women are no longer so free as they once were. Sari's friend, Anna, again begins to creep around the village trying to hide the fresh bruises that are a marker of her husband's homecoming. But change did happen in the women. And they are not as willing to lie down and take the men's actions and decisions as they once were. It is at this point that they begin to rely on Sari and Judith's herbal knowledge for getting rid of those pesky problems - the men who maybe should not have returned home from the war.

The best part? This is based on a true story. As the author writes, "The novel details a peculiar kind of madness that gripped the women in a small, isolated village over a period of around ten years, and writing the novel was my attempt to try and understand what circumstances might have brought it about, as well as what may have been going on in the heads of the women in question." This is a fascinating look at how far some women will go to assert their freedom.

NyiNya says

When WWI called the men away from their Hungarian village of Nagyar, their wives wept and wished them

a speedy return.

Until they noticed something unusual.

With the men gone, life was a whole lot better. One by one, each wife experienced the same epiphany: Nobody was spending the family's scant savings on booze, getting drunk and beating the daylights out of her. And what's more, the ladies realized that men weren't all that necessary. They were managing the farms pretty darn well themselves. Sure they still had to work in the fields, but without having to cook hubby's meals, sew and mend and wash his clothes, dodge his fists, keep the kids out of his way--and all with another one of his babies in her belly--things were a whole lot easier!

And then things got even better. The Austrian army dropped off some Italian prisoners of war to help the ladies with their farmwork. Do the heavy lifting, as it were. And indeed they did. And thensome. Polite, attentive, even romantic, the eager POWS were a new species of male, one the ladies of Nagyar had never before encountered...and one they found altogether acceptable. Altogether.

But as with all good things, this new happy chapter came to an end when The Boys Came Marching Home. No more Love Italian Style. It was back to watching hubby eat first before she and the kids got a mouthful, back to loose teeth and black eyes, and back to slam bam without the thank you ma'am.

Things looked bleak indeed. Until late one night when one of the ladies sits down to consider her miserable future and notices that arsenic-laced strip of fly paper swinging from the lamp overhead. She comes up with A Very Interesting Idea. One she gladly shared with her friends. Pretty soon life started looking good again. Except maybe there were more flies around than usual.

Then wouldn't you know it, somebody went and spilled the beans and the authorities started poking their noses into Nagyar business.

Based on actual events that transpired in a Hungarian village, this is a fascinating little book. It's a fast, almost compulsive read that combines humor and shock value in one seamless stream. The characters are depicted in sharp relief, beautifully crafted so their individual personalities give us memorable portraits. And the plot...it's a pip. We get so caught up in the ladies' innovative solution to marital discord, it begins to seem perfectly logical and we resent the long arm of the law reaching in and stirring things up.

Incidentally, good ideas don't die. The Women of Nagyar were not the first or the last group of unhappy women to make use of this fast and easy alternative to group divorce. A quick internet search shows that misandry and murder syndicates are evergreen throughout history. In 1658, an ambitious bunch of Roman housewives took out 100 pesky husbands and nosy neighbors. In 1868, Marseilles pharmacist/herbalist named Joye Monsier helped quite a few desperate housewives disencumber themselves without waiting for a decree nisi. In 1925, one Madame Popova of the Ukraine helped 300 abused wives find solace. 1926 saw the opening of Yugoslavia's "Lucretia Club," whose members shared information about husband-murdering techniques and knitting patterns. The list goes on and on. But for some reason, Hungary holds the record. Since 1900, the country has led the field, claiming around 60 of the 100 most notorious cases of mass husband killing. Can't afford a lawyer? Afraid hubby will object to your leaving...in an objectionable way? No problem. The solution is as easy as...pie. Once you've given the recipe a little reboot.

The temptation to play Dixie Chicks' "Earl Must Die" while reading this book is almost insurmountable. Just don't do it if you also leave the book where your husband or sweetie can see it. Next time you and your girlfriends are sitting in the kitchen, laughing and gossiping, poor baby is going to be in the den

hyperventilating and afraid to finish dessert. Especially if you asked him to pick up one of those Shell No Pest Strips on the way home.

On the other hand, he may start sending you flowers. Frequently. And for no reason. I'm just saying.
