

Forgotten Hero tells tale of man who helped save thousands

ANDREW ARMITAGE ([HTTPS://LEADERPOST.COM/AUTHOR/ANDREW-ARMITAGE](https://leaderpost.com/author/andrew-armitage)) Updated: May 17, 2019



A Tale Of Two Kitchens

FEATURED BY 

In one of the most amazing rescues of the Second World War, Count Bernadotte, the Swedish head of the Red Cross, saved more than 30,000 people from concentration camps in the last three months of conflict. A *Forgotten Hero* (ECW Press, \$32.95) is Shelley Emling's so very readable account of the Count who could.

The war is long over but books on that dark period of life still appear, gift of publishers around the world. I had forgotten Bernadotte so when ECW's book came in for review, I put aside what I was reading for a reminder.

The Bernadottes (think Napoleon) came to Sweden centuries now passed, settling in Stockholm to administer a country at loss with itself. Over the decades, many a Bernadotte

took the helm of an adopted country. Emling does a super job in reminding the reader of the days of life in Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark. And Folke Bernadotte.

As Allied Forces gathered steam, Himmler (on orders from Hitler) ordered the destruction of all camps and everyone in them to avoid any evidence of wrongdoing by the Nazis. In stepped Bernadotte who went as far as shaking Himmler's (head of the Gestapo) hand while pretending to listen to German woes as the war wound down. Bernadotte had access to a fleet of Red Cross buses by which he facilitated a great escape, the distinctive markings on them making sure they were not military targets.

Emling, an editor at the Huffington Post, works in Washington, D. C. and is the author of previous books including a biography of Marie Curie. In *A Forgotten Hero* she chronicles the life of Folke Bernadotte and his family from their early years to his role in saving to lives of so many. Bernadotte, who was assassinated in 1948 in Israel by the Stern Gang, comes alive in this late but straightforward and compelling narrative.

A few years back I read and raved about Yasuko Thanh's novel, *Mysterious Fragrance of the Yellow Mountains*, a debut novel that won the Rogers Writers' Trust for fiction plus the City of Victoria Butler Book Prize. An amazing novel I thought then and now, especially after reading the author's memoir, *Mistakes to Run With* (Hamish Hamilton, \$24.95).

Six months before receiving awards for her first novel, Thanh was admitted for a stay at a psychiatric ward. Her memoir of life in the street begins with growing up as the daughter of evangelical parents with whom she parted as a teen. The setting? Victoria, B. C.

She was still a child when she left home, an honour-roll runaway who cut herself off, smoking, shoplifting and falling in love with a pimp who soon had her working the mean streets of her hometown. Then it was on to Vancouver, a much larger setting for her new lifestyle where she enduring beatings, arrests, crack, and an unwanted pregnancy. Eventually, Yasuko left the sex trade but haunted by her past and a newly awakening realization of her writing powers, took to the computer for a dry-eyed, unsparing remembrance of days and traumas past.

What is the cost of survival? I am not sure but this autobiography is a hard road to read, filled with pain and passion. In the end, this is a reminder that we all have in us the power to start again. *Mistakes to Run With* is an eye-opener but I urge you to begin with *Fragrance of the Yellow Mountains* or the author's earlier short story collection (I don't read such but did this one) *Floating Like the Dead*. I can only hope that Thanh is still writing and that I will be spending many more hours with her in the future.

Of the many books read while coming back to life following surgery was Kate Quinn's *The Huntress* (Harper Collins, \$22.99). Quinn, a New York Times bestselling author of historical fiction, wrote a previous book that passed many hours of fascination. The Alice Network joined in her Empress of Rome sagas to satisfy many a reader but they haven't seen anything like *The Huntress* (I lent my copy out immediately and haven't seen it since).

Growing up in Boston in the post-war years, 17-year old Jordan McBride's long widowed father comes home with a new fiancée on his arm. Jordan is thrilled but still, there is

something off about her mother-in-law-to-be. A soft-spoken German, she has a past that the reader, putting two plus two comes up with four and suspicion. What mysteries does she hide?

Actually (and I don't mean to spoil your read) she is *The Huntress*, a lethal Nazi murderess who dispatches the likes of a few children. Will Jordan (or her father) figure out who she is or is that left to the reader who I am sure is yelling, "That woman is not what she presents?" Can't sleep? Too few distractions? Try *The Huntress* if you need a historical novel about a Nazi war criminal in America.

Now for a true-life memoir that will take you up, give you a good shake, and descend the other side. Want to travel in the later years of your life? Epidemiologist Steffanie Strathdee and her husband, psychologist Tom Patterson, were vacationing in Egypt when Tom came down with a stomach bug. But it wasn't really that. Think of fighting the most dangerous, antibiotic-resistant bacteria in the world and you have *The Perfect Predator: A Scientist's Race to Save Her Husband From a Deadly Superbug* (Hachette, \$36.50).

From local doctors in Egypt to a world-class medical centre at UC San Diego, Tom fights for his life, his wife and partner the witness, activist, and researcher who unravels what ails him. The book is one long difficult read (I have my own memories of what a good hospital can do in an emergency) by a woman who has been there. It is a fright-filled remembrance, nail-biting account of against-all-odds survival – and a warning that a global superbug crisis can happen at any time.

TRENDING IN CANADA

()

Dandy's brings artisanal ice cream to Regina



< Previous

Next >

This Week's Flyers