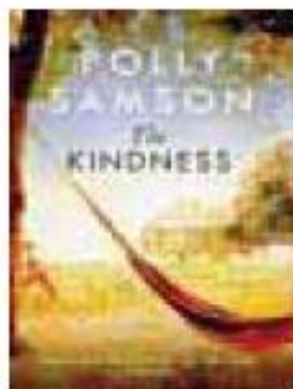


LITERARY FICTION

by **CLAIRE ALLFREE**



THE KINDNESS

by **Polly Samson**

(Bloomsbury £14.99)

THERE are several deceptions going on in Samson's second novel, not least on the reader. When we first meet Julian, he is mourning the loss of his adored young daughter, Mira – and savagely throwing out the last traces of former girlfriend Julia from the house in which they all once lived.

That house was also Julian's beloved childhood home and events are told through a series of flashbacks, which dapple the novel like light playing through trees.

Julian and Julia fell furiously in love and four years later, they had the doomed baby. Yet as the detail of their lives accumulates, the reader gradually realises that the story they thought they were reading is not the story at all.

Samson is a richly sensory writer, beautifully summoning such details as the 'milk fug' of early parenthood, but she stuffs her novel with too much unwieldy, tangled plot.

Yet this is still a sumptuous, serious story about how an act of immense love can at the same time be one of terrible betrayal, and how we deceive ourselves as much as we deceive one another.