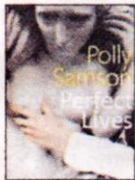


## LITERARY FICTION



### PERFECT LIVES BY POLLY SAMSON

(Virago £15.99)

'IT'S a book about the unexpected nature of happiness,' says Polly Samson, of her second collection of short stories about people living in a seaside town, whose smooth, self-contained narratives sit together like pebbles on a beach — just touching at the edges.

Most of her characters are linked by their piano tuner, who must seek the best in both the battered heirloom and the beautiful Bosendorfer with Nazi provenance. He visits the kohl-eyed bohemian whose husband has left her, and the family who have just had an egg rammed through their letterbox.

Samson has a photographer's eye for the gap between the surface detail of an individual's polished, public persona and the tangled mess of heart strings within.

She reminds us that: 'It takes just one thing: a freak in the weather; a bit of a rage [...] or a Rachel at a party who can casually shatter a perfect life with a few words.'

Not every story has lasting resonance, but some linger long in the mind, like the one about the new mother struggling to adjust to the infant son who reminds her of 'a Christmas gammon, boiled and ready for studding with cloves'.