



## Cast out from paradise

**THE KINDNESS** by Polly Samson

(Bloomsbury, £14.99; offer price, £12.99)

It's 1997 and Milton scholar Julian is lost in a muzzy haze of medicated grief. His partner, Julia, has removed all traces of herself from their idyllic cottage while all that remains of their young daughter is a single shoe. Unable to work, and keen to avoid the smothering sympathy of his ex, Julian succumbs to memories: of his affair with Julia, of their daughter's recent life-threatening illness, and of his love for their beautiful riverside home, Firdaws.

The *Kindness* is a tale of paradise lost and regained; of temptation, jealousy, betrayal and passion. Like Samson's previous work, it is also intensely sensuous and intoxicatingly steeped in colour. Images leap from the page – an orchard hammock, for instance, is 'a low-slung smile' – while the scent of Firdaws's hay meadows and honeysuckle is almost tangible.

Moving backwards and forwards in time, Samson's intricate plot slowly gives up its painful secrets, causing the reader to question previous assumptions. At the same time, references to Milton's epic account of man's fall cleverly embroider the action, which sees both Julia and Julian cast out from bliss in separate, unforeseeable ways.

Samson is particularly adept at domestic scenes. She also captures brilliantly the sweaty-palmed anguish of parents whose child is seriously ill. A heart-twisting and headily compulsive read.

*Stephanie Cross*