

Foreword

Hope was left in Pandora's Box, when all the evils were released into the world.

The *Pandora's Box* series brings together award-winning and risk-taking international authors in an unforgettable showcase, with five books in each collection. Never has it been more important to collaborate across borders and to use the power of storytelling to express the rich variety of human experience. This has been the main principle underlying our selection and we also chose stories we couldn't put down, characters we cared about, and writing that stopped us in our tracks to savour a phrase or an observation.

The novels in *No Woman is an Island* travel through time and space, from medieval and modern France through England in two world wars to present-day Scandinavia. Although very different, they all show the impact on women of events over which they have no control. No woman is an island.

Plague-ridden medieval France in *Blood Rose Angel* and the daily life of WW2 England in *The Chalky Sea* offer many parallels with modern ordeals, whether pandemics, natural disasters or human conflicts. Historically authentic, with timeless themes, these two novels remind us that the worst of times can bring out the best in people.

War damage is also a theme in *Hidden*, which portrays the price women pay. The wife's sympathy for her husband's shell shock traps her in a heart-breaking cycle of abuse. This psychological thriller answers so well the question, "Why doesn't she leave?"

Imbued with Scandinavian intensity, *Coffee and Vodka* lets the reader gradually discover the traumatic events behind a woman's suppressed memories as a chance meeting triggers flashbacks. The European flavour of this collection is completed by *The Chase*, where a couple's second home in France has a past as dangerous to its occupants as their own mental fragility. Everything is connected, as John Donne pointed out in the famous lines echoed in our title. In his day, "man" included "woman." We like to think that nowadays "woman" includes "man."

*No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe
is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as
well as any manner of thy friends or of thine
own were; any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.
And therefore never send to know for whom
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.*

John Donne

To preserve the international flavour – and flavor – of the novels, we have kept the original spelling and punctuation of each one, so you will find British English, American English, and Australian English conventions in the different volumes of the series.

I hope you love these books and take their people to your heart, as we did.

Jean Gill, Guest Editor for Vine Leaves Press