

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH arts & books section

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Paperbacks

CANDIDA CLARK
and JASON THOMPSON

Patient by Ben Watt (Penguin, £6.99) — Do not be put off by the gloomy subtitle, "the true story of a rare illness". By turns funny, moving and frightening, this book describes the progress and eventual cure of a usually fatal condition. Churg-Strauss Syndrome, from which Watt was diagnosed as suffering in 1992. He underwent months of surgery, and was given a 25 per cent chance of survival. Written with the intensity and lyricism one would expect from its author — the other half of Everything But the Girl — Watt's is a triumphant, gripping memoir.

The Innocence of Roast Chicken by Jo-Anne Richards (Review/Headline, £6.99) — Evocative and relentlessly frank, this is none the less an uncomfortable book, where fiction and what appears to be memoir rest uneasily against one another. The story moves between the white South African narrator's threatened idyllic childhood on her Afrikaans grandparents' chicken farm in the Eastern Cape in 1966, and Johannesburg in the tumultuous post-apartheid days of 1989. The question of individual responsibility becomes nothing less than a matter of life and death.

The History of Danish Dreams by Peter Høeg (Panther/Harvill, £6.99) — The first novel by the acclaimed author of *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* is incredibly ambitious, weaving together the lives of real and fictional characters to create a story that is at once fairy-tale, parable, family saga, castigation of and plan for a new society. Focusing on four families

Savages by Joe Kane (Penguin, £6.99) — An Ecuadorian Indian stands at the gate of the White House. "Moi" believes he can reach the President before being arrested. But the guards are too quick, warns his companion. "I will climb the trees and hide," replies Moi. "I will pretend I am hunting monkeys." The Huaroni are a nation of 1,300 nomadic warriors, a tribe so remote that their language is unrelated to any on earth. Joe Kane followed the fight to defend their land from Western interests. For an environmentalist, he is refreshingly unromantic — even funny.

A Life of Matthew Arnold by Nicholas Murray (Sceptre, £8.99) — Arnold defined literature as "the best that has been thought and said". Today his work is no more fashionable than his Gladstonian whisksers. That is unfair, says Nicholas Murray. Many of the homely Victorian's prophesies have been realised: for example, that in a secular world the hole left by God would be filled by art. In an age when the study of fine writing has succumbed to "discourse", perhaps the Arnoldian virtues will make a comeback.

Venus Flaring by Suzannah Dunn (Flamingo, £5.99) — Veronica is at the high summer of her life. With a painful sense of transience, we return to her schooldays. Her erstwhile best chum, Ornella Marini, is glamorous and restless. The pair grow up and apart, but Veronica has a great desire for reconciliation. "Losing a friend is worse than losing a lover," she reflects. "because