



thisweek

Readings & signings on LI

Wednesday

Lisa See discusses and signs copies of her new novel, "China Dolls." At 7 p.m., *Book Revue*, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com



Thursday

Three novelists speak and sign copies of their books: Long Island native **Julia Fiero** ("Cutting Teeth"), **Emma Straub** ("The Vacationers") and **Susan Scarf Merrell** ("Shirley"), a Sag Harbor resident. At 7 p.m., *Book Revue*, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com

Next Sunday

Linda Fairstein speaks and signs her new novel, "Terminal City." At 11 a.m., *BookHampton*, 41 Main St., East Hampton; 631-324-4939, bookhampton.com



plus

bookclub

Avid readers of Newsday's Books section online and in print can now join the lively conversation at the **Newsday Book Club**, launching this summer. Once a month, from June through August, we'll convene online to discuss a selected book with its author. The first pick is **Alice McDermott's "Someone"** (FSG), a 2013 finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in fiction. "Someone" offers a portrait, in vivid prose snapshots, of an ordinary Irish-American girl as she grows up in Brooklyn, marries and makes her own modest way in the world. McDermott will join us for an online chat about the novel and answer your questions **tomorrow from noon to 1 p.m.** To read an excerpt from "Someone," go to newsday.com/bookclub

reviews

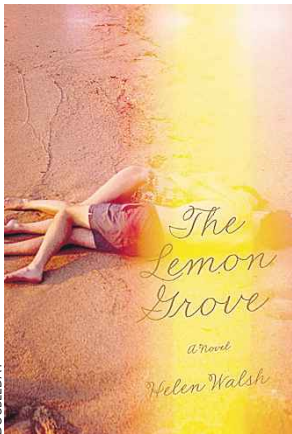
Summer sizzles on Majorca

THE LEMON GROVE, by Helen Walsh. Doubleday, 200 pp., \$24.95.

BY MARION WINIK
Special to Newsday

Pour a cold drink and pleat a paper fan before you start this one, lady readers, because the energy between a teenage boy and an older woman hasn't been this hot since "Summer of '42." Those who remember that 1971 film are definitely in the market for Helen Walsh's expertly paced and emotionally insightful "The Lemon Grove." The third novel from this British author, it may be her breakout in the States.

In a taut narrative with just a touch of Daphne du Maurier, Walsh takes the long- and pleasantly married Jenn and Greg on summer vacation to Majorca, to the villa they've been renting for years. This year they've allowed their 15-year-old daughter, Emma, to invite her boyfriend, Nathan. The kids come in



Helen Walsh's page-turner has family dynamics at its heart.

after the parents have had a few Rioja-soaked but not very sexy days to themselves. As soon they arrive, those lazy days of summer are over.

"Jenn is conscious of herself not quite controlling her reaction. She can feel her face slacken. She tried to compensate, looking down. . . . He is wearing a pair of plain blue swimming shorts; otherwise, he is naked before her. He is muscular but grace-



ful with it, balletic. He is shockingly pretty. She is aware of the seeming impropriety of registering these details — he is seventeen — and yet she cannot tear her eyes away."

Nathan has startled her in the kitchen, coming up behind her while she's beating eggs for lunch. She drops the bowl, the eggs spill and the veggies on the stove begin to burn. Yet, the careful reader may notice, the ceramic bowl

doesn't break. Walsh is great at such ominous, symbol-laden moments. There is a constant undercurrent of danger in the book, lots of driving and hiking on precipitous mountain roads, diving from cliffs, storms blowing in.

The nuances of the relationships among the family members make "The Lemon Grove" more than a steamy page-turner. While Emma treats Jenn with the cold snarkiness any mother of a teenager knows all too well, Jenn is not actually her mom: Greg's wife died in childbirth and he married Jenn a year later, which puts them on unequal footing as parents. As for Jenn and Greg, Walsh captures the comfort and the irritation of their years of familiarity. Jenn herself is a complex character: She has both a conscience and a streak of amorality — she pays for her groceries but steals a newspaper along with them.

There is a fair amount of sex in the book, and Walsh's descriptions of it are simple, graphic and effective. Like I said: cold drink and fan.

A Tom Robbins cobbler

TIBETAN PEACH PIE: A True Account of an Imaginative Life, by Tom Robbins. Ecco, 362 pp., \$27.99.

BY MARY ANN GWINN
The Seattle Times

If you are a baby boomer who can remember when and where you first read Tom Robbins' breakout novels ("Another Roadside Attraction," "Even Cowgirls Get the Blues," "Still Life With Woodpecker"), you might approach a Robbins memoir with subliminal dread. Can the bard of your youth still touch your mind and heart? Can Robbins, a man who believes in magic, still cast a spell? Can he still call forth his singular mix of insight, philosophy and kaleidoscopic imagination?

Having read "Tibetan Peach Pie," I can report — yes, yes and yes.

"Tibetan Peach Pie" is not really a memoir. Rather, it's a chain of interlinked stories about a long and very eventful life. Robbins was born in 1932 in the North Carolina hill country. It's a minor miracle that his strait-laced parents accepted the idiosyncrasies of a child whose imaginative thermostat was "set permanently on high." "Allowed to roam freely in both the streets and the woods, I observed and interacted not only with the wonders of nature but with an assortment of . . . bib-overalled raconteurs, many of whom spun stories as effortlessly and expertly as they spit tobacco juice," Robbins writes. He made up stories and talked to himself, walking the backyard in circles drumming a

rhythm with a "talking stick."

His hazy, lazy, charmed life ended when he was sent to military school, standard Southern strategy for boys who don't fit into the public-school system. The regimen of military school could have stifled him, but he won a string of writing awards. After dropping out of college and a stint in the Air Force, Robbins sashayed his way through a couple of newspaper jobs, when a Doubleday editor contacted him about writing a book about art. Instead, he sold his idea for a novel guaranteed to hit the sweet spot of the counterculture — the story of the owners of a Skagit County flea circus who come into possession of the mummified body of Jesus Christ (1971's "Another Roadside Attraction").

Eventually, "Tibetan Peach



Robbins' new book tells of his long and very eventful life.

"Pie" loses narrative steam. Robbins becomes successful, and more circumspect. The latter chapters are travel pieces or vignettes that don't cohere with the rest of the book.

But it's a gift to his fans, and it may earn him some new and younger readers. "Tibetan Peach Pie" is the story of a man who had the sense to follow where his imagination led — "my wild card, my skeleton key, my servant, my master," he writes. How lucky that we got to tag along for the ride.