

'Because Geenie's hair needs a lot of brushing and although I don't expect you to be her nanny there will be times when I may need help—'

'Oh.' Kitty grasped her knees. 'I hadn't realised...'

'Our old nanny, Dora, left us recently. She's gone and got married. He's a sweet man but I'm not sure how he'll cope with her. She was a good girl, it wasn't that, but she was sly. Geenie was far too attached to her, so in the end it was all to the good.'

Mrs Steinberg fixed Kitty with her grey eyes, which seemed to be smiling, even though her mouth was not. 'So. Tell me. What can you do?'

Kitty wanted to ask about the times when Mrs Steinberg would need help with the girl, but she'd been rehearsing her answer to this question, so she replied, 'I'm schooled in domestic science.'

*"Mrs Steinberg fixed Kitty with her grey eyes, which seemed to be smiling, even though her mouth was not. 'So. Tell me. What can you do?'"*

It was what Lou had told her to say, insisting it had enough meaning without having too much. She'd read about it in one of her magazines.

'Whatever does that mean?'

A sharp heat rose up Kitty's neck. Her mouth jumped into a smile, as it always did when she was nervous.

Mrs Steinberg laughed. 'Do you mean you can cook and clean?'

Kitty nodded, but couldn't seem to find enough breath for words. Her feet were numb with cold now, and she was beginning to feel awfully hungry.

Mrs Steinberg waved a hand in the air. 'So what can you cook?'

Kitty had prepared an answer to this as well. She'd always cooked for Mother, and had seen enough, she felt, in the year she'd spent in the Macklow house to know what the job was. The most important thing seemed to be always to have a stockpot on the go.

'Meat and vegetables both, Madam. Savouries and sweets.'

Mrs Steinberg seemed to be waiting for more.

'I can do meat cakes, beef olives, faggots... And castle pudding, bread and butter pudding, and all of that, puddings are what I do best, Madam.' She could eat some bread and butter pudding now, with cold custard on it.

Mrs Steinberg's face was blank. 'Anything else?'

Perhaps they were vegetarians. Lou's husband Bob said that some of these bohemians were. 'Fruit fritters... and, um...'

'Nothing more... continental, Kitty?'

'I can do cheese puffs, Madam.'

Mrs Steinberg laughed. 'Well. Never mind. I hope you won't mind doing some housework, too. I'm not very fussy about it, but there'll be a bit of sweeping and dusting now and then, keeping the place looking generally presentable.' She twisted round in her seat and looked again at the hole above her head. 'It will be easier for you when Mr Crane and Arthur have finished knocking these two rooms together, of course. One large, light, all-purpose room, that's what we want. I don't believe in all this *compartmentalisation*, do you?'

'Yes, Madam. I mean, no, Madam.'

'Stop calling me that. It makes me sound like a brothel-keeper. You can call me Mrs Steinberg.' The woman's long fingers rummaged at her scalp as she spoke. 'Now. Would you like to ask me anything?' She

perched on the edge of the armchair and held the wave of her hair back from her forehead with both hands. 'Anything at all.'

Kitty looked at the woman's clear forehead for a moment.

'Anything at all, Kitty.'

'Are there any other staff here, Mrs Steinberg?'

'Just Arthur, the gardener and... handyman, I suppose you'd call him. He doesn't live with us, but he's here most days.'

Kitty shifted in her seat. 'There's no housemaid or parlour-maid?'

'You won't be expected to wait on us, Kitty, if that's what you're worrying about. We don't go in for all that.'

'No, Madam.'

There was a pause. Kitty squeezed the green shoe in her hands.

'Are we settled, then? Could you start next week?'

She must ask it. 'Will I be expected to — what you said about when you're not here... your daughter...' She mustn't be the nanny. That was not what the notice said.

'What I mean is, what will I be doing, exactly?'

End of book extract

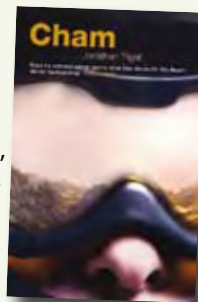
The Good Plain Cook. © Bethan Roberts 2008.

## New Releases

### Cham

Jonathan Trigell

Serpents Tail



In his second novel, Jonathan Trigell turns his attention from the ostracised and vilified world of *Boy A* to the lifestyle of skiing. The main protagonist, Itchy, is drifting through his troubled life and finds himself in the ski resort Chamonix in the shadow of Mont Blanc.

Byron and Shelley were inspired by the rugged beauty of Mont Blanc, as is Trigell. Itchy is appreciative of the landscape, but uses the backdrop of his seasonal job as a barman to further his unequal and exploitative relationships with women. While Itchy and his close entourage debate how to define rape in close sexual encounters, outside in Chamonix a rapist is terrorising the area.

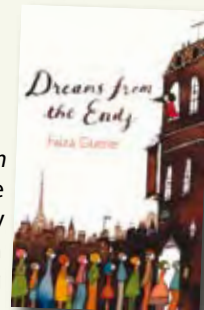
Trigell's writing has the ability to reach down into the depths of people's souls and discover their darkest and murkiest secrets. At times, *Cham* is challenging, explicit and uncomfortable. Itchy is not a likeable character, and often angers the reader.

Marion Johnson

### Dreams from the Endz

Faïza Guène

Chatto & Windus



**D**reams from the Endz is the extraordinary second novel from France's talented young writer, Faïza Guène.

Twenty-four year old Ahlème is an intriguing character who has to deal with a variety of complex situations. Ahlème looks after her father, The Boss, who since being injured in an accident on a building site has been unable to work. Meanwhile Ahlème is battling to prevent her sixteen-year-old brother, Foued from spiralling out of control and being drawn into a life of crime. Ahlème also has to contemplate returning to Algeria to visit her family after a ten-year absence following the murder of her mother at a village wedding.

*Dreams from the Endz* exposes the reality of immigrant life in France — the struggles and the queues in a society where everything depends on your immigration status. Moving from Paris to Algeria, Guène's witty and engaging writing details the impact of politics on everyday lives and what happens when people cannot achieve their dreams.

Shona Fairweather