**Sibling rivalry**

Brothers at arms; a prodigal son returns; a hard-bitten heroine.

by CRAIG SISTERSON

Irish author Liz Nugent has an uncanny knack for crafting compelling, nuanced thrillers centered on rather horrendous people. Our Little Crucibles (Penguin, $36.99) is a tale of three brothers who take secrets are coming to light. North takes the "predial son returns" trope and gives it a fresh spin. Soaked in speakiness, the shades of supernatural may divide some crime readers as this creepy tale bounces between past and present, Nugent has written a riveting story that blends whodunit with shades of Shakespearean tragedy.

A quarter-century after Paul Adams escaped the small village of Gritten, his head full of righte-- mains, he reluctantly drawn home when his frail mother has a fall. She claims someone is in her house, Paul feels he’s being followed is this a new danger or to the past that Paul’s tried to run from? Twenty-five years ago, one of Paul’s school friends was brutally killed by two classmates, boys Paul had hung out with himself in the months before. One time went to prison, the other — troubled and charismatic Charlie Crabtree — vanished. Now, a similar killer has happened in another small town, and old secrets are coming to

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**To hell and back**

Encounter with post-partum psychosis is moving and cathartic.

by CHARLOTTE GRIMSHAW

Catherine Cho wakes on a bed in a room that’s “white, stark and plain.” She’s wearing a hospital robe, and her arms are strapped down. Her hands are clenched, and she notices there are strands of hair in them. A man in the room introduces himself as Nenad and asks if she’s seen him. They have an exchange: “Nenad, do you believe in God?” he asks. His pause, and he looks thoughtful. “Fifty-fifty,”he says. “But I’m OK with that.” To this, he identifies He has to be the archangel Michael, come to deliver us from the cellphone in my hand. Internal processes veer off the beaten path, and the cautious superstition of a trip into institutions, with quite a similar killer has happened in another small town, and old secrets are coming to light.

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**Books of My Life**

Fiona Farrell

Fiona Farrell has won awards for fiction, poetry, drama and non-fiction. Her debut novel, The Skinny Louie Book, took out the prestigious Elsie Knox Award, NOUNS, VERBS ETC: Selected Poems (Otago University Press, $33.50) is out this month.

In 2004, when I wrote Book Book, a novel about the books that had shaped my life, I managed to narrow the list to 16. Given a shorter brief, though, I’d pick three.

**The Little Red Hen**

There are perhaps a dozen photos of me as a child. In several I’m clutching my Little Golden Book. “Then I shall do it myself,” said the Little Red Hen. Self-sufficiency, independence, fresh bread. Shaped me forever.

George Bernard Shaw’s preface to the play SAINT JOAN: I was 14, in Oman. Actors with posh accents performed a scene at a beachside walk, and I got a copy in a secondhand shop. The play was a bit boring but I read the preface and for the first time encountered H. G. Wells’ notion of the dogmatic religious edifice in which I’d been raised. In half an hour, I was released to think for myself.

**The Ancients and the Tale**

That my spine runs the length of my back because a marine worm from whom I am descended turned over, “for some long-forgotten reason,” I began swimming upside down. I love reading such things. The perspective is so wide and reassuring. This beautiful complex world. Inconsequential. A mere puzzle.

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**Crime roundup**

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