FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

General

The Peculiar Memories of Thomas Penman
Bruce Robinson
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Whatever misgivings one may feel on page one after encountering a spitefully incontinent Doberman, a cheerfully incontinent young Thomas, a vengeful Mum roasting the Sunday joint or a lurking Grandfather with a collection of cut-and-paste pornography, The Peculiar Memories of Thomas Penman never drops a stitch. It is sharp, spry and darkly funny from the first page to the last.

None of the Penman family is happy. Thomas' forbidding father is having it off with Rosie around the corner; his beloved Grandfather Walter is mysteriously wasting away from cancer while babbling about bluebells in a French meadow; his best friend is cadging cigarette butts from his vicar father and leering at Thomas's secret love, the precociously luscious Gwendolin. Meanwhile a private detective on a bicycle is following Thomas everywhere, and a rhumey-eyed psychic by the pier is stagewhispering the true facts of Thomas's untimely birth.

For local color, there's Broadstairs and the original sitting groom where Dickens composed Bleak House, now a tatty museum, where Thomas presents Gwendolin with a first edition of David Coppperfield. "Will you sign it? With kisses?" she asks. He does so: "For My Darling Gwendolin, On Her Birthday, May 26th, 1959. With Love For Ever, From Thomas."

You know it will all end badly, but how wise the author is to cut his treacle with vinegar, pacing the comic set pieces with flip-hook speed. The exact sort of chipper despair the English do so well. Thomas Penman is from the same people who brought you World War II, Emily Lloyd in "Wish You Were Here" and The Beatles (the early years).

Leeta Taylor