The Heart's Invisible Furies by John Boyne: Starting in a small Irish village in 1945, this novel deals with the social behaviour of that time and how it is totally dominated by the laws of the Catholic Church. The opening scene sees an unmarried young Irish girl who is pregnant, being banished from her parish. The son she gives birth to is adopted by a wealthy couple who live in Dublin and he becomes Cyril Avery by name alone. His adoptive parents have told him that he is not a real Avery and that at the age of 18 he will have to find his own way in life. The changing Irish political and social landscape is explored through Cyril's eyes as he grows up through a difficult childhood with his only friend Maurice Woodhead and then Dr Bastiaan who he meets when he moves to Amsterdam later in life. It is the story of Cyril's struggle to discover his identity in an Ireland that sees the power of the church all but vanish in scandal and shame.

Period Pain by Kopano Matlwa: Shortlisted for this year's Sunday Times Barry Ronge Prize for fiction, this novel examines the current state of South Africa through the eyes of the main protagonist Masechaba, a young doctor who is interning at a public hospital. The title of the novel plays on the words of the difficult period of time that South Africa is currently going through both socially and politically, addressing the issues of unemployment and xenophobia. Masechaba has come into this stressful work environment just after her brother has committed suicide and her father has moved out. The pressure put on her by the demands of her patients makes her feel both hopeless and useless, totally ill-equipped to deal with conditions at work as well as the anger that is bubbling up in the community where her mother lives. This is certainly a novel for our time, written with immense feeling.

Before the War by Fay Weldon: Set in London in 1922, this is an historic narrative about the foibles of the aristocracy in Twenties Britain. Vivien, the daughter of a wealthy publisher, just does not fit the mould of a marriageable young lady — she's twenty-four, is unattractive, wears unfashionable clothes and, worst of all during that era, she is intelligent. Using her social position, she "buys" a husband, Sherwyn Sexton, a poor writer who is working for her father. Sherwyn and Vivien move to Barscherau in Germany where they are joined by Vivien's mother, Adela, who is manipulative and contributes to the strange inter-family relationships. At the time of the marriage, Vivien is already pregnant and will die in childbirth while delivering twin girls — and the family saga will continue with Adela at the head. Weldon's writing style is interesting and different as she makes continual jibes at society via personal interjections in the narrative. A worthwhile read just for this different style.

The Winter Horses by Philip Kerr: Set in the Ukraine during World War II, the main character in this novel is a young Jewish girl called Kalinka who is trying to escape from Nazi Germany after her parents had been killed for being Jews. Kalinka is an unhappy outcast who no one wants to help as this would be dangerous. She is only happy when she is with the wild Przewalski horses in the Askaniya-Nova sanctuary. It is here that she meets Max, an old man who works at the sanctuary. He has been ordered to kill the horses in the sanctuary so that when the Germans invade the Ukraine, there will be no meat for them to eat. He refuses to kill the horses and when the Germans arrive, they start killing them off, leaving two horses that Kalinka and Max try to get to safety. They face many challenges together and Max makes many sacrifices to help Kalinka save the horses. A great read.
Brainteaser

A quick anagram challenge this week.

THREE MEN EXIT

is an anagram for which three-word phrase that means “the highest degree”?

A bite-sized chocolate for the first correct answer. Send your answers to the following e-mail: Library@bridgehouse.org.za

There was no winner of last week’s brainteaser. The ? in the following pattern of numbers: 3 9 11 33 35 ? should be replaced by 105 — the first number 3 is multiplied by 3 to get 9 and then two is added to the 9 to produce 11. The pattern is repeated with ? = 35 x 3 = 105.

From: The Most Enormous Book of Brainteasers “Ever!”

Should social networks be classed as publishers?

Stephen Fry, speaking at this year’s Hay Book Festival, has called for social networks that aggregate news to be reclassified as publishers and to be subjected to the same legal requirements that other traditional distributors of news have to adhere to. Fry suggests that if this legal requirement were to be implemented that the level of fake news that is passed around would be reduced as well as the amount of online abuse. Figures suggest that 80% of the population use one or more social media platforms as their source of news which is mostly unvetted. Social media platforms have been criticised for hiding behind the fact that they are just that — platforms that provide a means for information to be exchanged and enable communication to take place rather than publishing content for which they are legally responsible. It would obviously be a mammoth task as regulating the posts of over 1 billion Facebook users and 200 million Twitter users is not quite the same as putting the 30-odd pages of a newspaper or magazine together. The argument is an interesting one and Fry’s suggested solution would seem to be up against legal phrasing.