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In short

A FAR COUNTRY

by Daniel Mason

Picador, £16.99

☐ £15.29 (free p&p)

Isabel, aged 14, lives on the edge of a sugarcane plantation in a generic (probably South American) impoverished country. She has the strange gift of “seeing farther, hearing better”, and this is her only guide when searching for her lost brother in the seething slums of the generic impoverished big city. It all sounds rather tiresome (why make up a slum when you can have a real one?) but Mason is a superb storyteller. He inhabits Isabel’s mind with fine sensitivity, and cleverly uses his imaginary setting to write of dauntless, timeless love and loyalty.

THE PEACOCK THRONE

by Sujit Saraf

Sceptre, £12.99

☐ £11.69 (free p&p)

It is October 31, 1984. Gopal Pandey, a tea-merchant in Delhi, wakes up with a conviction that this will be an “unfortunate” day. He is right — Indira Gandhi is assassinated, and India is thrown into turmoil. Gopal is particularly worried about his son, who has got himself mixed up in politics. He has no idea that his life is about to change dramatically, setting him on the path to wealth and power. This is an enormous novel in every sense (it runs to 750 pages) — a canvas like an Indian version of William Powell Frith’s painting *The Derby Day*, with every face and voice beautifully distinct.