

hard to believe that the cure is escape with that tense and terrifying Mom.

After the innocents, the experts. In *A Breath of French Air*, Mr Bates opens another seam of his private goldmine, the Larkin family. This instalment of their adventures might almost be subtitled 'The Darling Bubs of Ma'; but as well as suckling, heavily in evidence in the first chapter, there's guzzling, chuckling, tipping, canoodling, and giggling. But if your veins, like mine, flow with iced water, you'll tend to share the sniffy diffidence of the Larkins' Brecon hosts.

Finally, *Bowd Street Story*, in which Mr Norman Collins gives the Imperial Palace treatment to Rammell's, a department-novel with a vengeance. It isn't just one book. It's an entire shelf-ful of books. Complete with little jokes, and floor-walker's dialect, and tricks to tug at your heart-strings. And an immoral model. All among the staunch comic Londoners. All piled on top of one another. All in nice short sentences. Like this. Readable. Maddeningly. Maddening.

RICHARD MAYNE