

Thrilling story on a compelling canvas depicting medieval Devon

BOOK REVIEW
Laura White reads
No Going Back
by Susan Frances



No Going Back is the second book in the trilogy of The Chiddingfold Sagas, a wonderful historical fiction based on the author's own family history. In the first book, *No One Must Know*, we met Joan, a young and lovely new Lady of the Manor of Chiddingfold, and travelled with her as she married Lord John de Chiddingfold, became close friends with a maid, Annie, and lived a life most unexpected in a thrilling but heart-wrenching tale, all set in the wonderful scene of Devon in the 1300s.

The second book, *No Going Back*, takes up the tale with Thomas, Joan's son, unexpectedly becoming Lord of the Manor. With plague sweeping across the country, nowhere is safe and Thomas is forced to leave his beloved studies with the monks to take care of his people.

Still young and unsure of himself, Thomas has to face up to his responsibilities and try to be a good Lord to men, stronger, older and more stubborn than himself.

With the help of his bailiff Simon, and strong-headed, kind hearted Ross, the miller's daughter, Thomas creates a new life for the small group of villagers in a remote part of his estate, Annie, his mother's long time friend, joins them with her brother, Peter, and his family. But a wandering priest will one day arrive to change Thomas' life forever.

When I was sent this second book in the trilogy, I was planning to skim-read the first one again, just to reacquaint myself with the characters and storyline. But that didn't happen, the first book is so good I had to take my time to re-read it again and enjoyed it just as much as the first time.

So, much later than expected, I began the second book and couldn't put it down. Once again Susan Frances has managed to create the world of Devon in 1348 in such a way that you can feel the weather, smell the forge and feel a real physical



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need to give Thomas a hug when things get tough.

Her characters are so well developed that you feel you know them and the way she has portrayed Thomas' development into a man, in many different ways, has been done so gently and sensitively that it really warms your heart.

And it's not just Thomas who grows and develops. William, Thomas' friend and blacksmith's son, has to navigate his way to finding and obtaining what he wants in life rather than what his father wants for him, and the lovely miller's daughter uses all her intelligence that she's not supposed to have, being a girl, to become one of the most important people in the village.

I loved this book and would highly

recommend both *No One Must Know* and *No Going Back* to anyone who enjoys a good historical tale with various twists and turns, and a few surprises. In fact, it's loved by so many that it won an award!

The Chrysalis Books, Reviews, and Everything Written (CREW) Project is an award-winning Australia-based global platform for books, blogs, poetry, reviews, news, press releases, promotions, other content, authors, writers, bloggers, creators, readers, and audiences. *No Going Back* was awarded the Readers' Choice Award Book of the Month back in April.

For your copies of these fantastic books, you can visit the website www.susanfrances.co.uk or search for the books on Amazon.

Poinsettias are stars of Christmas

If you want to bring a naturally elegant style into your home this season, without losing any of the traditional charm associated with Christmas, poinsettias are the perfect place to start.

Beautiful, garden centres up and down the country, they also help to keep these stores alive during the winter months.

Every Advent beautiful poinsettias – also known as the Christmas Star – come into their own in glorious style and a myriad of shapes. Their colourful bracts that range from blood red and Barbie pink to pure white, warming apricot and variegated brilliance, which ensure poinsettias are the go-to plant for so-called Christmas styling.

In size they run the gamut from charming miniatures up to spectacular plants the size of small shrubs. As perfect for adorning Christmas trees, wreaths and tablescapes as they are going to dinner party hosts, friends and colleagues identify our plants and beautiful bouquets, poinsettias are as versatile as they are pretty.

Poinsettias are also a fabulous way to introduce festive trends into the home. This year, go

for the books on Amazon.



Poinsettias, the Christmas star plants, are a festive touch to any home.

gorgeous hot pink poinsettias are flavour of the season. Making an artistic poinsettia arrangement yourself is easier than it looks. To frame the poinsettia, place it in its planter on a slice of wood. Then cut a metal ring and insert the ends into pre-drilled holes on either side of the piece of wood.

Next, cover the top of the ring with wild clematis (Clematis vitalba) tendrils. Loosely wrap chicken wire around the bottom half of the metal ring, then wrap it in the moss and decorate it with natural materials, if you want. A decorative star gives this homemade project the finishing touch. Your perfect poinsettia gift for anyone who loves natural things is ready.

Festival aims to broaden its appeal

The Dartmoor Walking Festival has undergone a transformation, emerging as the Dartmoor Outdoor Festival, with organisers aiming to broaden its appeal by incorporating a diverse range of activities, writes Laura White.

Scheduled to run from August 29 to September 5, 2025, the revamped festival will feature film screenings, climbing sessions, running events and accessible guided tours of Dartmoor's iconic moors.

Festival director Hannah Durdin, who assumed management of the walking festival earlier in 2024, said the rebranding reflects the area's vast recreational potential beyond hiking.

"There is so much we can be doing in Dartmoor other than just walking, so we are going to take it bigger," she explained.

The expanded vision is already garnering international attention.

"We've had people from America asking when it's on so they can plan their UK trips around the festival, which is quite the compliment," Hannah noted.

"The new festival is committed to inclusivity.

"We're passionate about helping people who may be on the fringes, those who would like to explore Dartmoor but don't know where to start," said Hannah.

In collaboration with the Dartmoor National Park Authority and Dartmoor Preservation Association, the festival will include accessible walks designed in partnership with wheelchair access groups, ensuring participants of all abilities can join.

"It's aimed at anyone," Hannah emphasised, "whether you've been walking on Dartmoor for 20 years or have never visited before. Literally, anyone is welcome."

All events will be individually bookable, ensuring flexibility for participants.

"You don't have to commit to spending hundreds of pounds," Hannah said, "You can simply choose the walks or activities that appeal to you."

A dedicated festival website is set to launch soon, where attendees can browse and book events.

Dartmoor's rugged beauty and rich cultural heritage have long inspired events, celebrating outdoor exploration.

The original Dartmoor Walking Festival was conceived to encourage locals and visitors to experience the moors' landscapes through organised hikes.

By evolving into the Dartmoor Outdoor Festival, the event now aims to reflect modern interests in outdoor pursuits while maintaining



Scenic Dartmoor National Park.

its roots in fostering a deeper connection to Dartmoor.

With its expanded programme and emphasis on inclusivity, the Dartmoor Outdoor Festival hopes to become a flagship event for the region.

Its new direction looks destined to inspire seasoned adventurers, families and first-time explorers alike, ensuring that Dartmoor's natural beauty and activities are celebrated by all.

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