



31 Hours

Masha Hamilton

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“A wolf’s howl” of a winter wind awakens Carol in her Manhattan apartment. She senses that some-thing is terribly wrong with her twenty-one-year-old son, Jonas. Unable to shake that feeling of dread, she is sure that her son would never intentionally go for weeks without contacting her; after all, he’s the sensitive scholar, empathetic idealist, seeker focused on finding a way to solve the world’s problems. But how well does she really know him?

As it turns out, Jonas is in a secret location, cut off from contact with his American life, the life that continues all around him. His girlfriend, Vic, rehearses for her debut as a Broadway dancer. Mara, Vic’s younger sister, tries to cope with her mother’s depression and her parents’ separation. Jonas’s father struggles with the life choices that separated him from his wife and son. The panhandler Sonny goes about his routine. But by the thirty-first hour, all of these lives will be connected again by Jonas’s actions.

Author Masha Hamilton examines the topic of terrorism at the point where personal relationships meet political realities. Perhaps drawing from her reporting experience in the Middle East, she depicts the prejudices that color the political land-scape. When asked about Jonas’ friend Masoud, Vic is torn between her desire to help locate her boyfriend and her sense that “appalling biases” could bring “anyone from an Arab country...into custody.” Each chapter identifies the time in New York and the time in Mecca. This simple device draws parallels be-tween Jonas and the Muslim Masoud, their motivations, families, and experiences. By not just focusing on political arguments but looking also at the personal relationships of characters, Hamilton gently encourages readers to examine their pre-conceptions.

Yet Hamilton’s allegiance is with the New Yorkers destined to be victims. A New Yorker herself, Hamilton ultimately wants her readers to come away from her novel with a clear sense of the vibrancy of her city and its inhabitants.

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