

In the Midst of the Sea

Sean Padraic McCarthy

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Dark, emotional, and incredibly creepy, Sean Padraic McCarthy's *In the Midst of the Sea* is an unsettling supernatural thriller.

Diana agrees to move to Martha's Vineyard with her husband Ford and their young daughter Sam, but she has no idea that their house has a chilling past. As the winter closes in and the family becomes more isolated, there are strange occurrences. Antique dolls seem to move around the house by themselves, long-dead people flicker in and out of view, and Ford's drinking and abusive behavior spiral out of control.

When Diana discovers a notebook in the basement that details the late-nineteenth-century life of a former resident, Elizabeth Steebe, she begins to see that her life is becoming an eerie recreation of Elizabeth's. However, escaping from her destiny—and the house itself—is not going to be easy.

In the Midst of the Sea is affecting on multiple levels. The haunted house story and slow reveal of Elizabeth's terrifying circumstances are psychologically unsettling, but this is not just a story of things that go bump in the night. Even more affecting is Diana and Ford's crumbling relationship. Ford is controlling and flawed; he will stop at nothing to get the respect and devotion he believes he deserves from his wife. Alternating between Diana's and Ford's points of view, the book does an excellent job of showing how love can turn into obsession and can result in violence.

The journal entries are utilized to great effect. Elizabeth's thoughts regarding her own abusive relationship and her limited options give greater depth to Diana's struggle and keep the tension high. As her story begins to dovetail with many of the phantoms Diana is seeing on the island, the broader picture is grimly revealed.

Gripping and unnerving, *In the Midst of the Sea* is a haunting debut from a talented new voice.

ANGELA MCQUAY (May/June 2019)

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