



The Hidden Hours

Sara Foster

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Secrets past and present intertwine in Sara Foster's fascinating psychological mystery, *The Hidden Hours*.

Last night, Eleanor was rescued from loneliness at her company Christmas party by Arabella, one of the publishing house's charismatic darlings. The two women drank and danced, and Eleanor saw Arabella slip a substance into her cocktail. This morning, Arabella was found floating in the Thames, and Eleanor found Arabella's massive engagement ring buried in her purse.

Eleanor had hoped to leave the trauma of her Australian childhood in the outback, but as information about the missing hours prior to Arabella's death reaches her, Eleanor feels the "black wings" of distant memories "beating against her neck." It doesn't help that her uncle, whose family she's staying with, has conscripted his eldest daughter into keeping his own dark secrets. Or that her supposed allies seem to be manipulating her, variously encouraging her to reveal all to the police and to withhold information, to be open with the evidence that she found and to toss it in the river. It's been a long time since Eleanor has trusted anyone; as the police investigation drags on, the behavior of others emphasizes why.

Propelled by apt psychological metaphors and tantalizing clues about Eleanor's early heartbreaks, this mystery holds its audience rapt. Juxtapositions of in-the-moment holiday failures and substance errors with those of bleak Christmases past help to keep the book's timelines vibrant and disturbing; as much as Arabella's secrets are intriguing, so are Eleanor's family's pains. The revelation of what happened to Eleanor when she was nine has as much to do with solving Arabella's murder as it does with her own healing.

Old wounds have to be reopened in service of the truth in the thrilling mystery novel *The Hidden Hours*.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (November / December 2020)

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