



The Hidden Side

Heidi Chiavaroli

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The historical intrigue of Revolutionary War New York parallels the all-too-familiar modern nightmare of a high school shooting in Heidi Chiavaroli's compelling *The Hidden Side*, a novel about tragedy, faith, and personal courage.

The past meets the present through these intriguing parallel tales. The common link is Long Island, New York, once the site of British invasion and colonial rebellion—the latter involving outright resistance along with more covert and subversive tactics.

From its historical perspective, *The Hidden Side* follows Mercy Howard, a young Long Island woman whose fiancé, Nathan Hale, has just been hanged for espionage. Hale would later be regarded as one of America's first great patriots. Having witnessed his death, Mercy vows to help overthrow the enemy British forces and, despite the danger involved, joins a secret ring of spies.

In the modern plotline, Long Islander Natalie Abbott cohosts a radio program offering faith-based guidance to troubled listeners. Like many mothers of teens, Natalie has issues with her high-school twins, Chris and Maelynn, and does her best to balance her work and family. Things are jolted into crisis mode, however, when Maelynn is nearly among the victims of a local school shooting—and Chris is the shooter.

With the school tragedy, the novel skillfully ventures into raw and unnerving territory. Beyond the actual event, Natalie endures Chris's arrest and trial, the searching of her home by law enforcement, a media onslaught, and hatred from many of her neighbors for her son's actions. She also agonizes over missed signs that her son was the victim of bullying and that his repressed rage could turn homicidal.

Both halves of *The Hidden Side* are singularly compelling, with more of a fine threading between stories than an obvious connection. There is also the shared message that even during times of spiritual darkness, with prayer and hope, forgiveness and new beginnings are always possible.

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