She's Not There by Joy Fielding

5 stars

Couldn't put it down!

Whilst on holiday in Mexico, Caroline and Hunter Shipley's two-year-old daughter, Samantha is taken from her cot and all attempts to find her fail, until the family has no choice but to return to California without her. The book then alternates between the present, which is fifteen years on, and the awful consequences of the actions taken on that fateful night.

The book seems to have been based on the real-life disappearance of Madeleine McCann from which Fielding seems to have drawn her inspiration.

While Hunter and their other daughter, Michelle, manage to go forward, Caroline's life is dogged by the suspicions and accusations of the police and the media, and the public at large. Caroline has the unfortunate trait of reacting to tragedy by donning an icy calm and so few people warm to her. Just when she is able to return to her work as a teacher, the anniversary of Samantha's disappearance turns into a media frenzy and few schools will employ her. To make her life more difficult she has a wonderfully hostile mother, Mary, and also a taut relationship with Michelle now an adult, who is by nature an unhappy and resentful person.

Then, one day, Caroline receives a telephone call which gives her reason to hope, and despite the negative views of her family, she keeps a hold on that hope, however foolish she may seem.

What this novel highlights in painful detail is the ongoing prejudice against parents who have been so careless as to lose a child, and the total inability of those parents to escape that dreadful past. Caroline suffers each and every day and the reader is left in no doubt of this and cannot help but feel sympathy for her.

Fielding has expertly drawn together a full palette of characters for the reader to love or hate and these characters take their places in the intricacies of the main and sub-plots.

Upsetting, sometimes exasperating but I dare you to put it down!

Pashtpaws

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review.