

The Secrets You Hide By Kate Helm

5 Stars

She is not the person everyone thinks she is.

Georgia Sage is a professional court artist and attends prominent court cases to illustrate the hearings because cameras are banned. The point of her work is to capture people as they really are – to reveal the secrets they thought they had hidden from view. Can sin write itself across a person's face? If you have a vice, does it show itself in the lines of your mouth, the droop of your eyelids, the mouldings of your hand? Georgia is a very talented artist – in her portraits she builds up layers of the people, to reveal the secrets they hide even from themselves. Her pictures paint a thousand words. Once she has made a man look guilty, there is no way back.

She is commissioned to paint a portrait for a book that features artists in the criminal field. She must return to her first big case and paint a portrait, not of the villain who started the fire but of the hero who saved two children from a burning house – Jim Fielding. A portrait is not like a photo - it's layered and every time you look at a painting you see something new about the person - their kindness, sense of humour, their sadness. Portrait sittings often take on the air of a confessional – is it only possible to be honest with a stranger? Is Jim the hero that everyone thinks he is? If you've been lying to yourself for years, you need a stranger to hear your confession.

But Georgia used to be Suzanne, her father murdered her mother and brother but spared her. Can you outrun madness when it runs in your family? Something shifts inside when you become a victim. You realise that the idea that we have any control over our lives is an illusion – you will never be the same. So, she has tried to protect herself and others from harm – turned her back on friendship and love, lived alone, lived a lie, obliterated all trace of the girl she once was - to get away from what her father was and what he did.

I thoroughly enjoyed the glimpse into the world of a court artist and the author very cleverly shows how many people are not what they seem on the outside. Many of us hide secrets deep inside from everyone who knows us and even from ourselves. I also learnt something new about Charles Bonnet Syndrome and Best Disease and will be giving my grade 11 class a research project about them next year. This is a book that I highly recommend.

Saphira

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review.