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The Secret Place: Dublin Murder Squad, Book 5



Synopsis

The sensational new novel from "one of the most talented crime writers alive". (The Washington Post) The photo on the card shows a boy who was found murdered, a year ago, in the grounds of a girls' boarding school in the leafy suburbs of Dublin. The caption says I know who killed him. Detective Stephen Moran has been waiting for his chance to get a foot in the door of Dublin's Murder Squad - and one morning, 16-year-old Holly Mackey brings him this photo. "The Secret Place", a board where the girls at St Kilda's School can pin up their secrets anonymously, is normally a mishmash of gossip and covert cruelty, but today someone has used it to reignite the stalled investigation into the murder of handsome, popular Chris Harper. Stephen joins forces with the abrasive Detective Antoinette Conway to find out who and why.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 20 hours and 34 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Penguin Audio

Audible.com Release Date: September 2, 2014

Language: English

ASIN: B00M7FRQ94

Best Sellers Rank: #70 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Mysteries & Thrillers > Police

Procedurals #183 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Mysteries & Thrillers > Suspense #199 in Books > Mystery, Thriller & Suspense > Mystery > International Mystery & Crime

Customer Reviews

Tana French knows how to get your attention up front. On page 21, she talks about Chris Harper, Finn Carroll and Harry Bailer, all teen students at Colm, having a fun time in the school corridors with plenty of laughing and horseplay. She casually adds that Chris has eight months and two weeks to live. The time line in this novel is not linear. One chapter deals with the time before Chris's death and the next chapter catapults us to the present when Detectives Antoinette Conway and Stephen Moran are investigating his murder. It proceeds like this, back and forth, almost to the book's end; you want to stay in the present but it's useful to go back and see what happened before Chris's death. French periodically reminds us in the former how long Chris has yet to live. In the latter, it's about a year after Chris's death. As

a member of Dublin's fictional murder squad, Conway worked the case to no avail at the time of his murder. In the present time, Moran has come to join Conway from his slot in the Cold Cases Squad with hopes of doing such a grand job that he'll win a permanent position in the murder squad. Conway and Moran focus their investigation on eight girls at St. Fulda's, the school next to Colm. The girls live, eat, sleep and study in two groups of four; one led by Julia and the other by Joanne. Conway and Moran conduct many interviews using 'good cop' and 'bad cop' tactics and soon decide that one of the eight was Chris's killer. But which one? Several girls had a budding romantic relationship with Chris, or thought they did, while other girls recognized that he was only interested in having a quick 'shag.' Each of the girls had opportunity but what was the killer's motivation? This is the fourth book I've read by Tana French and one of her many writing talents comes to the fore. She is quite adept at portraying the dynamics a group whether it be insecure high school girls coping with intense peer pressure, or young adults trying to hide a crime or protect each other from suffering. In this book, the interpersonal relationships of the eight girls is quite vivid from their authentic dialogue, telephone conversations or their secretive text messages. The only negative I can offer about this book is the ending. I read the last several pages twice but it didn't appear to have a final and full resolution.

This is the fifth book in the Dublin Murder Squad series, and while I didn't race through it as I did the previous books, it did not disappoint me in the least. Detective Stephen Moran works Cold Cases, but what he really wants is to transfer to the Murder Squad - 'Murder is a brand on your arm, like an elite army unit's, like a gladiator's, saying for all your life: One of us. The finest.' When 16-year-old Holly Mackey brings him some evidence relevant to a still-open case of a boy found murdered a year earlier on the grounds of Holly's school, Stephen may have his chance. Holly hands him a photo that was posted on 'The Secret Place' - a notice board at St. Kilda's for the girls to put up any anonymous message they want to get out of their systems. This particular photo showed Chris Harper, the dead boy, with a caption reading 'I know who killed him.' Stephen takes the card to the Murder Squad officer in charge, Detective Antoinette Conway. Conway, as a woman, is not part of the 'old boys club' of Murder, and as Stephen intuits, 'every day had to be a fight' for her. She is rough and abrasive. Stephen doesn't care - he just wants to help work the case. Discussion: Tana French is so good it almost hurts. This book is not as fast-moving as the previous books, but allows readers to savor every bit of the author's skill with capturing

dialogue. The writing is excellent; French is expert at describing a scene so that you can see it yourself, and setting a mood so that you actually sense it, whether menace or hope or shyness or insouciance. She conveys the thoughts of the characters so well we know exactly how they feel - such as Stephen's fascination with the lifestyle of the wealthy combined with his alienation from it, his wistful admiration of the uniqueness of innocent love, and his insight that once you are an adult, the opportunity to feel like that is forever lost to you. I could also feel the force of Conway's defensive hostility and the reason she got that way. And the growing connection between Moran and Conway - so skillfully done! As for the teenage girls: there is no way to contain my admiration for the way French brought them to life in all their desperation and craving and hope and horror. Just outstanding!

Evaluation: I highly recommend the books by Tana French, but I understand that the audio versions, which bring out the accents and dialect in a way a written book does not, are even better. If you haven't read any of Tana French yet, or just want to try one, I would suggest "Faithful Place" - my favorite of her books - which will introduce you to the characters you meet again in this book (although they are all perfectly fine as standalones). Rating: 4.5/5

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