

Q&A with Lucy Foley

What gave you the idea for *The Hunting Party*?

I was staying in a cottage on a very remote, snowy estate in the Scottish Highlands with my husband and we'd learned that in the event of very heavy snowfall we might not be able to leave the estate – that we'd effectively be trapped there. That made me think it would make the perfect setting for a murder mystery. I'd also been thinking that it would be a great spot to gather a group of friends to see in the New Year, and the two ideas converged.

You're also the author of three historical novels. Did you enjoy getting in touch with your darker side for your crime debut?

I loved exploring my darker side (I don't know what that says about me . . .) though there were definitely times when I creaped myself out! I also really enjoyed the challenge of writing in a new genre and in a contemporary setting, and creating characters you 'love to hate'.

There's a fantastic Agatha Christie feel to your murder mystery. Was she, or any other authors, an inspiration?

Absolutely. I'm a huge Agatha Christie fan. I love Poirot and Miss Marple but I'm a particular fan of those books in which there is no sleuth figure – I feel it instantly makes everything feel darker, more uncertain. *And Then There Were None* is a great example. I was certain from the outset that I wanted to avoid the cosy of a 'sleuth' character in my book. I also love Patricia Highsmith and I read her brilliant 'how-to' – *Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction* – while working on *The Hunting Party*.

Do you have a favourite scene in the book?

Probably the hunting scene, because I think it is particularly symbolic of how these characters, who are usually cosseted city-dwellers, begin to change in this place. It is as though the wilderness brings out something latent and feral in them and this increasingly plays out in their interactions with one another. The hunting scene is a watershed moment.

The remote hunting lodge setting just lives and breathes. Did you feel that the sense of place was integral?

Absolutely. I wanted the landscape to feel like another character. I also wanted there to be a sense that the events of the book could only happen in this setting, disconnected from the outside world – the characters loosed from the conventions that usually bind them.

From the beginning of the writing process, did you know whodunit and who the victim was going to be?

Yes. But that isn't to say there weren't a few surprises along the way! I'd planned everything out pretty carefully but there were major changes made when it came to the actual writing – I realised that it wouldn't make sense for a character to behave in the way I'd intended, say, or I suddenly thought of a new twist I wanted to add in.

Can you tell us what's next?

My next novel is another murder mystery and it's called *The Guest List* (you'd die to be on it . . .). Guests are called to a remote island off the Irish coast to celebrate the wedding of the year – the marriage of Jules and Will. Everything has been meticulously planned, the scene is set, old friends are back together: it should be the perfect day. Until, that is, the discovery of a body signals the perfect murder . . . There's a groom with a secret, a bridesmaid with a grudge, a plus one with motive, a best man with a dark past . . . and more!

I so enjoyed writing this book, inviting the reader into the world of a rather glamorous wedding that then goes horribly – fatally – wrong. I felt a wedding was ripe for the murder mystery treatment; they're wonderful occasions but also potentially times of heightened emotion and stress and people can behave very badly. It's also a chance for old friends, new friends and family members to come together – people who would never normally meet – with potentially explosive consequences.

Reading Group Questions

What does the New Year's Eve setting add to the story?

Discuss how Lucy Foley plays with the classic 'locked-room mystery' device.

What are the key themes of the book?

The group friendship is complex and, at times, very toxic. Did you feel this was a realistic representation?

Did you guess who the killer and the victim were?

All of the characters are flawed in their own way. In your opinion, before the killing, who made the worst mistake?

Discuss the roles of Heather and Doug in the character line-up.

At one point Heather observes: 'But that's the thing about old friends, isn't it? Sometimes they don't even realise that they no longer have anything in common. That maybe they don't even like each other anymore.'

Discuss this statement in the wider context of the novel.

What would you say about the book when pressing it into someone else's hands?