
Celia Fremlin

The Hours Before Dawn (Paperback)



Title: The Hours Before Dawn (Paperback)

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Format: Paperback

Language: English

Pages: 216

Publisher: , 0

ISBN: 1860492231

Format: PDF / Kindle / ePub

Size: 5.2 MB

Download: allowed

Description

This novel, one of the Virago Crime Classics, combines humour with a look at the danger and suspense in the tyranny of motherhood. It also explores the redeeming power of love.

Insightful reviews

Abbey: 1958, Edgar-winning first novel, the suspenseful - and fearful! - home life of a new mother; Poor Louise is definitely a bit of a fluffy space-shot of a woman, but she's kind and loving and truly tries her hardest to make everything work well for her family. Whether or not she is mad, becomes mad, or only sees madness around her is slowly and carefully presented. Seems a mite overwrought now, but still effective - three-and-one-half stars

Mrs. Louise Henderson has a new baby, two active daughters ages 6 and 8, and a home that is usually pretty much a chaotic wreck. And she also has a husband who doesn't show any empathy/sympathy for her, especially now that the baby is teething and simply refuses to sleep through the night. He's annoyed, but she is terribly sleep-deprived, entirely overwhelmed by her life's circumstances. Louise slowly spirals down into madness - or does she?

The coming of the new lodger tips the scales for her, from "barely surviving, all things considered" to night-wanderings, "misplacing" the baby (several times) and a slow realization that said lodger may not be what she appears to be. With complaints coming in on all sides about her poor performance as a wife, mother and neighbor, and her general inability to cope, poor Louise just can't seem to do anything right. When she begins to suspect that the lodger is "up to something..." (and only has a nosy neighborhood boy who agrees) emotionally she's pretty much thrown to the wolves by all her friends and her - supposedly - loving hubby.

The general attitude around her is that not only was she a quite wimpy little housewife before the baby's birth, now that she's also sleep-deprived and the baby is causing problems with the neighbors (and her husband) it seems to all her friends and family members that she's finally "losing it". But *is* she? The smoothness of Fremlin's writing allows the reader to not *quite* believe either story, that Louise is going mad or the lodger is up to something - either is likely, and even both just might be true. It's an excellent little domestic horror story 1950s style, and therein lies its only true weakness.

It hasn't aged well, alas. The overly-submissive, worry-wart little wifey was not only a staple of novels in the 1950s, she was also quite prevalent in real life, although most women today may not believe it. "Go along to get along" was the general attitude, as many wives simply didn't press for their own likes, interests, hopes, ideas. For many women pretty much everything was subservient to The Husband's Wishes, and pleasing him was Job No. One. And when you get someone like Louise who obviously has what we would now call "confidence issues", well....

And that lodger does seem rather creepy. Right from the get-go she exhibits questionable behaviors, but there's nothing startling, nothing that truly sets the alarms going off. It's very subtly done, and therein lies Fremlin's talent. Yes, parts of this are now awfully familiar plot

devices - and I'm quite certain that you'll guess at least part of what's going on fairly easily and early-on in the story. And there were endless passages about taking care of children According to the Authorities rules that bored me silly. And some of the then-currently popular psychologizing seems funny now.

But Fremlin treats that sort of thing with a nicely light hand, all the while allowing us to see Louise's uncertainties as she tries to deal with impossibly conflicting needs and responsibilities. Poor Louise is definitely a bit of a fluffy space-shot of a woman, but she's kind and loving and truly tries her hardest to make everything work well for her family. Whether or not she is mad, becomes mad, or only sees madness around her is slowly and carefully presented, with beautiful pacing after you get through the slow-moving baby-centric set-up business at the beginning (it's important stuff, actually...).

I can easily see why this won an Edgar - it's smooth, creepy, actually quite psychologically sound in many ways and terrifically observant (Fremlin must have herself had children recently....). Her depiction of what we would now call Post-Partum depression is fascinating. Although it's my opinion that a good deal of her trouble for Louise, at least at first, was due to sleep deprivation. But even that can easily push anyone over-the-edge, can't it?

Whatever the cause, The Henderson's nice suburban life slowly goes awry, with pretty much everything going from bad-to-worse. The ending is a bit of a formulaic let-down, alas, but perhaps in the 1950s it was rather sensational. I'd give it the benefit of the doubt, given the high quality of most of her writing, and her terrific ability to keep the reader guessing. Recommended for those who enjoy classic suspense.

Steph: Not really my thing; I can't really say I liked it but the book redeemed itself at the end. I thought if Louise took the Hooper baby one more time when she didn't want to, I was going to scream. But it all worked out in the end. A creepy little psychological thriller.

Sandi: This won the Edgar Award for best novel back in 1960 and features a mother trying to cope with a newborn who will not stop crying, two older girls, a typical English husband of the 1950s who shows his concern about the household by showing up unannounced for lunch and expecting a hot meal with meat, and new boarder in the attic.

Julie: extra of a mental mystery than a "regular" mystery. will get higher on the end.

Judy: one of many pleasures of interpreting all these outdated books for My significant fats studying undertaking is studying gem stones like this. The Hours earlier than sunrise received the Edgar Award in 1960. Louise Henderson is the younger mom of 2 teenagers in Fifties London. Her child doesn't sleep much, specially among the hours of two AM and dawn. He cries ceaselessly in order that by the point he's quite a few months old, Louise is so sleep disadvantaged she strikes via her day-by-day housewifery tasks in a daze. Mr Henderson is a regular 50s husband who wishes his dinner on time and thinks his spouse might be capable of

quiet that child so he can sleep at night. Neighbor girls on both sides in their domestic are busybodies: one is stuffed with suggestion on baby rearing and the opposite threatens to name the specialists in regards to the screaming baby. When the Hendersons let loose a bed room to a neighborhood tuition teacher, unusual issues start to happen. It takes Louise a number of weeks to gain anything bizarre goes on, being so sleepy that she is often at the verge of nodding off. Once she realizes their boarder Vera could be the reason behind the trouble, Louise turns beginner sleuth and saves her relatives within the nick of time. The Hours prior to sunrise equals the easiest of Shirley Jackson for its abundance of creeping creepiness in addition to its wry tackle motherhood and the plight of the housewife. fortunately for me, the e-book was once reprinted in 1995 through Black Dagger Crime sequence and that i came upon it at my neighborhood library.

Esther Taylor: nice learn even though one the place I saved having to remind myself of the period within which it was once written (feminists who get themselves all labored up over earlier gender roles mightn't take this e-book too well...)

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