



The Vows of Silence

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We met the enigmatic and brooding Simon Serrailler in *The Various Haunts of Men* and got to know him better in *The Pure in Heart* and *The Risk of Darkness*. *The Vows of Silence*, the fourth crime novel featuring Chief Inspector Serrailler, is perhaps even more compulsive and convincing than its predecessors.

A gunman is terrorizing young women in the cathedral town of Lafferton. What, if anything, links the apparently random murders? Is the marksman with the rifle the same as the killer with the handgun? With the complexity and character study that earned raves for *The Pure in Heart* and the relentless pacing and plot twists of *The Various Haunts of Men*, *The Vows of Silence* is truly the work of a writer at the top of her form.

The Vows of Silence Details

Date : Published 2007 by Chatto & Windus (first published 2006)

ISBN : 9780701179991

Author : Susan Hill

Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : Mystery, Crime, Fiction, European Literature, British Literature

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From Reader Review The Vows of Silence for online ebook

Roman Clodia says

After the more leisurely second and third instalments of this series, this is the tightest book to date. A sniper is targeting young married women in Lafferton; Cat has returned from Australia and faces her most heart-rending challenge; a widow is taking her first steps in dating again; and Jane Fitzroy is finding her direction in life.

I guess you could read this novel without the rest of the series but the others really add resonance as people's pasts count here. Definitely don't read this if you're looking for a more typical police/crime novel since the perpetrator is not difficult to spot and, in any case, Hill is always more interested in her characters and the effect crime might have on them than writing a mystery.

Nikki says

Susan Hill's Simon Serailler novels are shelved as mysteries in libraries and bookstores, and here on my virtual shelves as well. Having read the first (The Various Haunts of Men) and the fourth (this one), and some reviews, I think they are actually domestic fiction about a family, one of whose members happens to be a policeman.

I enjoyed both books, and will probably seek out the middle two and any sequels. But I enjoyed them as domestic fiction more than for the mystery. I learned from some of the other Goodreads reviews that each of the four books has Simon dealing with a serial killer, which stretches credulity given that the series is set in a relatively small cathedral town. I read a lot of police procedurals, and serial killers seem to crop up a lot, partly because in most real-life homicides the police know more or less "whodunnit." The need for proof can make tales of homicides which are domestic, gang-related, or committed during the commission of another felony interesting; but it's still a little more difficult to come up with plausible scenarios for detective work under those circumstances. So, nearly every writer of police procedurals has to have an occasional serial killer to deal with. But I'm just tired of them.

In a sense, though, the serial killer is not really the focus of The Vows of Silence. In fact, more people die in the book from accident, suicide and natural causes than by the hand of the killer. Although some chapters put us inside the killer's head, the victims are given equal time and their deaths are described more empathetically than is sometimes the case. Serailler seems to take a long time to come to a solution, but he has a lot of personal concerns to deal with, and in the end, those are the portions of the book I will remember. Recommended, but not as a mystery.

Lynne says

I've now read the first four of the series. I like it a lot, but it is strange in some ways. The first book, for instance, hardly featured the protagonist at all; it was mainly about a new employee who was attracted to

him. The next three, we have the protagonist, but I don't much like him. He's a cold fish who treats women badly. However, the mysteries are good, and I really like the guy's sister, a doctor. This is a really good series, and I don't have to like the protagonist, as evidenced by my current feelings for Thomas Lynley.

Karen Pullen says

I love Susan' Hill's books, though there is a sameness about them (serial killer terrorizes Lafferton). She's an excellent writer, reminding me of Elizabeth George only less wordy. She employs multiple points of view - including the victims and the killer - but it works very well; you always know who is speaking/thinking/experiencing the story. Her characters are appealing, especially the sleuth (Simon Serrailler) and his sister Cat. She weaves in and out of their family problems, his struggles as a policeman, his romantic entanglements (or avoidance of them). Susan Hill is one author I can depend on - I will always get her latest.

Jo Weston says

Best yet of the series for me. Really steamed along and I love the development of the family story alongside, with the characterisations there. Though it has to be said that the Serraillers are a fairly unfortunate bunch with what life doles out to them.

Kim Kaso says

As you can tell by the start & finish dates, this was a consuming & fast read for me. I am so glad I discovered the Simon Serrailler books by Susan Hill a year-and-a-half ago. I ration them, slot them into my reading as treats. The characters are so well-crafted, the Cathedral town feels familiar to me, the plots are full of lovely sleight-of-hand that keeps me guessing & often tempts to go to the end to alleviate the anxiety I feel on behalf of my favorite characters, she makes it hard to stick to my "no peeking" rule. It is always great to read about Simon and his extended family, although there are getting to be fewer of them 4 books in. I think I read somewhere the BBC or ITV is going to film these, I do hope they are well done. Highly recommended, deceptively complex, beautifully told mysteries, give them a try if you like English mysteries.

Deanne says

Read this in one sitting except for breaks to hunt down more coffee.

Serrailler is dealing with a number of things after the end of the previous book. A killer who shoots young women and a new DS who seems to be an idiot.

There's also personal problems which come in threes, including a tragedy close to home.

Again Hill presents a group of characters who are more than window dressing for the main character. There are also secondary characters who are new to Lafferton but essential to the story. Looking forward to the next.

Charlotte says

OK, I understand that when a sort of formula is working you may not want to mess with it, but four books, four serial killers, only one little English cathedral town? Beloved characters: you ought to move. Hill is obviously much more than a competent writer, so I'm confused by the repeat plot. Also, the personal events that befall the main Serailler family are SO SAD, and not in a useful way. I honestly don't understand why some of the hard things that happen to them do in this book--it just seemed overly cruel. What's the message--that life really is this hard? Okay. But still, reading this sequel is a tearful lesson about The Random and Cruel Acts of the World, without much of the nuanced and interesting reflections on faith or belief that infused the other books. I hope the next one (which I will certainly read) brings a little relief.

Carol says

Still going. This is really a fun and purely entertaining series.

Read in audio.

Dorothy says

Having enjoyed the other books in the Simon Serailler series, I was disappointed in this mystery. For one thing there were far too many deaths, some linked to the detective story, but others in the back story and involving established characters, and I felt that there were too many story lines and none got the attention they deserved. I also didn't like the frequent use of short staccato sentences of one or two words. This can be an effective dramatic device but was overdone here and seemed merely annoying.

Karen says

Death continues to surround the Serrailler clan, and not just of the crime variety. While Cat Deerbon deals with a shocking development, Simon is on the trail of a sniper in Lafferton (for a quiet village they've sure had their share of crazed criminals lately!) This book was somewhat disappointing, though. I figured out who the sniper probably was pretty quickly and the red herring wasn't very convincing to lead me otherwise. Then, the fate of one of the characters really made no sense at all.

The author also seemed to be much more heavily anti-Christian in this installment than previously. Although some of her characters are believers, most of them are either very shallow Christians (Christmas and Easter types) or they are avowed atheists. One of the few strong believers she's introduced was made into a parody of extremism.

Spuddie says

It took me a long time to listen to this book. I love the writing and the author's style, but I really dislike the main character, whom I find to be a self-absorbed, clueless snothead. So I only listen to a little at a time less I plot to kill him off. This one was especially poignant with his sister Cat going through hell as her husband Chris deals with a brain tumor.

Sandy *The world could end while I was reading and I would never notice* says

A true 4* this one.....Susan Hill is back to her best with Gunmen terrorizing women in the Cathedral town of Lafferton. What — if anything — links these apparently random murders? Is the rifle marksman the same person as the killer with the handgun? Simon Serrailler uses well-tried police methods - questions neighbors, searches house-to-house and ponders, both the motives for the murders and his personal life. His sister Cat is back with her family from their six month sojourn in Australia, but tragedy strikes home in her warm and welcoming farmhouse.

Another good read.

Sue says

It's amazing to me how much Susan Hill can incorporate into each episode of her Simon Serrailler series. Yes they are police procedurals and mysteries, but they also provide continuing character studies of the primary, continuing characters as there lives change in many and unexpected ways. And secondary characters are not ciphers but are fully developed with full pasts, presents and hoped-for futures of their own.

In this episode, recent brides and newlyweds have been shot by a sniper without warning, with no apparent motive, no apparent rationale for order of attack, and Lafferton and the Police are desperately trying to make sense of this and prevent any further death. Then there are changes within Serrailler's family.

Hill continues to play by her own rules as she moves forward in this series. No one is truly safe before this author's pen!

As for rating, I did have a guess as to the perpetrator but that didn't bother me because of the strength of the other stories and catching up from past episodes. There were some moments in this book that I found profoundly moving and well written, beyond the genre expectations. I waffled between 4 and 5, but landed on 5 for emotional grounds.

Victoria says

This fourth entry into the Simon Serrailler series left me with some rather mixed feelings. After the third book, The Risk of Darkness, ended rather abruptly and despite several characters being abandoned it what

felt like mid-story, they are not so much as mentioned here. I also expected there to be more with the kidnapper, but that plot line also has been cast aside. My concern over these plot lines led me to ruin a large part of the book - I thought I would read the synopsis for the fifth book - it should have been labeled "spoiler alert" because not only did I discover nothing to indicate one way or another that the third book would be revisited, but a huge development of the fourth book was completely given away!

Despite my dissatisfaction with the series and its continuity, I did greatly enjoy this book. Emotions run very high here and the plot offers quite a few genuine surprises. Simon, our series main character, continues to develop and is at his most likable here. I am definitely looking forward to the next book in the series, especially if it will be as fast-paced as this one!
