

The Hidden Girl

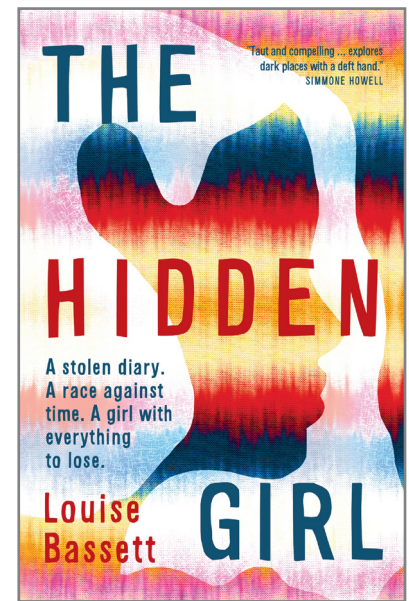
AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Secondary
(Language, Sexual references, Violence)



SYNOPSIS

Mel has everything to lose—but how can she stand back when she knows something’s not right?

Within the pages of a stolen diary, Melati discovers a coded cry for help—the diary belongs to Devi, an Indonesian teenager who is being held by traffickers. Mel races across the island of Java and against the clock to work out Devi’s identity and where she’s being held. Before long the pieces fall into place and Mel must put her own life on the line to save a girl she’s never met.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Louise Bassett is an Australian author who writes for young adults and grown-ups. *The Hidden Girl* is her debut novel and was shortlisted for the Ampersand Prize. Her award-winning adult short fiction has been published internationally. Her second and third YA novels are in the works.

After emigrating from England on a Greek liner, Louise grew up in Adelaide, ‘the weird murder capital of Australia’ and a fertile environment for a budding writer. After university, she narrowly dodged a career as a lawyer and worked in international aid in Cambodia, Papua New Guinea and Vietnam. While living in Indonesia, she scaled volcanoes and worked with activists who were campaigning to end violence against women. These experiences inspired *The Hidden Girl*.

Louise works in community justice, giving her a deep understanding of the impact of crime and vulnerability; issues she explores in her writing.

Based in Melbourne, Louise lives with her partner and too many books. Her stepsons keep her in touch with all things YA.

STUDY NOTES

- ‘But on nights when I can’t sleep, when the clock tortures me and the dark bends my thoughts into weird shapes, I get to thinking ... What if deep down I really am bad?’ (p 23). How are right and wrong presented in the novel? Are some characters (for example, Libby, Rachel, Michael or Mr Stokes) presented purely as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ or are there shades of grey?
- Do you think Melati does the right thing by keeping what she finds in the diary mostly to herself? How could the story have unfolded differently if she had told the authorities?
- Did you have any preconceived ideas about Indonesia before reading *The Hidden Girl* and if so, why? What did you

learn about the country and its culture from the book? Have you been to Indonesia, or would you like to?

- ‘They’re in my corner, but there’s a sour taste in my mouth. It’s that word. Brave. A lonely trophy of a word. I think of Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Joan of Arc. What did bravery do for them? They’re dead, dead, dead. Dead like my school record. They’re calling me brave, but deep down they mean stupid: Thanks for being stupid enough to do what we should have done,’ (p 28). Do you think Melati taking on Libby was brave, or stupid, or perhaps both? Do you agree with Melati’s take on what bravery means? How would you define it?
- What do we learn about Devi as a character through the diary? Do you think the voice that comes through is authentic to who she is? Why or why not? Have you ever kept a diary? What impression do you think someone could form of you from only reading your entries?
- Devi’s experience of human trafficking and trying to get justice is confronting. What was it like to read about what Devi went through from her own perspective? Were you surprised to learn this practice is prevalent in Australia? As a group, discuss what is being done to both stop human trafficking and to provide support for people who have had experiences like Devi.
- Did you find yourself mostly agreeing or disagreeing with Melati’s decisions throughout the book? Why or why not? Were there any of her choices you found yourself on the fence about?
- How is the theme of fear explored in the novel through both Devi and Melati? What are some of the things these characters are afraid of, for themselves and for their futures?
- Michael expresses to Melati how talking about tough topics, in his case his mother’s death, makes people uncomfortable even though it’s helpful for him to be able to discuss it. Can you relate to this? Why do you think it’s important to not do ‘the big swerve’ with friends and family when things get difficult?
- Melati struggles with controlling her feelings of anger. How does she work to improve on this? How does she change as a character as a result of the events of the novel?
- How does *The Hidden Girl* compare to other Australian YA you might have read? You could especially consider Melati’s narrative voice, the plot or the novel’s school setting. If you haven’t read much Australian YA, check out #LoveOzYA for lots more recommendations!