



Hidden Doors, Secrets Rooms

Jamie Eubanks

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This brisk and original cat-and-mouse thriller exceeds expectations with unpredictable results.

John Mills, a reclusive iconic British singer and songwriter, is living in self-imposed solitude until Jillian Braedon and her five-year-old daughter, Valerie, show up at his isolated home during the middle of a blizzard. Jillian, on the run from the FBI, is keeping an unbelievable secret that John slowly deciphers in this amalgam of mystery, science fiction, adventure, and romance.

As strangers intrude upon his quiet life, John is forced to face the pain from his past: “For the past few winters, he had welcomed the snow here. It had given him that added peace of mind that no one would disrupt his solitude, because dead men don’t feel comfortable in the presence of the living. And he was dead—five years dead. Or so he had thought before a certain little girl showed up on his doorstep.” Descriptions are beautifully worded: “The snow glistened as if made of granulated sugar. ... The sky was a troubled shade of blue.”

The characters in this very original story all have unique personalities. The agents—Brewster, Laurel, Barnes, and Andrews—are an eerie bunch of supposed government operatives. Mel Talbot, an international computer hacker and friend of John, has a personality as big and over-the-top as John’s is subdued, quietly intelligent, and understated. Jillian struggles to control her personal demons, as well as protect her daughter.

Author Jamie Eubanks, who runs a detective agency in Southern California, unfolds the story a brisk pace. Present events play out alongside each character’s backstory, or in the case of Agent Andrews, his mysterious lack of backstory. The somber John, who gets around with a cane as the result of a helicopter accident five years earlier that claimed the life of his wife and young son, is drawn to Valerie’s openness and innocence. He’s both intrigued and confounded by Jillian’s amazing claims. The plot keeps the reader guessing whether the bad guys will discover John’s hidden house guests before Mel Talbot can smuggle them away to safety. It’s a game of cat and mouse with unpredictable results.

The book is very nicely edited, and its cover, in blues and grays, depicts a lone tree and shack, which one can imagine is the hidden location where the FBI agents are hunkered down, trying to locate and, ultimately, terminate Jillian. “The roof was a pitiful sight of galvanized sheeting, littered with small holes as if a barrage of bullets had hit it. During the day, sun filtered through the tiny holes, seeding the floor with light.”

The book’s title comes from a record album of the same name by John’s internationally known band. There’s also a literal secret room accessed by a hidden door off the kitchen area of his well-fortified desert home, where Jillian and Valerie can be safely ensconced when necessary. Fans of mysteries and thrillers will find that this book exceeds any expectations they may have had going in, primarily due to its unconventional plot line.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (December 20, 2013)

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