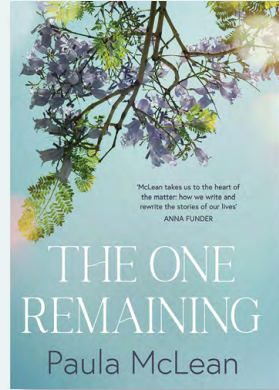


Q & A WITH PAULA MCLEAN



Q: What inspired the story of *The One Remaining*?

A: Initially I sat down to write memoir, but within a few days I was confronted with all the tricky questions memoirists face – who to include and who to leave out, what stories to tell, and what best to avoid. I felt the presence of two little birds sitting on my shoulder, one urging me to be brave, the other asking, Why would anyone want to read your memoir? One of those little birds, the one urging me on, found its way into the early pages of the novel I ended up writing.

So instead of writing memoir I happened on the idea of writing a fictional memoir of a fictional novelist – what became Hilary's Story. The idea arrived in the mysterious way that our creative minds work, but once I held that idea in my head, I could see the beginnings of a novel.

Q: In essence, what is the story about?

A: My protagonist, Hilary, is a mature novelist who has suffered significant trauma in her teenage years, trauma that she carries through her life. She is unable to share this long hidden story as time and again she chooses to keep this period of her life secret from those she loves. She comes upon years of her diaries, long packed away in a filing cabinet, tied in double knots. As she reads through the diaries, she decides to write a memoir, a way to tell the difficult stories she has withheld. The novel is also the story of a writing life, and so I include references to Hilary's 'body of work', as any real writer presumably would do in writing their memoir. In Hilary's case it is five novels and a collection of short stories. However, *The One Remaining* is also a love story, one that I hope is affecting and that dives into aspects of what her marriage might look like.

Q: How long did it take you to write the novel? Were there any challenges along the way?

A: The drafts took the better part of four years. I loved the months of writing, slipping into that mysterious creative space, what novelist Ashley Hay calls 'the subconscious slither between the creative world and the real one'. In many ways I loved the technical challenges, especially how to incorporate 'Hilary's novels' and her imagined readers into the narrative – almost books within books. I kept a flip chart to the side of my desk with the names of her novels and vague descriptions of what they might be about, and what themes they might explore. Then I created opportunities to bring these 'books' of Hilary's into her memoir. And, of course, the big one, time, was always a challenge.

Q: Was there anything about the editing process that surprised you?

A: No – having been an editor myself I was well aware of what the process would be, and I had the support of my wonderful publisher Ginny Grant.

Q: What does it mean to you to be the first title published under Fearless Press?

A: It means everything! I'm thrilled! Helping to support the voices of women has been a major part of my own career, so now – sitting on the other side of the fence so to speak – to be published by Fearless Press, which is dedicated to publishing the diverse voices of women, is incredibly special.