

The Hunting Party
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Behind-the-Book Essay

I had the idea for *The Hunting Party* while staying in the remote Scottish estate that was the inspiration behind Loch Corrin in the book. It's a beautiful, wild landscape with a loch fringed by Scots pine trees, thousands of acres of heather-covered mountainside, a huge herd of red deer, roaring waterfalls. Heavenly — exactly the sort of place one might travel to to escape the pace of the city for a special celebration, as the friends in the book do.

Before we arrived, we were sent a set of instructions for our stay: during heavy snowfall, I read, we might find ourselves unable to leave the estate — and equally no one would be able to get in. That got me thinking — in those conditions, couldn't all that remote, beautiful wilderness take on a more oppressive, even sinister, cast? What if something terrible happened and you were cut off from all help from the outside world? Something like a murder.

I also wanted to explore the idea of old friends. Other than the newcomer, Emma, the group in *The Hunting Party* have known each other for years. But how well do they still really know each other? How much do they even really like each other? And how many secrets are they keeping from each other? I suspect that many of us have at least one friendship like this — if we really honest with ourselves — where all that binds us is the history we share. There are tensions between the characters because their 'roles' in the group were defined when they were eighteen and have stayed the same since — despite them now being very different people. One, Samira, is now a mother. One, Katie, has a successful career but is seen as the failure, because she doesn't live up to the glossy image of perfection represented by her best friend. As for this golden girl, Miranda — the years in between have rubbed a little of the shine off her. She's desperate to reassert herself.

I enjoyed exploring what the wilderness brought out in these pampered city-dwellers... how the tensions, jealousies and hidden desires between them might begin to surface and wreak havoc... with fatal consequences.

My literary inspirations when writing *The Hunting Party* were Agatha Christie, genius of the locked room murder mystery and Patricia Highsmith who created such wonderfully complex, devious characters and wrote so well about the ways in which friends or lovers can deceive one another.