



Rebecca Forster

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HOSTILE WITNESS

When sixteen-year-old Hannah Sheraton is arrested for the murder of her step-grandfather, the chief justice of the California Supreme court, her distraught mother turns to her old college roommate, Josie Baylor-Bates, for help. Josie, once a hot-shot criminal defense attorney, left the fast track behind for a small practice in Hermosa Beach, California. But Hannah Sheraton intrigues her and, when the girl is charged as an adult, Josie cannot turn her back. But the deeper she digs the more Josie realizes that politics, the law and family relationships create a combustible and dangerous situation. When the horrible truth is uncovered it can save Hannah Sheraton or destroy them both.

1. Should children who commit violent crimes be tried as adults? Should chronological age enter into the discussion given the severity of the crimes we see being committed by children?*
2. Is it truly possible get justice in this day and age where trials are discussed simultaneously in the media spotlight and by men and women who have agendas that reach beyond guilt or innocence?***
3. Can there be any sympathy for Linda? Is her desire to secure her future extreme, or the norm?
4. Was Linda jealous of Hannah? Her youth? Her beauty? Most of all her sense of right and wrong? Was Hannah a mirror that reflected only her mother's failings
5. Were Linda's actions throughout the book calculated or simply reactive as the situation spiraled out of control?
6. Was Hannah's loyalty to her mother understandable, pitiful, or heroic?
7. Children mature physically so much earlier these days. Do we (adults) burden them by mistaking physical maturity for emotional, spiritual and intellectual maturity? Do we do them a disservice by not helping them pace their childhood? Is this driven by mothers, fathers, media, friends or all of the above?
8. On some level, was Josie as selfish as Linda? Does she use Hannah to fill a void in her life, or are her intentions purely honorable in terms of helping Hannah find a safe harbor?
9. Did Josie have a right to insert Hannah into her life without discussing it with Archer and Faye? Both of whom she made a commitment to – one professional and one personal.

*Recently the news reported a Supreme Court decision striking down mandatory life in prison for children. This in response to two fourteen-year-old boys sentenced to life for killing in the course of a robbery. The news has reported children as young as ten deliberately killing their victim.

**Think OJ Simpson, Robert Blake. Celebrity and showmanship played their part but so did the District Attorney's choice to change the venue and the assignment of prosecutors.