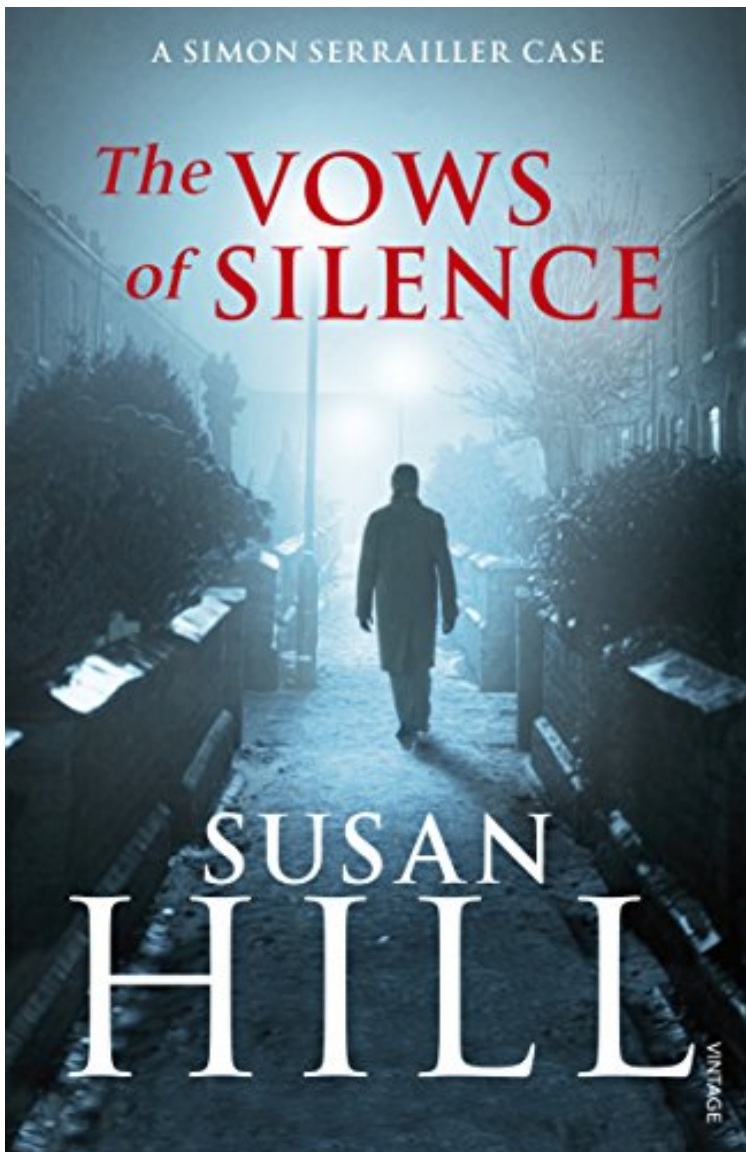


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The Vows of Silence: Simon Serrailer Book 4



Par Susan Hill
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA gunman is terrorising young women. What links these seemingly random murders? Is the marksman with a rifle the same person as the killer with a handgun? Or do the police have two snipers on their hands?Detective Chief Superintendent Simon Serrailer is in charge of the case, but is struggling to cope with a tragedy at the heart of his family. The pressure is mountingExtraitOneThey had climbed for two hours. Then they had come into the low-hanging curtains of cloud. It had started to drizzle. He opened his mouth to make some sour remark about the promise of a fine day, but, at the same moment, Iain turned his head a fraction to the left. Motioned with his forefinger.Iain knew the hills and the weather of the hills, the subtle shifts of wind direction. Knew them better than anyone. They stood, still, not speaking. There was a

tension now. It hadn't been there minutes before. Something. The sun broke apart the cloud curtain, leaving it in tatters. The sun shone at first with a watery cast but then, like a man leaping out into view, full and strong. The corners of Iain's mouth twitched in a smile. But still they stood. Motionless and silent. Waiting. Iain lifted his binoculars to his eyes and looked from left to right, slowly, slowly. And he waited, watching the set of Iain's head, waiting for the moment. Their clothes began to steam in the sun. Iain lowered the glasses and nodded. They were above the deer, and for another half-mile he saw nothing. But they were there of course. Iain knew. They went carefully, keeping upwind. The ground was stony here, easy to slip. He felt the old excitement. These were the best moments. When you knew. You were this close to it, this close to having it in your sights, this close to the whole point and purpose and culmination of it all. This close. There was the faintest outbreath from Iain's pursed lips. He followed the line of sight. The stag was alone, halfway up the lower slope immediately west of where they were standing. It had sensed nothing that much was clear for the moment. Keep it that way. They dropped down and began to crawl, the soaking ground against their bellies, the sun on their backs. The midges came on with a vengeance, to find their way unerringly through chinks in clothing, brushing aside the barrier of citronella, but he was so keyed up now he barely noticed them. Later he would be driven mad. They crawled for another ten minutes, dropping down slightly until they were level with the stag and a couple of hundred yards away. Iain stopped. Lifted the glasses. They waited. Watched. Still as the stones. The sun was hot now. The wind had dropped altogether. They began to inch maybe thirty yards further and the thirty yards took ten minutes; they barely moved. Just enough. The stag lifted its head. The Old Man, Iain whispered, so softly he could barely hear. The oldest stag. Not as huge as those living on the lower ground, and without the vast antlers. But mighty enough. Old. Too old for another winter. He had too much respect for the beast to let that happen. They were downwind and perhaps a hundred and fifty yards off. But then the stag shook its head, turned sideways, ambled a little way, though never turning its back. They waited. Waited. The sun blazed. He boiled inside his wax jacket. Then, casually, it turned and, in a breathtaking second, lifted its head and faced him full on. As if it knew. As if it had been expecting him. It positioned itself perfectly. He unslipped his rifle. Loaded. Iain was watching intently through the glasses. He balanced himself with care and then looked down the sights. The old stag had not moved. Its head was raised higher now and it was looking straight at him. It knew. Iain waited, frozen to the glasses. The world stopped turning. He aimed for the heart. Two. Dark blue jacket. Blue-and-white print skirt. Medium heels. Scarf? Or the beads? Beads. Helen Creedy went into the bathroom and fiddled with her hair. Came out and caught sight of herself again in the full-length mirror. God, she looked frumpish. That was the only word. As if she were going to a job interview. She took off the skirt, blouse and jacket and started again. It was very warm. Late September, an Indian summer. Right. Pale grey linen trousers. Long linen jacket. The fuchsia shirt she hadn't yet worn. Better? Yes. Earrings? Just plain studs. There was a roar outside as Tom gave his motorbike its usual final rev turning into the drive. The roar died. She heard the clunk of the metal rest going down onto the concrete. Just after six o'clock. She had hours got dressed far too early. She sat down on the end of her bed. She had been excited. Keyed up. Nervous, but with something like pleasure, anticipation. Now, it was as if the temperature had dropped. She felt sick. Anxious. Afraid. How absurd. Then she felt nothing but a draining tiredness so that she could not imagine ever having the energy to stand on her feet again. The kitchen door slammed. She heard Tom drop his helmet and heavy leather gloves onto the floor. Pale grey linen. New fuchsia shirt. She had even had her hair done. She wanted to lie down on her bed and sleep and sleep. After another couple of minutes she went downstairs. Oh, good choice, Ma. Elizabeth looked up from her French textbook. Tom, as always when he got in, was at the toaster. Tom. He had said he was OK about it. Fine about it. But Helen still wondered. She had nothing to worry about with Elizabeth, though it was her daughter who had pushed her into this in the first place. Its six years since Dad. You won't have us here for much longer. You've got to get a life, Ma. But now she caught a look on Tom's face which was at odds with what he said. That he was OK about it. Fine. I thought you weren't meeting this guy till eight. Half seven. All the same. Tom scraped what looked like half a pound of butter and a dollop of Marmite across four slices of toast. The kitchen got the evening sun. It was warm. Elizabeth's French books. Pens. Markers. Tom's Marmite pot, lidless on the table. The smell of warm toast. And bike oil. I can't go, Helen said. I can't do this. What am I thinking? Oh God, not again, we've been through all this. Tom, tell her, back me up, will you? Tom shrugged. His sister snorted impatiently. Put her pen down on Eugenie Grandet. Right, let's start again. Is it just first-night nerves or what? First-night nerves? How did that even begin to convey what she was feeling, sitting at the kitchen table in pale grey linen and a fuchsia shirt she had never worn and at least an hour too early? It was a couple of months ago that Elizabeth had said, as they were walking Mutley, on the Hill, I don't

think youre meeting people.Helen had not understood. In her job as a pharmacist she met people every day. I dont mean that. Elizabeth had sat down and leaned her back against the Wern Stone. It was July. Mutley lay panting.Helen had hesitated, standing, looking at the view over Lafferton so as not to look at her daughter. She sensed that something was important, or that things were about to change but she did not know what or how. It alarmed her. Mum, dont you think you might . . . well, meet someone I mean, someone else. After Dad. Sit down, Im getting a crick in my neck here.Helen sat on the dry grass. Elizabeth was looking straight at her. She had always been like this. Helen remembered the night she had been born: Lizzie had looked straight at her in this same, uncompromising way, even though newborn babies were not supposed to focus. She had done it as a small girl when asking a question. That straight, blue-eyed gaze that held you and did not let you off. Here it was now. Before you know it Ill be at Cambridge, fingers crossed. Tom will be off with his weirdos.And Ill be on my own and I wont be able to function is what you mean.Not exactly.What then?I worry that youre missing out. You should have someone.I dont want to be married again.How do you know? You may not want to in theory . . . but if you met someone.Well whos to say I wont?Not stuck in a windowless cubbyhole full of pill packets you wont.I like my job.Thats not the point. Look, I think you should take a more proactive approach to this thing.There is no thing. Come on, Mutleys too hot. So am I.She stood. But when Lizzie also stood, there it was, the direct gaze. Not letting her off. Helen had turned and started back down the Hill so fast she almost slipped on the stony track.*She had not wanted to think about it. She wouldnt think about it. She was perfectly contented. She had met Terry when she was twenty-three, married him a year later, had the children, been happy. When Tom was six she had gone back to work, part-time. Life had been good. When Terry had been diagnosed with malignant melanoma she was told he would have a couple of years, maybe more. He had had four months. Any sort of relationship with any other man had been was unthinkable. She realised as she reached the last few yards of the track that she was angry, angry and in some sort of panic. I think Elizabeth said, catching up with her.Well, I dont. Leave it. It is not a conversation I am prepared to have.#8217...Revue de pressePraise for Susan Hill: "It's the intelligence of this brooding series that rivets a reader's attention."-Maureen Corrigan, Washington Post "Susan Hill's crime novels are getting better and better, an unexpected but entirely convincing ending."-The Spectator "This is a crime series that specialises in sidestepping conventions, always to exhilarating effect...These books succeed in harnessing all the genre's addictive power while maintaining a complexity and fascination entirely their own."-The Independent "Hill knows how to keep those pages turning."- Chicago Sun-Times