

The Wonder House by Justine Hardy. Atlantic Books 2005.

This is a superb debut novel by an established writer that will leave all who read it hungry for the next one!

The Wonder House is set on the Nagin Lake in Kashmir, largely but not exclusively on one house boat. The Kashmir Valley is in a heightened state of tension and turbulence due to the nuclear standoff between India and Pakistan, exacerbated by the Pakistani military coup that brought President Musharaff to power.

The main protagonists are Gracie, English-born widow of an eminent Indian judge, her staff Suriya and Lila, her neighbour Masood and his nephew Irfan, and a visiting British journalist called Hal.

Though the lake is calm the book is full of the swirling currents of tension between them all, the secrets they either share or jealously guard, the sadnesses and regrets and the overall anxiety and fear engendered by military occupation and insecurity with which they have to live.

Justine Hardy knows India well, and it shows; the Wonder House is incredibly evocative and the reader can feel the damp and cold of the lake in winter, hear the voices of the protagonists and feel their pleasure and pain.

Superb!

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh