



Finding Susan

Associate Professor Molly Hurley Moran PhD

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Advancing with the suspense and deft reportage of the true-crime genre and fueled by the poignancy of a literary memoir, *Finding Susan* is Molly Hurley Moran's pointed exploration of the disappearance of her sister and her family's descent into the surreal world of psychics and detectives they once dismissed as the stuff of *Lifetime* movies.

Susan Hurley Harrison disappeared from upscale Ruxton, Maryland, on August 5, 1994. Her body was discovered in the woods of northern Maryland two years later, and her death was ruled a homicide. Although Susan's case drew substantial media attention—including a spot on *Unsolved Mysteries*—no one, to date, has ever been charged with her murder. In piecing together a mosaic of Susan's final years, Moran grew to believe her sister was a victim of domestic violence.

An academic by trade, Moran employs a scholar's precision and razor-sharp feminist analysis in this valiant effort to come to terms with Susan's life and death and to understand her sister in a way she did not when she was alive. "Finding" Susan refers to both the search for Susan's body and the search for the formative forces of her life.

A slender and stylish blond, Susan was haunted by her "lace-curtain Irish" ancestry and her mother's frightening drinking problem as she tried to rise into the upper-class WASP world, her feelings of inferiority and her own burgeoning alcoholism manifesting in an intense drive to create a storybook life. A devoted mother and talented woman who found a creative outlet in the domestic arts, Susan revealed a more troubled side when, in a move that shocked friends and family, she left her first husband for wealthy Baltimore businessman Jim Harrison, with whom she shared a tumultuous and violent union.

Moran describes the nightmare-like limbo inhabited by families of missing loved ones with heartbreaking realism, inviting compassion for such families and shedding light on the psychological and sociological forces that can cause a competent, intelligent woman to have so little self-confidence that she remains trapped in an abusive relationship. Likewise, Moran warns of the particular dangers alcohol poses for women with her examination of the role drinking played in Susan's demise.

Mirroring elements of high-profile cases from Laci Peterson to Nicole Brown Simpson, *Finding Susan* is one woman's chronicle of loss and remembrance that arrestingly details the helplessness experienced by families of missing persons and calls critical attention to our alarming blindness to domestic abuse. Including appendixes of domestic violence resources, *Finding Susan* serves as a guide for concerned family members and friends of at-risk women to help identify the warning signs of domestic abuse. Thirty-six photos and illustrations are a powerful complement to the volume.

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